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SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

SECTORAL ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
THE ARMED FORCES OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC 2020

VENDULA DIVIŠOVÁ, RICHARD STOJAR, DOMINIKA KOSÁROVÁ, LIBOR FRANK,
ANTONÍN NOVOTNÝ, JAN BŘEŇ, JAN HANZELKA, ADAM POTOČŇÁK

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ARMED FORCES 2020**

RICHARD STOJAR ET AL.

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COLLECTIVE OF AUTHORS

Richard Stojar

Vendula Divišová

Dominika Kosárová

Libor Frank

Antonín Novotný

Jan Břeň

Adam Potočňák

Jan Hanzelka

This expert study is a partial result of the project DZRO STRATAL - Strategic Alternatives, implemented at the [University of Defence](#).

Reviewers:

Assoc. Prof. Ing. Jaroslav Varecha, PhD., Department of Military Tactics and Operational Art, Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik in Liptovský Mikuláš

Prof. JUDr PhDr Miroslav Mareš, PhD., Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this analytical study is to evaluate the development of the safety environment of the Czech Republic in 2020. The ambition of the Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies (CBVSS, Centrum bezpečnostních a vojenskostrategických studií), University of Defence in Brno, is to provide an alternative insight into the discussion on the consequences of security development for the formulation and implementation of an effective defence policy of the Czech Republic. The study is primarily based on materials processed by CBVSS and analytical materials produced in countries sharing the same or similar security environment and security interests. The study presents results of a comparative analysis of available open sources and includes an evaluation of selected state and transnational actors. A sectoral analysis based on the Copenhagen School approaches was used for the study, describing the political, societal, environmental, military, and economic sectors. The text analyzes the period of the last year of 2020 and seeks to capture major events and trends with implications for the security environment in individual sectors and to identify implications for the defence policy and armed forces. Most of the sectors here reflect the global pandemic, but try not to focus solely on this dominant phenomenon. Verification of the outputs was carried out within the framework of expert meetings with the participation of members of the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, Czech Armed Forces and representatives of the security community.

The results of the sectoral analysis are shown in the figure at the end of the study. Relevant threats identified in 2020 are divided here according to the respective sectors, i.e., according to the nature of the protected value or interest of the Czech Republic under threat (e.g., stability of the Euro-Atlantic area or the environment). At the same time, threats are placed in concentric circles reflecting their levels of action: local - regional - global. Some challenges are manifested in more sectors and at more levels at the same time.

POLITICAL SECTOR

The political sector and its reference objects are threatened by instability and tensions at several levels: national (weakened legitimacy of governments, anti-government protests, influence of non-state actors), international (deterioration of bilateral relations between states, questioning borders), as well as global (superpower rivalry for the position of global leader). At these three levels, we can see persistent or, in some cases, escalating instability in 2020 on the one hand, but there are also cases where, on the contrary, tensions have been reduced compared to the previous period (progress in the political resolution of national armed conflicts - Libya, Afghanistan; recognition of Israel by four Arab states; the opportunity, although underused, to replace superpower rivalry by superpower cooperation in the fight against SARS-CoV-2). A separate level of analysis within the political sector also represents the European and transatlantic integration area, where challenges to NATO cohesion as well as an increase in national protectionism in the EU against the backdrop of the pandemic can be seen. At the same time, all four levels were affected by the 2020 pandemic.

National level

In a number of states or self-governing territories (Poland, Mali, Hong Kong, Venezuela, etc.) the unrest of the previous year continued, escalating as far as the coup in the case of Mali. A new wave of instability has erupted in the US, Ethiopia, Belarus (although domestic tensions had already been present in previous years, but their manifestation grew to unprecedented proportions in 2020), but also in other states (among other reasons, because of the government's disagreement with the response to the pandemic). It was the pandemic that exacerbated the already existing socio-economic problems in 2020 and affected the ability of states to provide basic goods and services to the population, which led to the weakening of the legitimacy of governments. Conversely, some long-standing domestic conflicts (with varying degrees of internationalization), such as Afghanistan, Libya or South Sudan, significantly shifted their efforts to alleviate tensions.

