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THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

NO. 162 (2470), 6 NOVEMBER 2024 © PISM

## BULLETIN

# Czech Wartime Security Policy Pursues Individual and Collective Efforts

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Russian aggression and Czechia's significant involvement in helping Ukraine have translated into the Czechs' updating strategic documents, increasing cooperation in NATO, and greater efforts to modernise the army. They, along with the initiative on munitions for Ukraine and announcements of fulfilling defence spending commitments starting this year, Czechia is seeking to strengthen its position in the North Atlantic Alliance. Russia's actions are also leading to a strengthening of Polish-Czech relations and higher prospects of closer security cooperation between them.

**Ukraine Aid.** Czechia's military support to Ukraine stands out for its speed, scale, and diversity. Czechia was the first country to supply Ukraine with combat helicopters (Mi-24s). They sent mainly post-Soviet and post-Czechoslovak equipment, including T-72 tanks (replaced by German Leopard 2A4s under the "Ringtausch" programme), BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles, RM-70 missile systems, Model 1977 Dana and 2S1 self-propelled howitzers, and 2K12 Kub air defence systems. Of the modern armaments, they have donated Dana M2 howitzers, as well as assault rifles, machine guns, and sniper rifles. In addition, Czechia is servicing military equipment belonging to Ukraine and, as part of the [EU military assistance](#) mission ([EUMAM](#)), is training soldiers there on its territory and in Poland. The value of Czech military aid since the beginning of the invasion is estimated at around €1.24 billion, partially compensated by the EU, mainly through the [European Peace Facility](#).

The Czech government's proactive efforts on behalf of Ukraine have been underscored by the munitions initiative. So far, artillery acquisitions from third countries, including non-European countries, has been possible thanks to a coalition of donor countries and Czech coordination. According to Prime Minister Petr Fiala, Ukraine will receive a total of half a million shells by the end of this year, and

Czechia expects to continue the initiative into next year as well.

**Individual Actions.** Although a gradual revision of Czechia's policy approach to Russia began with, among other things, the disclosure in 2021 of Russia's involvement in an [explosion at an ammunition depot in Vrbětice](#), it was not until a political change in the fall of 2021 that the way opened for a re-evaluation of Czech security policy. It was strengthened in early 2023 with [the election to the presidency of Petr Pavel](#), former Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces and chairman of the NATO Military Committee. He has advocated for prominent support for Ukraine, including its accession to the Alliance (even in the absence of government control over all of the country's territory), as well as for holding Russia internationally accountable. This contrasted with the uncritical sympathy for Russia of former President Miloš Zeman, who changed his approach only after its attack on Ukraine, a year before the end of his second term.

In 2023, the Fiala government approved new security and defence strategies in which the likelihood of a military attack on the Czech Republic or another NATO country is considered to be the highest since the end of the Cold War. The strategies also allow for a scenario of a "defensive war against a technologically advanced adversary equipped with nuclear weapons". In response to the Russian threat, the

modernisation of the Czech armed forces to enable them to participate in collective defence operations is the primary objective. The second priority is comprehensive operational preparation of Czech territory to receive allied forces. Earlier strategies in 2015 did not explicitly identify Russia as a threat, but annual unclassified reports by the Information Security Service (BIS) did.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has motivated the Czech government to modernise its armed forces and increase defence spending, although it is only expected to exceed 2% of GDP starting this year. Allocating 1.37% of GDP in 2023—the least of the V4 countries—Czechia significantly lagged behind countries that were meeting the 2% political commitment. The increase in this spending is accompanied by significant arms purchases. Last year, Czechia awarded the most expensive military equipment tender in its history for 24 F-35 fighter jets from the U.S. (the first ones are expected to arrive in 2031) and 246 CV90 infantry fighting vehicles from Sweden, while in October this year it concluded a contract with Brazil's Embraer for the delivery of two C-390 Millennium multi-role transport aircraft. At the same time, it announced in a government programme updated last March that, among other things, it would increase the country's military production capacity, including for export. Thanks to the activity of concerns such as the Czechoslovak Group and Colt CZ Group, the value of arms exports from Czechia, according to data provided by the Defence Ministry, increased last year by about 60% (to about €2 billion) from the record year of 2022.

**Bilateral and Collective Actions.** Czechia is participating in strengthening deterrence in Central Europe, including by leading a NATO multinational battle group in Slovakia and patrolling its airspace together with Poland. It also contributes to the Alliance's multinational brigades in Lithuania and Latvia. Ties with the U.S., in turn, are strengthened by the bilateral DCA defence agreement ratified last August. Czechia has thus legally normalised the potential stationing of U.S. troops on its territory, catching up with most of the Eastern Flank countries.

Czechia was not in the mainstream of the Eastern Flank states after 2014 in terms of proposals for changes in NATO in the dimension of deterrence and defence against Russia. It also differed from other countries in the region in its approach to developing EU defence initiatives under the concept of so-called strategic autonomy. In Czechia, this idea is also widely seen as potentially boosting domestic industry and deepening cooperation with European partners, especially Germany. A similar approach accompanies Czech participation in the [European Political Community](#), which has security cooperation as one of its main goals (its first summit was held in Prague in October 2022, during the Czech presidency of the EU Council). Within the EU, Czechia

is involved in, among other things, [PESCO](#) structural cooperation projects (currently in 7 out of 66, mainly related to the air force). They have also re-staffed the EU Visegrad Battle Group, coordinated by Poland, which began a one-year tour of duty as part of the new EU RDC force on 1 July.

Although the Czech government's security strategy calls for the "promotion and development of regional cooperation", its multilateral dimension has serious limitations. This is due, among other things, to the [paralysis of political cooperation in some formats involving Hungary](#), criticised by the Fiala government for its eastern policy, and in view of the deterioration of relations with [Slovakia after the change of its government](#) a year ago. However, despite the near suspension of political cooperation in the Visegrad Group, its military component continues, as confirmed by the meeting of the V4 countries' military chiefs of staff in Gdynia in October and the accompanying special units' exercises.

Russia's attack on Ukraine has strengthened Polish and Czech security cooperation. The announcement of, among other things, further joint efforts to help Ukraine was declared by the prime ministers of the two countries at this year's intergovernmental consultations on 9 October. In turn, during last year's edition, the defence ministers signed a framework agreement on strengthening interministerial cooperation. The strengthening of bilateral cooperation is also reflected in the content of the Czech defence strategy, in which Poland is listed as one of five key partners (alongside the U.S., the UK, Germany, and Slovakia).

**Conclusions and Outlook.** Czechia sees Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a turning point for European and national security. This is evidenced, among other things, by the updates of national strategic documents and modernisation of the army. Explicit support for Ukraine is the result of the Fiala cabinet's policies critical of Russia and President Pavel's approach. However, due to the high probability of a change of government after next year's parliamentary elections, as well as the depletion of military stocks, it is realistic that Czech support for Ukraine will be reduced.

Changes in Czechia's eastern policy have brought its threat perception closer to Poland's. However, the gap may widen again if there is a change in power because of next year's parliamentary elections in Czechia. Poland is a point of reference for the Czech authorities in the discussion of armaments, allowing them to lend credibility before the public to their decisions to increase spending in this area. Czechia's perception in Poland, which is critical of failure to meet commitments by its allies, will be helped by allocating at least 2% to defence. Czech authorities, in turn, are keen to keep the munitions initiative alive. That's why Fiala and the prime ministers of Denmark and the Netherlands, in a joint statement on 17 October, called for fulfilling the spending commitment.