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FOR INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY STUDIES

European Defence Industry.  
The perspective of the Czech Deputy Minister of  
Defence Kopečný

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# *Analytica for intelligence and security studies*

Interviste

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Torino, aprile 2021



Tomáš Kopečný, Deputy Minister of Defence, currently heads the Industrial Cooperation Division. Mr. Kopečný, as an expert on international industrial cooperation and defence market, is dedicated to strengthening the Czech defence industry, strategic partnerships in defence research and development, and continuous build-up of Czech defence industrial and technological base within the European defence framework. He holds an advanced MA degree (PhDr.) in Security Studies from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University in Prague. As an exchange student, he also attended the McGill University in Canada and did a professional internship at NATO within the team of the Special Advisor to NATO Secretary-General and the Public Diplomacy Division. His prior work experience covers various positions within the Czech Ministry of Defence, ranging from the Advisor to the First Deputy Minister on Africa to the Head of the Industrial Cooperation Division

*Deputy Minister, NATO's Science & Technology Trends 2020-2040 highlights several emerging tendencies bound to affect military operations, defence capabilities, and political decision space. Which ones would you identify as most disruptive of the status quo, and how should they be tackled?*

All of the identified Emerging & Disruptive Technologies are important. However, for the upcoming decade, I perceive artificial intelligence to be the most decisive area not only in terms of military advantage but also in terms of economic competitiveness and geopolitical power. The race to become the leader in AI development has already begun – both China and the US see AI as the decisive technology for winning the global superpower status for the upcoming decades, and their official strategies revolve around it. AI's significance stems primarily from the fact that it serves as an enabling technology for all of the other identified trends, bringing exponential growth to their development. In contrast to technologies such as quantum computing, AI is already in an advanced state of maturity, and we can be almost certain about the scale of the disruptions it will cause in the foreseeable future.

There are two paths a medium-power country like the Czech Republic should pursue simultaneously in order to ensure that the strategic and competitive advantage of ourselves and our allies is preserved. Firstly, in terms of domestic policy, efforts to pursue intensive cooperation with the private sector and academia must be bolstered. After decades of separation, industrial policy needs to become an integral part of our perception of security policy and geopolitics again. The state needs to fulfil two primary goals in relation to AI – protect and foster its development.



Therefore, a long-term strategy for technological development should be implemented, making the private and research AI innovation capacities subject to a comprehensive state support system as part of a broader effort to achieve strategic and technological autonomy in cooperation with allies. As for the “protect” part of the agenda, the state should work to ensure the protection of its AI capabilities by shielding them against hostile foreign investments, economic coercion, cyber-threats and other dangers.

Secondly, in parallel to domestic policies, AI capacities need to be protected and fostered through multilateral cooperation. This should be executed primarily through NATO and its recently emphasised EDTs agenda where AI is perceived as one of the main pillars of technological development. This initiative should help Member States to take advantage of their shared military planning, economies of scale, and division of labour. It will allow them to coordinate their AI development and protection plans, implement safe funding schemes and pool finance, protect and ally-shore sensitive supply chains, collaborate in R&D, share best practices etc. Overall, this should lead to achieving AI cutting edge and strategic autonomy covering all of AI’s sub-areas ranging from autonomous weapons to language analysis.

[In the recent NATO Policy Hackathon, ten universities were tasked to develop prompts to help the Alliance achieve its 2030 goals. One of those was the strengthening of NATO collaboration with the private sector. Could you provide us with an overview of the current situation, highlighting how and why this should be pursued?](#)

As already partially explained in my previous answer, the private sector will play a decisive role in security, geopolitics, and economics in the upcoming decades. Most importantly, new technologies are becoming vital for achieving strategic and economic advantage. However, compared to the past, technological innovation, even in military terms, is now coming primarily from the private sector. Moreover, strategic industries and technologies in the private sector of NATO Member States are facing an increasing amount of hybrid aggressions by hostile actors, putting them at the forefront of the national security battlefield.