Increase in political instability

In several European countries (Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, etc.) as well as in the US, residents protested against government measures to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in 2020. Individual states, including the Czech Republic, declared a state of emergency already in spring, which allowed governments to adopt epidemiological measures, including restricted movement of persons or a ban on assembly. Critical voices against epidemiological measures began to be heard especially since the end of summer, with the onset of the second wave of pandemic and the reintroduction of restrictions in most European states, which were perceived by protesters in liberal democracies as unacceptable restrictions on their freedoms or threats to the economy. With the non-receding pandemic and persistent anti-pandemic measures, several states, including the Czech Republic, faced a certain degree of legitimacy crisis. Since March 2020, when the pandemic hit the Czech Republic, the Czech Republic recorded a significant decrease in confidence in the government (while the confidence index in the state apparatus was at the level of 70% in March 2020, it dropped to the level of 40% in September 2020 and it remained below 50% for the majority of the rest of the year).¹

¹ NATIONAL PANDEMIC ALARM. Government Confidence Index, 2021. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/QzJGg7V>

The failed response to the pandemic affected the citizens' confidence in the government also in **Poland**. In addition, in October a new wave of protests broke out after the Constitutional Court had ruled against the background of the deteriorating epidemiological situation that abortion in the event of serious fetal harm was unconstitutional. A series of protests broke out in various Polish cities, representing the largest demonstrations since 1989. The demonstrators did not only protest against the ban on abortion, the organizers actually also demanded the resignation of the government.² The events of 2020 were reflected in the support for the government Law and Justice party. While the support for Kaczyński's Law and Justice was 49% in March, it was 8 percent lower in September and decreased by further 10 percent in October.³

In **Belarus**, the crisis broke out in connection with the disputed presidential elections held in August 2020. Protests against President Alexander Lukashenko were organized as early as in May in response to the detention of opposition candidates. The situation culminated on the election day immediately after the publication of the exit polls, according to which Alexander Lukashenko was to receive almost 80% of the votes, while the opposition candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (wife of the imprisoned Siarhiej Tsikhanousky) was less than 7%.⁴ Protests broke out in larger cities of Belarus calling for fair counting of votes. Following the publication of the election results, the demonstrations intensified, demanding the annulment of the elections, the release of all detained protesters and political prisoners, and the punishment of those responsible for the brutal treatment of protesters and detainees. Alexander Lukashenko rejected the demands and accused the US or NATO (namely Poland, the United Kingdom, but also the Czech Republic) of organizing the protests. He also accused NATO of alleged gathering of military force on the western border⁵ of Belarus, trying to appeal to Vladimir Putin to provide military assistance to Belarus.

In response to the events in Belarus, the European Parliament refused to recognise Lukashenko as the President and even described him as a persona non grata in the European Union. At the same time, the EU pointed out that "on the basis of reliable information Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is the winner of the election".⁶ Tsikhanouskaya expressed her readiness to lead a transitional government and to hold new free and fair elections, and announced the establishment of a Coordinating Council for the transfer of power, recognized by the European Parliament as a legitimate representative of the Belarusian people.⁷ Subsequently, several states stated that they did not consider Lukashenko's inauguration legitimate and the European Union even imposed sanctions on representatives of the Belarusian power. Despite pressure from the public and abroad, Alexandr Lukashenko refused to resign until the end of 2020 and protests in Belarus continued, while security forces systematically used violence and violated human rights.

² BOUBÍNOVÁ, Markéta. Kostoly budú čoskoro prázdne. Oveľa skôr ako som dúfala, vraví organizátorka poľských protestov, 1.11.2020, Denník N. Available from: <https://rb.gy/3flk3k>

³ FORRÓ, Tomáš. Poľská príručka kopania vlastných hrobov, 2.11.2020, Denník N. Available from: <https://rb.gy/7ibzbv>

⁴ DW NEWS. Lukashenko wins Belarus presidential vote, according to official exit poll, 9.8.2020. Available from: <https://rb.gy/lbbmal>

⁵ DW NEWS. Belarus: Rival rallies as Lukashenko claims NATO deployed to border, 16.8.2020. Available from: <https://rb.gy/o7hs5h>

⁶ EPP GROUP. We call for new and free elections in Belarus, 17.8.2020. Available from: <https://rb.gy/yjlouy>

⁷ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. The EU needs to comprehensively review its relations with Belarus, 21.10.2020. Available from: <https://rb.gy/pt9sjk>

Several states, including the Czech Republic, removed their ambassadors from Belarus in response to these events.

