

NO LONGER IN THE SHADOW The Rise of Czech-German Defence Cooperation

UŽ NE VE STÍNU Nárůst česko-německé obranné spolupráce

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Abstract

The article explores the driving forces behind the increase in Czech-German defence cooperation since the mid-2010s. We argue that the growth is due to several factors: Germany's more active role in European security, an upgrade of the political framework of Czech-German relations and the Czech Republic's need to modernise its armed forces. Further enhancement of relations was hindered by underdeveloped cooperation within the defence industry. The war in Ukraine has broken through this 'glass ceiling', and the quality of Czech-German defence cooperation is increasing.

Abstrakt

Článek zkoumá hlavní síly, které stály za nárůstem intenzity česko-německé obranné spolupráce přibližně od roku 2014. Vzestup vysvětlujeme souběhem několika faktorů: aktivizovanou rolí Německa v otázkách evropské bezpečnosti, posilněním politického rámce česko-německých vztahů a potřebou České republiky modernizovat své ozbrojené síly. Další prohloubení vztahů bylo znemožňováno nedostatečně rozvinutou spoluprací na poli obranného průmyslu. Válka na Ukrajině však tento „skleněný strop“ rozbila a česko-německá obranná spolupráce se tak posouvá na kvalitativně vyšší úroveň.

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Keywords

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Klíčová slova

Česká republika; Německo; obranná spolupráce; válka na Ukrajině.

Introduction

The Czech Republic and Germany have come a long way in their relationship. For centuries, the two nations coexisted without many problems until the rise of both Czech and German nationalism in the 19th century turned them into a ‘conflicted community’,¹ with a tragic outcome in World War II and the post-war expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia. An uneasy process of reconciliation followed the fall of the Iron Curtain, one that it would be daring to argue has now been achieved. Few areas illustrate the shift from enmity to a partnership between the two better than defence policy. While during the infamous period of National Socialism, the Wehrmacht uniform was terrifying to most Czechs, today Czech and German soldiers are exercising, being deployed in foreign missions and serving together in military commands.

The path towards achieving the present quality of defence partnership has not been straightforward. Czech defence policy traditionally followed the transatlantic vector directed at cooperation with the USA and the United Kingdom, and Germany was long not preferred as a defence partner. This was mainly due to structural differences based on lacunae in the compatibility of the two countries’ strategic cultures and on Germany’s low military profile internationally. In the eyes of the Czech public and politicians alike, defence cooperation with Germany was a sensitive issue due to the historical experience of Nazism and the world wars, and this created opportunities for politicising the problems of defence cooperation.

From about the mid-2010s, however, the Czech perception of Germany began to change. In defence policy, Germany became a ‘strategic’ and ‘natural’² partner to the Czech Republic. The two countries began to cooperate on essential defence projects of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU), and in February 2017, even announced their intention to affiliate the Czech 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade to the German 10th Armoured Division.³ In March 2017, a new Czech defence strategy was adopted, with the implication that Czech security depended on the relationship with our Western neighbour; Germany was identified as a pillar of regional defence cooperation.⁴ At no point in the history of the Czech Republic was military cooperation with a particular state described in such explicit terms. This substantial shift raises the question: What stood behind the growth in the intensity of Czech-German defence cooperation and what are the prospects of its further development? Given the current war in Ukraine, it is also inevitable to ask how the conflict has impacted Czech-German defence cooperation.

The goal of our article is to explore the development of Czech-German defence cooperation and to identify the main drivers behind its increase since the mid-2010s. The growth in this

¹ KŘEN, Jan. *Konfliktní společenství: Češi a Němci 1780-1918*. Praha: Karolinum, 2013.

² Ministry of Defence (MoD) of the Czech Republic (CR). *The Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic*. Prague: Military History Institute, 2017.

³ MoD of the CR. Letter of Intent Between the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic and the Federal Ministry of Defence of the Federal Republic of Germany Concerning the Affiliation of the 4th (CZE) Rapid Deployment Brigade with the 10th (DEU) Armoured Division. 2017 [Accessed 8 August 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p8tmtfx>

⁴ MoD of the CR. *The Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic*. Prague: Military History Institute, 2017.

cooperation is due to a confluence of multiple factors internationally, bilaterally and nationally. First, internationally, Germany has become more active in its commitments to provide European security as a consequence of the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, which significantly increased the attractiveness of Germany as a partner in defence issues. Second, on the bilateral level, the Czech-German Strategic Dialogue was established in 2015, resulting in closer political links between the Czech Republic and Germany and creating favourable conditions for developing defence collaboration, which assumed an important position in the dialogue. Finally, at a national level, the Czech need to re-arm played an important role, as it opened opportunities for Germany to supply its weapons. For a long time, Czech-German defence industry cooperation remained underdeveloped, but the current war in Ukraine has proven to be a game-changer: arranged supplies of German tanks for the Czech armed forces do strengthen the military ties between the two nations, and the quality of the cooperation is moving onto a higher level.

In times of crisis, it is particularly useful to look closer at the defence cooperation of Germany and the Czech Republic as both countries play an important role in providing security on the Eastern flank of NATO. The war in Ukraine has revealed gaps in threat perceptions and readiness for action, especially in its early phases. It has, however, also shown significant areas with so far untapped potential, such as arms modernisation and investment in security and defence, which has already helped both countries uncover their synergies and achieve more efficient cooperation. Exploring the trajectory of Czech-German defence relations and assessing the impact of the war in Ukraine on areas of cooperation is therefore crucial for understanding the current nature of Czech-German defence cooperation and its future prospects. With government documents and strategic papers, parliamentary records, press releases, publicly available data and secondary sources, the analysis is based on a medium sample of 18 interviews conducted between March 2016 and November 2022 with Czech and German officials, politicians, experts and other defence stakeholders.

The structure of our article is as follows. Following the introduction, we outline the position of the Czech Republic towards Germany in defence policy since the end of the Cold War. We then analyse the driving forces that have influenced the increase of Czech-German defence cooperation, including an assessment of the impact on it of the war in Ukraine. Lastly, along with concluding remarks, we outline the prospects of further development of defence cooperation between the two neighbours.