Nevertheless, until recently, the options for the Alliance or for the individual Member States to protect and empower strategic companies in the private sector were limited as any intervention in the free market was considered unacceptable under the free market paradigm. Faced with our rivals disregarding and abusing the free-market rules and attacking our strategic industries, this paradigm has been changing, and industrial policy is making a comeback to security and geopolitics.



Therefore, the Alliance has been looking for ways to cooperate with the private sector and ensure its safe development – above all in two areas: a) Critical infrastructure; b) Emerging & Disruptive Technologies. In the upcoming decade, we can expect numerous initiatives in this direction, as became clear during the last Ministerial Meeting on February 17-18.

[Covid-19 has proven challenging in countless aspects. How has it affected the defence industry and what answered have been deployed?](#)

Despite the ongoing pandemic crisis and unfavourable development in the Czech Republic, I must say that the defence industry in our country has proven quite resilient to the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. However, we must continue in our effort to support the domestic defence industry and to focus on the areas with either high added value or where the long-standing domestic expertise and renown exists. Typically, it's the field of radiolocation and passive surveillance, small arms and aviation technologies. Frankly speaking, I don't possess statistics showing the European defence industry's current situation in this matter, but I believe that there won't be much difference. Europe as a whole clearly sees the importance of sustaining its defence industrial capabilities, and the adopted measures and flexibility of both EU and national initiatives and programmes are reflexing this goal as much as possible.

[Given the rise of hybrid threats, and as exemplified by the current pandemic, the Armed Forces are often tasked with gendarmerie roles that otherwise would not be their responsibility. Do you see this trend as a harbinger of a more profound transformation, and how is this impacting national defence procurements?](#)

In the case of the Czech Republic, one of the tasks of its Armed Forces, anchored in the Armed Forces Act, is to provide support and assistance to the Law Enforcement if their own capacity is temporarily not sufficient. Personally, I consider that the assistance in times of Emergency should be the task of Armed Forces in general, as any government could potentially need to respond to a large spectrum of threats, which are often coming unexpectedly and still need to maintain the routine functioning of Law Enforcement activities. Without any assistance, this could prove to be impossible in certain cases. The national defence procurement is a complex ecosystem oriented on building cross-domain capabilities, and it certainly reflects the current perception of hybrid threats, for example cyber-threats or unmanned systems. On the other side, I do not think that assistance to Law Enforcement is affecting this system in a major way. The same practice was applied after terrorist attacks in Europe several years ago when Army personnel were assigned to police Patrols to enhance their capacities.



Collaboration inefficiencies are one of the plagues of defence procurement. Because of its high level of complexity, the military aircraft field is probably the most affected, as seen in the latest cases of the Eurofighter and A400M. The sophistication is bound to increase; what future do you foresee for this branch of the defence sector, given that there are two European consortiums developing the 6<sup>th</sup> generation fighter jet?

In my opinion, the collaborative approach would be more and more vital in the future regarding the rising costs and complexity of major advanced military systems research and development. I presume that in the area of defence and particularly in the military aerospace industry, such practice as the mentioned consortia focused on the 6<sup>th</sup> generation fighter will be considered the only possible way to effectively develop next-gen platforms. However, the most problematic aspect here remains, and that is the ability to synergise and harmonise all the different requirements and views on hundreds and hundreds of the developed system's aspects. On the other side, the tools like the EDF or PESCO can certainly help solve the often very complicated matter of financing and can bring together various actors. Not only the large manufacturers but also and foremost, the SME's.

After World War II, the European defence industries were categorised by Krause as second-tier producers, struggling to sustain massive R&D expenses and unable to produce the entire range of weapons systems on their own. In the long run, is the European sector bound to specialise in market niches and act as a subcontractor, or there are options to retain global relevance, such as opting for a new reorganisation (as it happened in the 1990s) or relying on political solutions such as PESCO?