In the **United States of America**, the *Black Lives Matter* movement, founded back in 2013, was re-activated to highlight inequalities in attitude to people of coloured skin and called for fight against racism and police violence against African-Americans. A series of protests across the US were triggered by the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 during an arrest in Minneapolis. There were further cases of police violence against African-Americans, which triggered further protests, where participants called for police reform. Estimated 15 to 26 million people participated in mass protests, with over 4,700 demonstrations taking place in the US from May to July, averaging 140 per day.⁸ The protests resulted in the removal of symbols of the Confederation and contributed to the escalation of the conflict between the left wing and the right wing, while in some cities they were accompanied by violence or vandalism. The demonstrations took place against the backdrop of the Presidential Campaign by President-in-Office Donald Trump and his democratic opponent Joe Biden; Trump was criticized for polarizing the American society and inciting hatred and racism. In parallel with the growing social tension, the right-wing extremist and vigilante movements (Wolverine Watchmen, Boogaloo Bois, etc.) also became active, calling, inter alia, for a civil war and minimal state intervention in civil rights and freedoms. In autumn, their plan to kidnap the democratic governor of Michigan Gretchen Whitmer was thwarted. In October 2020, the Department of Homeland Security identified domestic violent extremism as one of the biggest threats the US was facing at home at the time.⁹

Polarization and tensions in the American society also increased in connection with the presidential elections that accompanied Trump's allegations of electoral fraud and the lawsuits against individual states. Even after the official announcement of the results, which declared Joe Biden's as the winner, Donald Trump and a shrinking circle of Republicans close to him continued to question the election, which they considered to be rigged. Many analysts pointed out (and so did President Trump suggest, questioning the correspondence vote already before the election) that Donald Trump might not recognise the election results if he lost, which might greatly complicate the process of transferring power to the new president or lead to an unprecedented crisis in the United States. While Trump continued to challenge the election even after the courts rejected his complaints, US allies (and also Vladimir Putin, after the official results were announced) congratulated Joe Biden on his victory.

The Middle East regimes were once again confronted with a legitimacy crisis, with **Lebanon** being the most affected by the explosion of 2750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate, stored in Beirut's port since 2013, that claimed more than 200 victims. In the coming months, the government was accused not only of insufficient accountability and lack of assistance to the victims of the explosion, but also of not preventing the incident when it was possible. The explosion thus became another stimulus for dissatisfaction and social tension in the long-term political and economic crisis, which was additionally aggravated by the pandemic in 2020. In response to the explosion in Beirut, the Czech Republic sent humanitarian aid and rescuers from the USART special forces to Lebanon.

⁸ WRIGHT, Matthew. Black Lives Matter protests may be the largest in U.S. history..., 3.7.2020, Daily Mail. Available from: <https://rb.gy/swbljt>

⁹ US HOMELAND SECURITY. Homeland Threat Assessment, October 2020. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/0zJGvFj>

Civic dissatisfaction in **Mali** culminated in 2020 in connection with three events: the kidnapping of the opposition leader before the parliamentary elections, the accusation of the President of interfering with the results of the parliamentary elections and, finally, the unmanageable situation regarding the coronavirus.¹⁰ Dissatisfaction resulted in demonstrations known as the *June 5 Movement*. The situation climaxed in August, when a group of army rebels (the so-called National Committee for the Salvation of the People) captured the incumbent president Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, who had faced several corruption scandals since his first election in 2013. The president eventually resigned under the pressure from the armed forces. In response to national political developments in Mali, the African Union temporarily suspended its membership, while ECOWAS appealed in favour of civilian leadership and condemned unconstitutional changes, as did the EU. The coup was also condemned by the US, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Turkey, and the UN Security Council. The former defence minister and retired Colonel N'Daou, who is to remain in power until the 2022 presidential election, was finally elected as the interim president, while Colonel Assimi Goïta, the leader of the coup, was appointed as the vice-president.¹¹ The conflict between Dogon and Fulani ethnicities, as well as Tuaregs' efforts to gain independence in northern Mali are also long-term sources of instability at the national level, with militant Islamist groups, including al-Qaeda, on their side.