Germany in the Shadow of Czech Defence Policy's Atlantist Vector

With the fall of the Iron Curtain, Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic faced the task of reforming its defence policy and integrating into Euro-Atlantic security structures, which was substantially influenced by experiences obtained from bilateral and broader international cooperation. Here the Czech Republic showed an obvious tendency of looking up to the United States and United Kingdom - the leading forces of NATO - and oriented its defence policy accordingly.⁵ Beyond involvement in the NATO Partnership for Peace programme, the Czechs were involved in the Joint Contact Team Program (JCTP) and US International Military Education and Training (IMET), and sent its military representatives to

⁵ Interview with Tomáš Szunyog, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the CR, 14 April 2016; interview with Jana Černochová, member of the Defence Committee of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the CR, Prague, 28 March 2016.

study at the Marshall Center.⁶ These forms of collaboration further deepened links between the Czech Republic and the USA and UK. The specific strategic culture of Germany, dubbed a ‘culture of restraint’, established in the post-war era and based on maintaining a ‘low profile’ in matters of military policy and defence, did not suit the Czechs, who therefore preferred the approaches of the Anglo-Saxon partners over Germany.

Nonetheless, Germany supported the integration of the Czech Republic into the Euro-Atlantic security structures, not least because it was in its security and economic interests to shift the NATO and EU borders further east, thereby securing for itself a central rather than a peripheral position. The main tasks to prepare the Czech Republic for NATO accession were democratisation, modernisation and the civilian control of its armed forces; here Germany offered the Czech Republic its specific German model, *Modell Bundeswehr*, based on the concepts of ‘inner leadership’ (*Innere Führung*) and ‘soldier - a citizen in uniform’. The overwhelming majority of the operations and measures taken to integrate the Czech Republic into NATO structures were funded by Germany. If the Czech Republic were to ‘pay its own way’, as is the rule in the Alliance, this would have negative impacts on the country’s contacts with Germany.⁷

Czech-German defence cooperation was implemented on the basis of an 1993 agreement between the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic and the Federal Ministry of Defence of Germany.⁸ Further bilateral agreements, mostly technical in character, entered into by the defence ministries of the two countries, included those on exchanges of soldiers and civilian members of the armed forces for the purposes of obtaining or completing education (1996), on cooperation on military equipment (1997) and on connecting the Czech and German military communication systems (2001).⁹ In 2003, an agreement was signed on the stationing of armed forces¹⁰ and in the same year a new German military advisor was installed at what was then the Military Academy in Brno. Bilateral cooperation at the time consisted of language courses and joint exercises in protecting against weapons of mass destruction, logistics, military medical care and communications. Contacts were also established between departments of military history in the two countries. By contrast, no joint programme was developed at the time in weapons cooperation. Although the Czech and German economies had long been linked, there was a lack of substantial cooperation within the Association of Czech Defence and Security Industries with German partners and the potential for collaboration between the Czech and German defence industries remained unexploited.¹¹

Transition to the ‘NATO standard’, including national financing, at the beginning of the new millennium increased the granularity of official contacts and emphasised the principle of mutual advantage. At the same time, cooperation became more multilateral, and purely

⁶ ŠANDOR, Mikuláš. *Současnost a perspektivy česko-německé vojenské spolupráce*. Závěrečná práce KGŠ. Brno: Univerzita obrany, 2020, p. 10.

⁷ HANDL, Vladimír. Češi a Němci jako spojenci: sblížení strategické kultury. DRULÁK, Petr - Střítecký, Vít (eds.). *Hledání českých zájmů. Mezinárodní bezpečnost*. Prague: IIR, 2010, pp. 127-128.

⁸ MoD of the CR. *Agreement between the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic and the Federal Ministry of Defence of Germany, 24 May 1993* [accessed 10 July 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/y3dm7mc7>

⁹ All three agreements are available from: <https://tinyurl.com/yc5xr26u>

¹⁰ The agreement is available from: <https://tinyurl.com/dsdxcccm>

¹¹ Interviews with Antonín Sed'a (17 March 2016), Marek Ženíšek (25 April 2016) and Ivan Gabal (25 May 2016), members of the Defence Committee of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the CR, Prague.

bilateral activities decreased.¹² With the Czech integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures complete in 2004, Germany ceased to be a special topic in the Czech security and defence policy, appearing from then on mostly in the broader context of multilateral security policy.¹³

A More Active Role for Germany in the Issues of European Security

In 2014-2016, Germany took a much more active role internationally in security and defence. German political leaders drew the attention of the world at what became known as the Munich Security Consensus, an umbrella term for a series of coordinated speeches by top German politicians at the 2014 Munich Security Conference: Federal President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen agreed that Germany should take on more responsibility in the world to respond to multiple European and international crises. Gauck specifically appealed to his fellow Germans not to hide behind historical guilt and a culture of reticence.¹⁴ Similarly, von der Leyen emphasised that “*indifference is not an option for Germany.*”¹⁵ Her governmental colleague Steinmeier stressed that “*assuming responsibility [...] must amount to more than rhetorical outrage [...].*”¹⁶ The 2016 White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr confirmed the self-perception that due to Germany’s economic and political weight, it is a duty for Germany to take on responsibility for Europe’s security in association with German European and transatlantic partners.¹⁷

It was a very tense period for international security. In spring 2014, Russia forcibly annexed the Ukrainian Crimea peninsula, thus violating one of the crucial rules of the post-war world order. Questions hung over Europe about the consequences for European security of the June 2016 referendum in which the British decided to leave the EU. Furthermore, in an unprecedented fashion, US President Donald Trump questioned the NATO commitments of his country to its European partners, with Germany singled out for verbal attacks and criticism. Germany thus received an opportunity to show that its determination to take on greater responsibility for European security and defence was genuine. It set up, alone or with others, a range of NATO and EU projects that were fundamental for developing European defence capabilities, especially on NATO’s eastern flank, making Germany a potential partner for the Czech Republic and partially compensating for the weakening US role in

¹² HANDL, ref. 7, p. 128.