If you focus on the Czech Republic, our country is one of the exceptions to Krause's theory as we possess world-leading expertise and products in the field of Passive Surveillance Systems. And I am almost sure that we can find many of such examples through Europe. It's true that European states are not self-sufficient in some areas of defence production, however, there lies a great potential in currently broadly discussed and focused European collaborative projects and subsequently their supportive tools. Also, we can certainly benefit from partnerships with third parties, namely the US or Israel. There is also a rising agenda of so-called Emerging and Disruptive technologies, which are predicted to play a very important role in the future of warfare and both NATO and EU reflect that in their new technological support roadmaps. Europe, in evidence of the serious necessity to prioritise building its own genuine capacities, has stepped in the right direction and I believe that it will lead us to very useful results.



Related to the previous question, in 1991, Moravcsik framed the modern history of defence procurement as an autarky-efficiency dilemma. Thirty years later, is this cadre still relevant in the current European scenario? To what extent are national defence industries an asset to foster state sovereignty?

Even though I consider Moravcsik's theory a timeless one, I must admit that today's information age, where hi-tech industry areas are on the rise, bringing together the high added value and disruptive potential, along with often astronomical financial costs and high demands on the know-how and expertise is showing us the other, often more crucial aspects. Financial affordability is one of them. On the other side, nowadays, it is more than viable to include some form of collaboration in at least some aspect of the project, especially in the defence R&D projects. The only actor, which is more or less effective and self-sufficient in terms of military capacity-building is the United States of America. And I set aside the question of resource and material deliveries, which would otherwise make any state or other actor always dependent on some external supply lines. In the meaning of the purely R&D and production capacities, the US is currently the "one and only". But in the case of the European defence industry field, on the one hand, we can see the rise of cooperative projects and joint ventures to ensure the ability to be more competitive or to be eligible to participate in various supportive tools like the EDF. On the other hand, it proves that to catch on without any collaborative effort or favourable external environment in the means of state and international support -political, institutional and financial, is nowadays very, very difficult. Especially in the hi-tech areas such as unmanned systems, artificial intelligence, space technologies or laser applications. However, the current collective mindset is more than favourable and both Transatlantic and European political will is now beginning to be oriented firmly to support these areas and initiatives and I believe it will bring its fruit in the foreseeable future.

Could you give us a sector overview of the defence sector relations between Italy and the Czech Republic, underlining which fields still have unexpressed potential and which are already mature? What are the prospects for the future?

The defence relations between the Czech Republic and Italy is primarily based on the development of technologies and the support of the defence industry. The greatest potential is in the field of joint projects within a European Defence Fund, where mutual interest prevails with the use of PADR and EDIDP tools. It involves cooperation on European projects in areas such as surveillance aircraft, UAVs or controlled and programmable 155mm ammunition.



At the same time, the field of aerospace technology is very promising. In the Czech Republic, the activities of the Czech subsidiary of Italian S. A. B. Aerospace located in Brno were launched in 2018. The company has a state-of-the-art technological background that is unique to the conditions of the Czech Republic. The company participates in a number of European Space Agency projects as well as in the development and production of satellite dispensers for the European launch vehicle Vega-C.

From March 2021, Italian special forces will join the European task force *Takuba* in the Sahel, where the Czech Republic has deployed its 601st Special Forces Group. What are your interests in this kind of operation in the Sahel, does the region constitute a strategic priority for you? The mission is the first of its kind for Prague and, given the high risks entailed, do you see it as oriented against jihadi terrorism or more as an occasion to bolster European cooperation?

The reason for participating in the European task force Takuba in Mali is twofold. Firstly, it significantly contributes to the level of interoperability of European armed forces, which is critical for European security in general. Secondly, the Czech Republic firmly believes in the fight against terrorism and in the inseparability of European and African security with special regard to the Sahel region. The African continent has become the new major battleground in the global fight against terrorism, which fact must be recognised in Europe and dealt with accordingly. I believe that the joint European task force is the ideal instrument for this state of affairs and I welcome the participation of our Italian allies.