The situation also escalated in **Ethiopia**, where tensions between the government and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) escalated into an open conflict, when the Prime Minister intervened militarily in the Tigray region in response to an alleged attack by Tigrayan forces on a federal military base. Ethiopia was thus on the brink of a civil war. TPLF lost its representation in the government back in 2019 and has since criticized the Prime Minister for, among other things, postponing the parliamentary elections, allegedly due to the pandemic. The TPLF rejects the Prime Minister's vision of national unity for ethnically heterogeneous Ethiopia. Paradoxically, however, in the event of further escalation, the conflict could strengthen efforts to achieve greater autonomy in other regions of Ethiopia,¹² as well as endanger neighbouring states by engaging them in the conflict (such as in the case of Eritrea) or causing migratory waves.

Another wave of protests rose in **Hong Kong** after Beijing passed the Hong Kong National Security Act. The law defines four types of crimes, namely separatism, subversive activity against the central government, foreign interference in local politics, and terrorism, to be punished more severely, while the perpetrators can be extradited to mainland China for prosecution and execution of the sentence. Critics point out that the law restricts Hong Kong's civil liberties as well as its freedom and autonomy, thus violating the agreement concluded between Beijing and the United Kingdom, under which the principle of "one country, two systems" was to apply in Hong Kong after its transition under the Chinese administration. At the same time, the law can also be seen in the context of President Xi Jinping's statement on the importance of "reunifying all Chinese regions"¹³ as a step towards unification. Thousands of protesters took to the streets of Hong Kong after the law was passed rather quickly. At the international level, the law was criticized,

¹⁰ ČOREJ, Tomáš. Otázky a odpovede o prevrate v Mali: obávať by sa mohol Trump aj Macron, 20.8.2020, Denník N. Available from: <https://rb.gy/slldhk>

¹¹ DIALLO, Tiemoko. Former Mali colonel Ndaw named interim president, junta leader VP, 21.9.2020, Reuters. Available from: <https://rb.gy/9qsfcw>

¹² ČOREJ, Tomáš. Pred rokom dostal Nobelovu cenu za mier. Teraz je jeho krajina na pokraji krvavej občianskej vojny, 13.11.2020, Denník N. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/1jqlF7C>

¹³ DOVČÍK, Jakub. Hongkong ukazuje realitu globálnej Číny po koronakríze, 28.5.2020, Denník N. Available from: <https://rb.gy/1rqhlc>

in addition to the United Kingdom, by the US and the EU, and also raised concerns in Taiwan, for which there was a clear signal that the “one country, two systems” system offered to Taiwan in the past was dysfunctional.

The political crisis continues in **Venezuela**, where uncertainty has increased in connection with the December 2020 parliamentary elections. The US, the EU as well as the Organization of American States have declared the elections in which Maduro’s coalition has won illegitimate and decided in advance. With the acquisition of parliament, Maduro will be given control of the last body controlled by the opposition, with the assumption that after the acquisition of the National Assembly, Maduro’s powers will be increased and the economic and humanitarian crisis in the country will continue to deepen. The question is also how this situation will affect the dual government that exists in Venezuela after Juan Guaidó (then President of the National Assembly) declared himself president at the beginning of 2019, with over 50 states, including the Czech Republic, recognising him as Venezuela’s legitimate leader. Guaidó argues that he will remain president even after the parliament regroups on the basis of the outcome of the elections, even though his mandate as interim president should expire exactly with the establishment of a new parliament. The long-term unsolvable situation affects Guaidó’s support in the society, which fell from 60 to 30 percent between January 2019 and the end of 2020. Nowadays, it even turns out that most Venezuelans do not support either Guaidó or Maduro.¹⁴