¹³ HANDL, Vladimír. Česká politika vůči Spolkové republice Německo: od normalizace k evropeizaci. KOŘAN, Michal (ed.). *Česká zahraniční politika v zrcadle sociálně-vědního výzkumu*. Prague: IIR, 2009, p. 21.

¹⁴ GAUCK, Joachim. *Germany’s role in the world: Reflections on responsibility, norms and alliances*. Speech at the Munich Security Conference, 31 January 2014. [accessed 30 July 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/wx3nsv88>

¹⁵ VON DER LEYEN, Ursula. *Speech by the Federal Minister of Defense at the Munich Security Conference, 31 January 2014* [accessed 30 July 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2rzrhs7f>

¹⁶ STEINMEIER, Frank-Walter. *Speech by Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier at the Munich Security Conference, 1 February 2014* [accessed 30 July 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/54j2rm84>

¹⁷ The Federal Government. *White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr*. Berlin, 2016, p. 6.

European security under Donald Trump. From small beginnings before 2014, Czech-German defence cooperation grew substantially.¹⁸

Czech-German Cooperation Within NATO

Perhaps the most important initiative that Germany introduced at that time was the so-called Framework Nations Concept (FNC). It envisaged cooperation based on the build-up of multinational formations under the leadership of a major military power (a 'framework nation') that would provide the military backbone for a group of smaller participating countries.¹⁹ In 2014, the concept was officially endorsed at a NATO summit in Wales. As the summit declaration explains, the Framework Nations Concept aims to provide the Alliance with coherent sets of forces and capabilities and to improve the balance of the provision of capabilities between the United States and Europe as well as among European allies themselves.²⁰ Three different FNC approaches within NATO have crystallised, grouped around Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy, with their own aims, methods and structures. The Czech Republic joined the German cluster at the Wales summit and committed to working systematically together.

The German conception of FNC rests on two partly independent pillars. Firstly, the German-led FNC has concentrated on the coordinated development of capabilities in capability clusters with the aim of helping close capability gaps. The focus of the clusters is defined to support NATO priorities and participating countries can choose which clusters they join.²¹ The framework nation takes the lead of such a cluster and smaller countries are expected to plug in their specialised capabilities.²² Currently, the FNC involves 23 clusters with one or more capability goals.²³ The Czech Republic is active in most of the clusters, and its recent participation in the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Defence Protection and Medical Support clusters has proved to be the most beneficial.²⁴

The second pillar of the FNC is far more ambitious and important: it aims to build up larger multinational military formations consisting of forces and capabilities designed to operate together. Larger formations allow for modular plug-in and even the integration of contributions from other FNC nations (participating states are also free to 'plug out' whenever they decide to do so). Within this model, the Bundeswehr is supposed to provide the core, the bulk of the forces as well as the central force enablers and force multipliers. By 2032, the FNC force pool should result in three multinational mechanised divisions, each capable of commanding up to five armoured brigades.²⁵ Cooperation mostly rests on joint

¹⁸ Interview with Ondřej Vlk, MoD of the CR, Prague, 7 September 2020; interview with Holger Offenhausen, Federal MoD, Berlin, 10 May 2016.

¹⁹ HAGSTRÖM FRISELL, Eva - SJÖKVIST, Emma. *Military Cooperation Around Framework Nations*. Stockholm: FOI, 2019, p. 9.

²⁰ NATO. *Wales Summit Declaration*. Brussels: NATO, 2014 [accessed 15 August 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/vnnrcd4v>

²¹ GLATZ, Rainer L. - ZAPFE, Martin. *NATO's Framework Nations Concept*. Analysis No. 218. Zurich: Center for Security Studies, 2017, p. 2.

²² MAJOR, Claudia - MÖLLING, Christian. *The Framework Nations Concept. Germany's Contribution to a Capable European Defence*. Comment No. 52. Berlin: SWP, 2014, p. 2.

²³ 6th Progress Report on Framework Nations Concept (FNC) activities - achievements and way ahead.

²⁴ Email communication with an official of the MoD of the CR on 8 November 2022.

²⁵ GLATZ - ZAPFE, ref. 23, p. 2.

exercises, education and training and staff exchanges aimed at strengthening the interoperability of forces.²⁶

In line with plans to build up larger multinational formations under the FNC, a Letter of Intent was signed in 2017 between the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic and the Federal Ministry of Defence of the Federal Republic of Germany concerning the affiliation of the Czech 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade to the German 10th Armoured Division.²⁷ Through closer and better structured cooperation between German and Czech land forces at brigade level and above, both parties committed to contributing to the further development of European security and defence capacities. The cooperation should mainly focus on common activities of staff elements; analysis, processing and exchange of past and present doctrine; common training and exercises; education of ‘subject-matter experts’; development of concepts and future common projects and their inclusion in national defence planning processes; cooperation on procurement and logistical support; harmonisation of military requirements; and, last but not least, testing systems and equipment.²⁸

As the Letter of Intent states, the affiliation “*does not establish any rights nor obligations under international law or the national law of the participants*”.²⁹ This means, should Germany decide to deploy an integrated unit, it could only do so with the consent of the Czech Republic as its junior partner, thus keeping control over the activities of the brigade in the hands of the Czech government.³⁰ In spite of this, the affiliation became strongly politicized.³¹ After the Letter of Intent was signed, the topic quickly found its way into political discourse, the media and the general public debate. The real content of the agreement was questioned, as were its intentions and the legitimacy of the decision on the affiliation. Affiliation was often (mis)interpreted depending on one’s ideological background. Statements about the affiliation were frequently taken out of context and revealed misunderstanding and even manipulation of its nature and objectives, which, among others, pointed to gaps in strategic communication by the Czech Ministry of Defence.³²

So far, the cooperation between the Czech 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade and the German 10th Armoured Division has a mixed record. Procedures for joint exercises and other activities have been clarified. No major differences in national doctrines have been identified that would affect the options for cooperation. The transfer of experience among units up to the company level through joint training has got underway. In joint staff training, attention is particularly given to organising the information flow among the levels of command. The area of training and transfer of experience is partially affected by the fact that some courses are

²⁶ STRUß, Karsten. *Das Heer in der Multinationalität*. InfoBrief Heer, Ausgabe 4, Oktober 2018, p. 6.