Relief of domestic conflicts

On the contrary, tensions eased in **Libya**, where chaos prevailed since the fall of the long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Since then, two governments were competing for power, the internationally recognized government of national unity in Tripoli, while Libya’s east was under the control of a Tobruk-based government, effectively led by Khalifa Haftar as a self-appointed marshal.¹⁵ Both governments declared a ceasefire in August 2020 and negotiations were held in Geneva in October between the military representatives of the two main hostile parties to the conflict, which resulted in the signing of a permanent ceasefire agreement across the Libyan territory. In addition to stopping the fighting, both parties also agreed on the exchange of prisoners, departure of foreign fighters from the country and opening of air and land corridors. In early November, the parties subsequently agreed on practical steps to implement the ceasefire agreement.¹⁶ At the same time, the Forum for Libyan Political Dialogue was set up with the aim of reaching a consensus on a single government framework and holding national elections as soon as possible. In this context, the statement of the incumbent Libyan prime minister about his intention to resign and leave power to a unified executive was also welcomed.¹⁷ Shortly afterwards, under the auspices of the UN, peace talks between hostile parties began in Tunisia in order to pave the way for the presidential and parliamentary elections. The ceasefire agreement and the follow-up to the peace process are a historic milestone, but their success will also depend on the attitude of external actors who became engaged in Libya through the supply of arms or fighters.

¹⁴ BÖHMER, Kristina. Kto nepríde voliť, nebude jest'. Maduro po voľbách získa poslednú baštu opozície, 7.12.2020, Denník N. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/ojqlRi1>

¹⁵ ALLAHOUM, Ramy. Libya’s war: Who is supporting whom, 9.1.2020, Al Jazeera. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/QjqlYOi>

¹⁶ UN NEWS. Libyan sides agree plan on implementing ceasefire deal, 4.11.2020. Available from: <https://rb.gy/uxvzlk>

¹⁷ UN NEWS. Libya ceasefire: UN relaunches inclusive political forum, amid growing ‘sense of hope’, 26.10.2020. Available from: <https://rb.gy/89hwq2>

In addition to Libya, the conflict in **Afghanistan** came closer to a political solution in 2020. The breakthrough consisted in primarily the agreement between the Taliban militant movement and the United States, signed on 29 February. Under the agreement, all NATO troops are to be withdrawn from Afghanistan within 14 months if the Taliban abides by the terms and engages in peace talks with the Afghan government. In the first phase, the US reduced the number of American soldiers to 8600. The next phase consisted in the elimination of violence, the exchange of prisoners between the Taliban and the Afghan government (which was initially strongly rejected by the Afghan government itself because it was not a party to the February agreement and stressed that the exchange of prisoners should be the subject of talks between the government and the Taliban, not a condition for them)¹⁸, and finally in direct talks between the two actors. The first ever direct talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government did finally take place in Doha, Qatar, in September, a few months later. The talks have raised hopes for an end to the long-standing conflict, but at the same time there have been considerably contradictory visions on the post-conflict future of Afghanistan, which may hinder the early reaching of a peace agreement. In addition, there are other non-state actors in Afghanistan alongside the Taliban, including, for example, the so-called Islamic State, that will continue to be an obstacle to a stable Afghanistan in the near future, even if the Taliban and the Afghan government eventually agree.

South Sudan also took a step towards a political solution to the long-term conflict, when political crisis was overcome in February and opposition leaders took up positions in the new government on the basis of the 2019 agreement (which was supposed to end the six-year civil war). President Kiir subsequently declared that the war was officially over.¹⁹ However, South Sudan continues to face many challenges, including the implementation of the peace agreement, widespread violence and the need to unite the army, the government and the people. It was precisely in the context of repeated violations of the ceasefire that the UN Security Council renewed the sanctions imposed on South Sudan, including the arms embargo, in May 2020.²⁰

European and transatlantic integration area

Within the framework of the existing integrations in the European and transatlantic areas, including the Czech Republic, we can see two opposing phenomena in 2020 in terms of the membership base. On the one hand, transatlantic integration was strengthened when **Northern Macedonia** joined NATO in March 2020, becoming its thirtieth member state. However, the situation was evolving differently within the European Union for Northern Macedonia. Bulgaria vetoed the start of negotiations on the accession of Northern Macedonia to the EU in November due to the slow implementation of the 2017 agreement between the two countries.²¹ In this context, the Czech Republic and Slovakia blocked the EU Council conclusions on enlargement, stressing that the enlargement process should

¹⁸ BBC. Afghan conflict: President Ashraf Ghani rejects Taliban prisoner release, 1.3.2020.

Available from: <https://rb.gy/xpz390>

¹⁹ INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP. A Major Step Toward Ending South Sudan's Civil War, 25.2.2020.

Available from: <https://cutt.ly/VjqlzZM>

²⁰ UN SC. Security Council Renews Mandate of Expert Panel Overseeing South Sudan Arms Embargo by 12 Votes in Favour, None Against, 3 Abstentions. UN SC press release, 29.5.2020. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/bjqlnJc>

²¹ ECFR. Goran Buldioski, Vessela Tcherneva. How to advance a European solution to Bulgaria's and North Macedonia's dispute, 2.12.2020, European Council on Foreign Relations. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/2jqU5m6>

not be an instrument for resolving bilateral disputes.²² Not only did no member state come close to EU membership in 2020, but one of the key member states actually left. In February 2020, the **United Kingdom** was the first ever to formally withdraw from the EU after almost four years of negotiations. 2020 was a transitional period, at the end of which, despite several critical moments, the United Kingdom and the European Union finally agreed on the final form of a trade agreement that would regulate their relations after 31 December 2020. In addition, uncertainty remains as to whether the United Kingdom will “survive” Brexit in its current form, or whether centrifugal tendencies in Scotland and Northern Ireland will increase, where the latter, according to some assumptions, could even seek to join the Republic of Ireland.²³ The departure of the United Kingdom, one of the EU’s strongest economies with some of the most capable combat forces,²⁴ also raises questions about the impact of Brexit on the EU’s defence capabilities, whether in terms of the *EU Battle Groups* or EU’s military overseas missions, in which the United Kingdom played an important role, in particular in organizational, management or diplomatic aspects.

Alongside the culminating Brexit, the main challenge for the European Union in 2020 was the pandemic. In this context, national protectionism emerged, with individual states across the EU taking different anti-pandemic measures at national level without stronger coordination within the EU. An unprecedented step was taken when the states of the European Union and the Schengen area closed their borders. At the same time, the pandemic was exploited for populist purposes. In addition, there was a significant polarization of society across the EU, as reflected in the above-mentioned anti-government protests. Authoritarian tendencies persisted in two EU member states, **Hungary** and **Poland**. It was in this context that the cohesion of the EU, or the process of taking consensus decisions, was partially jeopardized, which was also reflected in the adoption of the European budget. In response to the pandemic and its economic impact, the EU has adopted a recovery plan to help its member states revitalise their economies and boost public investment once the pandemic is over. However, the approval of the budget of EUR 1.1 trillion for the next seven years and of the recovery fund of EUR 750 billion²⁵ was threatened by the veto of Hungary and Poland, which opposed the proposal to make the allocation of European funds conditional on a functioning system of the rule of law. Hungary and Poland were the ones to have faced criticism in recent years for weakening the rule of law and liberal democracy. In both countries, the strengthening of government parties’ control over individual components of power and threats to the system of brakes and counterbalances, which is the basis for the functioning of the rule of law, continued also in 2020. Eventually, both countries withdrew their veto only after accepting the compromise proposed by Germany. While breaking the deadlock is a success, critics have also expressed concerns that the compromise might weaken the rule of law requirements, which they believe could jeopardise confidence in the EU’s institutions and its values.

In addition, the EU and NATO also faced a challenge in the **eastern Mediterranean**, where the conflict between Turkey, on the one hand, and Greece and Cyprus, on the other, escalated due to the maritime border. Ankara has long challenged the claims of Greece

²² YAR, Lucia. Slovensko a Česko sa postavili Bulharom: Do procesu rozširovania neťahajte bilaterálne problémy, odkazujú, 18.12.2020, Euractiv. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/Pjqlrh7>

²³ GLENNY, Misha. Boris Johnson Is Losing The Union, 17.9.2020. Available from: <https://rb.gy/lrhaee>

²⁴ GIEGERICH, Bastian, MÖLLING, Christian. The United Kingdom’s contribution to European security and defence. IISS, 2018. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/pzJGWm4>