²⁷ MoD, ref. 5.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ BRAW, Elisabeth. Germany Is Quietly Building a European Army Under Its Command. *Foreign Policy*, 22 May 2017 [accessed 16 August 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/34de2a2r>

³¹ The Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the CR. *The Interpellation of the MP Vojtěch Filip Regarding the Agreement on the Affiliation of the 4th (CZE) Rapid Deployment Brigade with the 10th (DEU) Armoured Division for Martin Stropnický, the Minister of Defence of the Czech Republic*, 16 March 2017 [accessed 16 August 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/3snmmkrx>; The Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the CR. *The Stenographic Record of the 57th Meeting*, 25 May 2017 [accessed 16 August 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/4ubhbvzb>

³² Interview with an anonymous official, MoD of the CR, Prague, 12 April 2018; interview with an anonymous official, MFA of the CR, Prague, 13 April 2018.

in German, and not enough members of the Czech armed forces know the language well enough. The other areas of cooperation defined in the 2017 Letter of Intent have, however, not been substantially developed.³³ The implementation process was much affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, which temporarily stopped all activities and cooperation between Czech and German units.³⁴

It is nevertheless evident that the cooperation between the Czech 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade and the German 10th Armoured Division is ultimately beneficial to both sides. Thanks to their involvement in the Germany-led FNC, the Czech armed forces have been given the opportunity for long-term collaboration and exchange of experience with a mature Alliance partner. In particular, the joint staff exercises will continue to improve the ability of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade to participate in international forces in all kinds of combat. The collaboration will also accelerate the necessary standardisation of military equipment and the required weapons systems will be provided - in regular and frequent contact with the Bundeswehr, these processes simply cannot be postponed any longer.³⁵

Following a crucial agreement at the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw, Czech and German soldiers also established cooperation as part of the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) on NATO's eastern flank. The eFP consists of creating four battle groups, each the size of an enhanced battalion and based in Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. The Czech army has been supporting the German-led battle group in Lithuania since July 2018, when it sent a mechanised platoon with Pandur armoured vehicles, reinforced by a platoon of engineers, a logistics unit and a medical unit - a total of up to 230 service personnel. In 2019-2021, the Czech army's involvement in eFP Lithuania continued in the form of four electronic warfare task forces. From July 2021, ground-based air defence units have been deployed in Lithuania.³⁶ The involvement of Czech forces in the German-led eFP battalion is linked with joint training and the transfer of experience, and this substantially improves the quality of cooperation between the Czech and German units.

In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the war that followed, NATO agreed to establish four more multinational battle groups (MNBGs), in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia.³⁷ Czech and German soldiers have been working together in the Slovakia MNBG, now - and this is a historical first - with German troops under the command of their Czech colleagues. The main purpose of the MNBG is to demonstrate the determination of the allies to defend the countries on NATO's eastern flank, deter potential aggressors and, should Slovakia be attacked, defend it. The mandate to send up to 650 members of the ACR to Slovakia was approved by the Czech Chamber of Deputies in March 2022.³⁸

Another noteworthy effort to bolster NATO's eastern flank is the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) initiative. This is an international brigade created by NATO member

³³ Information received from the headquarters of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade, July 2021.

³⁴ Information received from the headquarters of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade, July 2021.

³⁵ ŠANDOR, ref. 6, p. 17, 20.

³⁶ Czech Army. *Latvia and Lithuania*. 19 January 2023 [accessed 20 February 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/yc3y994n>

³⁷ NATO. *NATO's military presence in the east of the Alliance*. 21 December 2022 [accessed 20 February 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/bddsubxr>

³⁸ Czech Army. *Slovakia*. 1 January 2023 [accessed 20 February 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/38v6u73s>

countries after the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea. In 2019, Germany commanded the VJTF forces; at that time, nearly 200 Czech soldiers served in the ground component of the forces. Rapid response air defence was provided by the 25th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment of Strakonice.³⁹ Since 2023, Germany is again the leading country in the VJTF, and the Czech Republic is among the nine alliance countries that contribute militarily to this initiative that now involves about 11,500 service personnel.⁴⁰

Czech-German Cooperation Within the EU

The significance of Germany for European security was further highlighted as it became one of the main driving forces (along with France) behind the activation of the so-called Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), perhaps the most important EU security and defence initiative ever. PESCO was introduced by Article 42(6) of the Lisbon Treaty and was activated as part of the implementation process of the 2016 EU Global Strategy.⁴¹ It puts together EU member states whose military capabilities ‘fulfil higher criteria’ and which have made ‘more binding commitments’ to one another.⁴²

From the very beginning, Germany has promoted a conception of PESCO that encourages participation of a broad pool of EU member states. Unlike France that pushed for an exclusive character of PESCO with demanding entry criteria and strong operational commitments, Germany was afraid that setting the bar too high would create new divisions in the EU and alienate many member states, including those from Central Europe. The German inclusive vision of PESCO was thus much more favourable for the Czech Republic.⁴³ PESCO cooperation is intended to strengthen the European defence pillar of NATO and make the EU an equal partner to the USA, which was one of the reasons why the Czech Republic has been involved in it from the beginning.

In March 2018, the Council formally approved a first set of 17 projects, followed by another three sets in November 2018, November 2019 and November 2021. Currently, 60 projects are being developed covering the whole defence spectrum, in particular training facilities, land formation systems, maritime, air systems, cyber, enabling joint multiple services and space.⁴⁴ Of the 60 ongoing PESCO projects, Germany became a leading nation in eight of them (an additional one has already been closed) and has participated in 15 more. The Czech

³⁹ ŠINDELÁŘ, Miroslav - FAJNOR, Jakub. *Ministr obrany: Spolupráce mezi českou a německou armádou se zintenzivňuje a rozšiřuje*. 16 April 2019 [accessed 20 February 2023]. Available from:

<https://tinyurl.com/mtpcej6>

⁴⁰ NATO. *Germany takes the lead for NATO's high readiness force*. 28 December 2022 [accessed 20 August 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/ykx45nbn>

⁴¹ EU. *Council decision (CFSP) 2017/2315 of 11 December 2017* [accessed 22 February 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/3r9c4mtz>

⁴² EU. *Lisbon Treaty*. Article 42(6) [accessed 22 October 2022]. Available from:

<https://tinyurl.com/4yqx5ucs>

⁴³ BILLON-GALLAND, Alice and QUENCEZ, Martin. *Can France and Germany Make PESCO Work as a Process Toward EU Defense?* Washington: GMF, 2017, p. 1-2 [accessed 22 October 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/4tubey8j>

⁴⁴ EU. *PESCO Projects*. November 2021 [accessed 22 October 2022]. Available from:

<https://tinyurl.com/mtuss2fe>

Republic has become a leading nation of one PESCO project and participated in seven others.⁴⁵

Of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic is Germany's most prominent partner, being involved in five of the nine projects Germany leads currently. An important platform for Czech-German cooperation within PESCO is the Electronic Warfare Capability and Interoperability Programme for Future Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, of which Czechia is the lead nation and Germany is the only other direct participant. The project focuses on the development of electronic warfare capabilities, with the most ambitious objective being to create an EU Electronic Warfare Joint Standing Force.⁴⁶

Czech and German collaboration on PESCO projects is important not just in terms of supplementing military capabilities that are lacking, but also in terms of the commitment to increase budget expenditure, which will spur other forms of collaboration, and for strengthening the interoperability of the armed forces. This cooperation also opens options for greater involvement in international armaments projects and provides an opportunity for the domestic defence industry and wider economy.

In addition to PESCO projects, the Czech and German militaries also work together in EU battle groups, minilateral military units with the purpose of augmenting the EU's military rapid reaction capacity.⁴⁷ In the second half of 2016, the Czech defence ministry allocated forces and resources (up to 250 people) to a battle group led by Germany.⁴⁸ In the second half of 2020, Czech units, again up to 250 people, were on standby for a Germany-led EUBG. A Czech task force, comprising a mechanised company, a military police team, a psychological operations unit as well as combat support and combat service support units, was allocated to the EU battle group.⁴⁹ Despite not being deployed yet, battle groups have served the important purpose of demonstrating the compatibility of command levels and the joint readiness for action of staff officers; they also serve as a proof of mutual trust between participating countries and their armed forces.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ EU. *Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)'s projects - Overview*, 2021 [accessed 22 October 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/bdh7m5zu>

⁴⁶ POSPÍŠIL, Petr. *Schopnosti a interoperabilita elektronického boje*. Euroskop, 21 January 2019 [accessed 22 October 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2rn6w22j>

⁴⁷ EU. *EU battlegroups*. October 2017 [accessed 22 October 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/bdhrjtju2>

⁴⁸ Czech Army. *Čeští vojáci v zahraničí 2016*. February 2017 [accessed 22 October 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/4yhrre5r>

⁴⁹ Czech Army. *Čeští vojáci v zahraničí 2020*. 11 February 2022 [accessed 22 October 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/27n2eacc>

⁵⁰ CHAPPELL, Laura. *Marching into Battle or Extinction? Understanding the Existence of the EU Battlegroup Concept*. Paper presented at the UACES 49th Annual Conference, Lisbon, 1-4 September 2019.

Czech-German Strategic Dialogue as a Political Stimulus to Defence Cooperation

Established between the Czech and German governments in July 2015 at the initiative of the Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka, the Czech-German strategic dialogue has provided an important stimulus for developing Czech-German defence cooperation. Security and defence policy is the topic of one of the working groups, involving staff from the Czech Ministry of Defence on the one side and the German Federal Ministry of Defence on the other.

The very fact that the dialogue was launched was a success of the Czech policy on Germany and a manifestation of its proactive approach, given that the German side was originally reserved about the project. It is, after all, the Czech Republic, which - as a junior partner to Germany - profits from it more. It must be added that Germany does not commonly enter into strategic dialogues with countries of the power category that includes the Czech Republic.⁵¹ Czech diplomats were able to develop the relationship thanks to certain specificities, including the fact that Czechs and Germans are economically linked neighbours who share the overarching motivation of overcoming divided European mentalities, which helped make the Germans accept the idea.⁵²

The approach of both sides to the dialogue has been mostly constructive, cooperative and proactive.^{53,54} The process of socialisation, which is evidently part of the dialogue, is very beneficial for the Czech-German relations, as it creates a solid network of people willing to push for the development of these relations. Importantly, the dialogue also facilitates the harmonisation of the positions of the Czech and German sides.⁵⁵ It has been criticised for lacking a strategic dimension, especially in relation to the EU,⁵⁶ as it mostly covers issues of practical, tactical cooperation.⁵⁷ Given its connections with NATO and EU priorities in international security, however, defence cooperation is one of the areas where the dialogue's strategic potential is most evident. With the inclusion of security and defence policy in the dialogue's framework, the two sides have confirmed that these are key strands of their cooperation and have a promising future. An important benefit of the strategic dialogue is that it has induced the German side to show a greater interest in the Czech Republic's potential in the area of defence. Unlike in police cooperation, where multiple consequential projects have been developed since the early 1990s, continuity was lacking in defence cooperation.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Interview with an anonymous official, MFA of the CR, Prague, 26 April 2017.

⁵² Interview with an anonymous official, MFA of the CR, Prague, 7 April 2017.

⁵³ Interview with an anonymous official, MFA of the CR, Prague, 13 March 2018.

⁵⁴ Interview with an anonymous official, MFA of the CR, Prague, 26 April 2017.

⁵⁵ Interview with Jan Kreuter, MFA of the CR, Prague, 13 April 2018; interview with Josef Opluštil, MoD of the CR, Prague, 2 July 2020; interview with Ondřej Vlk, MoD of the CR, Prague, 7 September 2020.

⁵⁶ Interview with a German diplomat at the interdepartmental meeting of the Czech-German Strategic Dialogues' working groups, MFA of the CR, Prague, 15 May 2017; interview with a German diplomat, Embassy of Germany in Prague, 2 April 2017.

⁵⁷ TALLIS, Benjamin. *Czech-German Relations: A Dialogue in Place of Strategy, in Hope of Strategy and in Need of Strategy*. Policy paper. Prague: IIR, 2016.

⁵⁸ Interview with Ondřej Vlk, MoD of the CR, Prague, 14 April 2016; interview with Jan Kreuter, MFA of the CR, Prague, 14 April 2016.

The Security and Defence Working Group has been among the most active in the strategic dialogue from the outset. Its programme emphasises strengthening the European pillar of NATO and European defence capabilities, largely through NATO's FNC and the EU's PESCO, and the continuation of operations, missions and commitments such as the enhanced Forward Presence, NATO Response Force including the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, cooperation in the EU Battle Groups and in crisis management operations.⁵⁹ Following the changes in the security environment caused by the Russian aggression and war in Ukraine, the Security and Defence Working Group set itself the task for 2022-2024 of going beyond the areas noted above and working on supplementing the capacities of the armed forces in the context of implementing the German offer of 'Backfill/Ringtausch'.⁶⁰

It is necessary to emphasise that the dialogue is not an exclusive framework, nor the sole stimulus for developing Czech-German defence cooperation, but it is very useful in terms of developing proposals and creating a frame of reference for activities that are mostly multilateral in character.⁶¹ Understandably, there was bilateral defence cooperation before the dialogue started, but the dialogue makes defence cooperation more visible and provides an oversight function.⁶² The dialogue also allows both the Czech and the German side to exert pressure to ensure that commitments are honoured. An important benefit of the dialogue is that it helps set and maintain the agenda and guarantees that both sides will take the initiative.⁶³ An early May 2022 meeting of the Security and Defence Working Group demonstrated that the institutional substructure of the mutual contacts is working well and is able to cover pressing issues linked with the war in Ukraine.⁶⁴

The Defence Industry as a Key Indicator of Czech-German Defence Cooperation

Defence industry cooperation is crucial in the sense that it substantially predetermines the overall strength of the defence cooperation between the Czech Republic and Germany. It solidifies military and ultimately also political ties, as the supply and purchase of weapons provide an important political signal about international relationships. Weak defence industry relationships represent a brake on overall defence cooperation. By contrast, a greater connection with the German defence industry and the acquisition of German military equipment would positively influence the measure of future Czech-German defence cooperation. This is a crucial, yet also sensitive, topic - the Czech and German defence industries have long been competitors and both governments prefer to support their domestic arms producers.⁶⁵

The intertwined character of the German and Czech economies suggests that joint defence projects should be very feasible. For a long time, however, the prospects for viable defence

⁵⁹ Czech-German Strategic Dialogue, Working Program 2019-2021 (extended to 2022).

⁶⁰ Czech-German Strategic Dialogue, Working Program 2022-24; email communication with Ondřej Vlček, MoD of the CR, Prague, 25 August 2022 and 23 September 2022.

⁶¹ Interview with Ondřej Vlček, MoD of the CR, Prague, 30 March 2017.

⁶² Interview with an anonymous official, MoD of the CR, Prague, 12 April 2018.

⁶³ Interview with Josef Opluštil, MoD of the CR, Prague, 2 July 2020.

⁶⁴ HAVLÍČEK, Pavel - LANG, Kai-Olaf. *Czechia and Germany in times of war: Time to act together*. Briefing paper. Prague: AMO, 2022, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Interview with Josef Opluštil, MoD of the CR, Prague, 2 July 2020.

industry cooperation have not materialised; German arms companies did not own or invest in Czech producers; the two countries had few joint defence projects; and trade was seemingly limited to Czech imports of German engines, transmissions and other components from Friedrichshafen. The Czech Ministry of Defence did not buy German trucks, artillery, tanks, aircraft or other complex systems.⁶⁶ The extent of cooperation between the two defence industries was determined by the notional ceiling of the two countries' cooperation on defence policy - simply put, relations had nowhere further to go.⁶⁷

Since the 2014 Ukraine crisis and post-Brexit, however, contacts have gradually intensified. The Czech Republic has had to rearm, and many modernisation activities have begun. In line with the expectations of the Czech side, German defence suppliers have been actively pursuing large defence contracts in the Czech Republic as part of Czech armed forces' arming projects.⁶⁸ The tender for new infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), the biggest-ever proposed acquisition in the history of the independent Czech armed forces, provides an example.⁶⁹ The Czech Republic's commitment to NATO to establish one heavy brigade by 2026 equipped with new IFVs opened up investment and cooperation opportunities for German arms companies.⁷⁰ The tender for the new IFVs took seven years and originally the Czech government invited two German firms, among others, to submit bids: the consortium Projekt System & Management GmbH (PSM) offered the Puma armoured vehicle, and Rheinmetall Landsysteme came in with the Lynx vehicle. Neither of them, however, was able to win the mammoth job. On 20 July 2022, the Czech government eventually decided to cancel the tender.⁷¹ In September 2022, negotiations were started with a Swedish IFV manufacturer, BAE Systems, underlined by a Memorandum of Understanding signed in December 2022.⁷²

While the case of the new IFVs was a missed opportunity for closer Czech-German defence industry cooperation, an apparently fundamental breakthrough was made in the case of new tanks for the Czech army. As a compensation for the military material that the Czech Republic provided to Ukraine, under the 'Backfill/Ringtausch' programme, Germany offered the Czech Republic 14 Leopard 2A4 tanks and one Bpz3 Büffel armoured recovery vehicle. Following an agreement with the German Minister of Defence, Christine Lambrecht, the news was announced to the Czech government by her Czech counterpart, Jana Černochová, according to whom "*Germany has long been our key economic partner. Yet in the field of defence this has not been the case and we want to change this, not just in terms of the tank*

⁶⁶ URBANOVSKÁ, Jana - CHOVANČÍK, Martin - BRAJERČÍKOVÁ, Stanislava. Minilateral Cooperation in the EU's Post-Brexit Common Security and Defence Policy: Germany and the Visegrád Countries. *Europe-Asia Studies*. Routledge, 2022, vol. 74, no. 3, pp. 416-417; CHOVANČÍK, Martin. Defense industrialization in small countries: Policies in Czechia and Slovakia. *Comparative Strategy*. Routledge, 2018, vol. 37, no. 4, pp. 272-285.

⁶⁷ Interview with Josef Opluštil, MoD of the CR, Prague, 2 July 2020.

⁶⁸ Interview with an anonymous official, MoD of the CR, Prague, 12 April 2018.

⁶⁹ ŽÁK, Petr. *Kam kráčíš Armádo České republiky aneb akviziční úkoly pro příští roky*. Army web, 1 February 2022 [accessed 6 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p83cwjp>

⁷⁰ URBANOVSKÁ - CHOVANČÍK - BRAJERČÍKOVÁ, ref. 68, p. 417.

⁷¹ Hospodářské noviny. *Gripeny nahradí americké letouny F-35 Lightning. Ministerstvo chce pořídit 24 letadel*. 20 July 2022 [accessed 6 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/4una74ny>

⁷² MoD of the CR. *Ministerstvo obrany udělalo další významný krok k nákupu BVP od Švédska*. 21 December 2022 [accessed 6 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/32nn7bxt>

fleet but in bilateral cooperation overall."⁷³ In October 2022, Czech Ministry of Defence officials signed a series of contracts under which Rheinmetall was to buy decommissioned Leopard tanks from the German and Swiss armies and make them operational for the Czech military.⁷⁴

Included in this delivery are spare parts, munitions and a three-year service support, including training for Czech soldiers - initially in Germany, and later more intensive, combined training of Czech and German tank troops in the Czech Republic.⁷⁵ This training will further deepen the bilateral cooperation between the countries. The defence minister Černochová took delivery of the first Leopard 2A4 tank in December 2022 at the headquarters of the 7th Mechanised Brigade in Páralovice. The remaining vehicles should be delivered by the end of 2023. The Bpz3 Büffel recovery vehicle should be ready by mid-2024.⁷⁶ The expectation is that after 2025 the donated A4 tanks will be modernised to the A7 specification. The timing of the modernisation corresponds to the time needed to train the crews and develop the technological and logistical facilities for the new type of tank.⁷⁷

The Leopard 2 tanks will allow the Czech army to decrease its dependence on old Soviet technology and move up to NATO standards. They are a good choice for the Czech armed forces not just because of their modern equipment, performance, resilience and combat capabilities, but also in terms of technical support, repairs, spare-part supplies and the possibility of future upgrades. Leopard 2 tanks are in a widespread use by the armed forces of 19 countries, including Germany, Poland, Austria and Hungary (but not Slovakia) in Central Europe.⁷⁸ The adoption of this hardware will also facilitate the process of creating a heavy brigade in support of the Czech commitment to NATO.

Beyond this donation, the two countries are set to negotiate the possible purchase of up to 50 more Leopard 2 tanks with the most modern A7+ specification.⁷⁹ In purchasing the new tanks and modernising the donated ones, the Czech Ministry of Defence intends to work closely with the German government. The Bundeswehr plans to purchase and modernise its own Leopard 2 tanks and by negotiating together with the suppliers the Czech military should be able to secure a similar price to that paid by the Bundeswehr.⁸⁰ This is an opportunity to secure the maximum possible involvement of the Czech defence industry, not just in the

⁷³ FAJNOR, Jakub. *Česká republika obdrží od Německa tanky Leopard 2*. 18 May 2022 [accessed 6 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/3c6hp87t>

⁷⁴ MoD of the CR. *Dohody k daru německých tanků Leopard podepsány, výcvik vojáků začíná už příští týden*. 11 October 2022 [accessed 7 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p8zhnu>

⁷⁵ GREGOROVÍČOVÁ, Veronika - KABÁT, Ladislav. *První zkušenost českého vojáka s Leopardem: Tank je jednoduchý na ovládání a srovnatelný s T-72*. 2 December 2022 [accessed 7 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/3cudfyte>

⁷⁶ KABÁT, Ladislav. *Ministryně obrany převzala pro vojáky první Leopard 2A4*. 21 December 2022 [accessed 7 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/2u3rx537>

⁷⁷ Czech Army & Defence Magazine. *Tanky Leopard 2 míří do české armády*. 25 June 2022 [accessed 10 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/32vm3mxx>

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ ŠVAMBERK, Alex. *Česko má dostat tanky Leopard 2A4 a pak si koupit modernější verzi*. 17 May 2022 [accessed 10 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/5phycuhx>

⁸⁰ natoaktual.cz. *Německo daruje Česku 15 starších tanků. Ve hře je nákup nejmodernějších*. 18 May 2022. [accessed 10 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/ymnwtzja>

supplies and modernisation jobs for the Czech army, but also in the much more extensive supplies for the German military.⁸¹

One of the most recent initiatives that could bolster Czech-German defence cooperation is the offer made by Chancellor Olaf Scholz to develop European Sky Shield, an air defence system, as a joint project. Scholz proposed the creation of a new air defence system - which has been dubbed the 'German Shield'⁸² - in August 2022 in Prague during his speech at Charles University. He announced massive German investment in air defence in the coming years, and also that the resulting capabilities would be exploitable in the NATO framework. He offered that Germany would conceive its air defence so that other Central European, Baltic and Scandinavian countries could become involved if interested.⁸³ Czech involvement in the project definitely makes sense - if we were looking for an area where the Czech armed forces had an obvious gap to plug, it would be air defence.⁸⁴ Moreover, Czech armed forces lack the financial means to provide long-range air defence. The domestic defence industry could become involved, which would be obviously welcome by Czech firms.⁸⁵ Compatibility issues and possible frictions created by each country using its own system would be resolved. Moreover, the cooperation could possibly serve as a model of a close Czech-German coordination in other issue areas.⁸⁶

Conclusion: The Prospects for Czech-German Defence Cooperation

Germany is and almost certainly will continue to be a crucial European country and a vital part of the international community. Given its economic and political importance, it is obliged to participate actively in the shaping of the world order. In many respects, the functioning of both NATO and the EU would be difficult to imagine without German involvement. Germany is aware of its importance, and invests significant effort and sums into the command structure and corps headquarters of NATO forces, as well as in the multinational acquisition of military systems whether as part of NATO or on a bilateral or multilateral basis. In the future, Germany will play a key role in operational deployment, as it will provide command elements and key systems. Given the economic might of Germany and its reliance on international cooperation, it will be inevitable for Germany to gradually play a similar role to that exercised in operational engagement by the USA in recent decades. In connection with increasing defence expenditure, the military importance of Germany can be expected to grow further in the future. In 2019, Germany made the biggest year-on-year increase in its defence budget since 1993 - by 10 percent.⁸⁷ In his 'Zeitenwende' speech, delivered two days after the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Chancellor Scholz

⁸¹ FAJNOR, ref. 75.

⁸² STRATILÍK, Ondřej. *Německo buduje něco velkého. Pod ochranný deštník láká i Česko*. 8 September 2022 [accessed 30 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/bb6fb8cu>

⁸³ The Federal Chancellor. *Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague*. 29 August 2022 [accessed 30 January 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/4dztm84b>

⁸⁴ STRATILÍK, ref. 84.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ EBERLE, Jakub - LANG, Kai-Olaf - HANDL, Vladimír. *Evropská agenda pro česko-německé vztahy*. Policy paper. Prague: IIR, 2022, p. 6.

⁸⁷ SIPRI. *Trends in World Military Expenditure 2019*. Stockholm: SIPRI, April 2020 [accessed 1 February 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/4ydrdxhc>

announced the creation of a special defence fund worth €100 billion for necessary investments and armament projects and vowed to invest more than two percent of GDP in defence.⁸⁸

It is the intersection of Czech interests with the initiatives and ambitions that Germany has been developing and intends to promote in the future that is decisive for the Czech-German defence cooperation and its further development. The Czech Republic is one of about 130 countries with which the Bundeswehr has established relations. Given this number, the prioritisation of cooperation partners is inevitable; this is done based on how they help achieve Germany's defence policy objectives. From the perspective of future Czech-German defence cooperation it is essential for the Czech Republic to actively involve itself in international collaboration in the FNC project, encourage closer collaboration between the Czech 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade and the German 10th Armoured Division, strengthen interoperability with the Bundeswehr and support measures to bolster the collective defence and strategic autonomy of the European pillar in NATO. Instances of cooperation within the EU are also important, but due to potential duplication with the FNC project, they have only a support role in developing the Czech-German cooperation.

Germany will be at the centre of efforts to consolidate the European defence industry base. We need to consider that German defence firms often have a near-monopoly in the market. From the Czech perspective, it is important to make the effort to involve our firms with international arms companies, to participate in development projects, for our state-owned enterprises to establish collaboration with German partners and to promote the integration of Czech components into joint weapons systems. Developing Czech-German defence cooperation will facilitate the growth of industrial cooperation. From the Czech perspective, the establishment of this type of cooperation in all the areas cited above is a very important step. The acquisition of German Leopard 2 tanks is the essential springboard for developing these activities in the future and a fundamental impulse for mutual defence cooperation. It will allow for better collaboration and for achieving joint defence objectives, thereby strengthening both the military and the political ties between the two countries.

Despite the growing positive trend in the Czech-German defence cooperation, some factors can also be identified that limit further prospects of the cooperation. In 2020-2022, there were significant limitations linked with the Covid-19 pandemic. As in other areas of life, the pandemic hindered personal contacts between the members of the Czech and German armed forces, which are essential for joint training and building trust. Lasting more than two years, the Covid crisis significantly affected the FNC initiative in particular and the main task now is to restart the initiative in the belief that Covid-19 pandemic will not be repeated.

Secondly, the language barrier will probably persist for some time to come. Although English is the main language of communication in NATO, in discharging their service duties members of the armed forces often use other languages. A study of the University of Defence's Language Training Centre in 2012 showed that 22 percent of soldiers used German in service 'occasionally' and five percent 'frequently'.⁸⁹ In 2014-2022, only 96 people in total were

⁸⁸ The Federal Government. *Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin* [accessed 12 December 2022]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/mvmhu8bv>

⁸⁹ ČECHOVÁ, Ivana et al. Změny v jazykové a řečové kompetenci vojenských profesionálů. *Vojenské rozhledy*, 2011, roč. 20 (52), č. 2, pp. 155-167.

supported in German-language courses at the Centre.⁹⁰ Although the emphasis on language training in educating Czech military professionals is growing overall, knowledge of German lags visibly behind that of English.⁹¹ This shortcoming was apparent during the course for Leopard 2 tank drivers organised at the Bundeswehr centre in Munster.⁹² A deeper knowledge of the German language would be very beneficial for the development of the Czech-German cooperation, not just during informal contacts with the German partners, but also elsewhere. Last but not least, the transatlantic mind-set of large parts of the Czech Ministry of Defence, characterised by a preference for links with the Anglo-Saxon partners, also places some limitations on the development of the Czech-German defence cooperation. In the eyes of many, Germany symbolises the European Union, which traditionally has not been understood as a strong security actor at the ministry. The reserve shown towards the EU as a security actor is reflected in some of the same attitude towards Germany. Germany's hesitance over weapons supplies, from the beginning of the war in Ukraine until January 2023, when it finally approved the export of Leopard tanks to the Ukraine, has unfortunately reinforced the image of Germany as a reluctant military player and was a source of frustration for (not only) Czech Atlanticists.⁹³ Indeed, the war in Ukraine has come as an opportunity for Germany to show that its commitments towards European security 'amount to more than rhetorical outrage', as Steinmeier promised in 2014.⁹⁴ If Germany wants to prove its role as a European *primus inter pares*, it should not miss this chance. To paraphrase the advice of Timothy Garton Ash to the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel in the midst of the eurozone crisis, "...*history is knocking at your door. And history only knocks once.*"⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Archive of the University of Defence's Language Training Centre, 2022.

⁹¹ ČECHOVÁ, ref. 89.

⁹² GREGOROVÍČOVÁ - KABÁT, ref. 77.

⁹³ HAVLÍČEK - LANG, ref. 66, p. 8.

⁹⁴ STEINMEIER, ref. 16.

⁹⁵ ASH, Timothy Garton. *Only Germany can save the euro zone*. The Globe and Mail, 25 November 2010 [accessed 5 March 2023]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/4tpfzayz>