²⁵ CONSILIIUM.EUROPA. Plán obnovy pre Európu. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/yqljQn>

and Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean and is conducting geological surveys in the area concerned. In 2020, Greece accused Turkey of provocation by military force when Ankara sent a reconnaissance ship, accompanied by Turkish naval forces, to territories Athens considered to be part of its exclusive economic zone. Greece responded to this with the readiness of its own armed forces with the support of the French squadron. In this context, French President Emanuel Macron even stated that Turkey was no longer a partner for the EU in the eastern Mediterranean and called on Europe to take a tougher stance towards Turkey's assertive policy.²⁶ At the same time, in response to Turkey's actions, the US sent an aircraft carrier to the eastern Mediterranean for a joint military exercise with Greece, copying the borders of the Greece-claimed exclusive economic zone. In addition, Turkey also dispatched exploration ships to the northern part of Cyprus, whose autonomy is not recognized by any state other than Ankara.²⁷ Cyprus and Greece also protested against Turkish activities in Libya, accusing Ankara of dividing the eastern Mediterranean with the Libyan internationally recognized government (which Ankara militarily supports) regardless of the existing economic zones in the region. Erdogan thus continued to pursue assertive policies in 2020, worrying the states of the region (including Egypt) as well as Turkish allies within the Alliance. Erdogan's assertive policy poses a challenge for both NATO and the EU. On the one hand, it threatens the homogeneity and cohesion of NATO, as two members of the Alliance have entered into a dispute here, on the other, it questions the territorial sovereignty of two EU member states. President Erdogan's decision to transform the Hagia Sofia temple from a museum into a mosque was also perceived as controversial. This step is also interpreted as part of Erdogan's strategy to strengthen Turkey's status as a regional power²⁸ or one of the leading forces in the Islamic world.

Last but not least, the threat of radicalization persisted in Europe, as reflected in the terrorist attack in Vienna in November 2020 perpetrated by the descendants of Albanian immigrants from Northern Macedonia. Compared to the attacks in European capitals from previous years, it was a minor attack that claimed four victims, but the threat of terrorism has moved closer to the territory of the Czech Republic again and it has turned out that despite the persistent pandemic and restrictive measures, terrorism continues to pose a threat to European security.

International level

At international level, in 2020, on the one hand, we saw the continuation or resumption of old disputes between states (including the eastern Mediterranean dispute mentioned above), but at the same time we also saw attempts to alleviate tensions in relations between Arab states and Israel.

Increase in instability and tensions in bilateral relations

The **Nagorno-Karabakh** conflict escalated in September 2020. Armenia and Azerbaijan accused each other of violating the ceasefire applied more or less since 1994. After several weeks of fighting, Azerbaijan, supported by Turkey, finally declared itself the winner, with Armenia losing much of Nagorno-Karabakh in an agreement mediated by Moscow. At the same time, the Russian Federation has sent peacekeepers to oversee the

²⁶ ČT24. Turecko už není partnerem, Unie musí být tvrdší a jednotnější, tvrdí Macron. 10.9.2020. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/GzJGTsA>

²⁷ In October, the people of Northern Cyprus elected Erdogan-supported candidate Ersin Tatar, also referred to as a populist nationalist.

²⁸ HIRMAN, Karel. Grécka armáda je kvôli Turecku v bojovej pohotovosti, 22.7.2020, Denník N. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/bzJGP8D>

end of the fighting and control the Nagorno-Karabakh corridor and Azerbaijan's exclave Nakhichevan. From the political point of view, the agreement does not address the status of the unrecognized state of Nagorno-Karabakh. Its importance lies in changing the geopolitical realities in Nagorno-Karabakh (strengthening the position of Azerbaijan, the presence of Russian troops), while at the same time planting a new potential apple of contention not only between Armenia and Azerbaijan (grievance on the part of Armenia), but also contributing to tensions within the Armenian society. In Yerevan, immediately after the surrender, protests broke out, in which demonstrators rejected the agreement, denounced the surrender as humiliating, considered it a betrayal or dictation imposed on Yerevan, and demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

At the beginning of 2020, relations between the **US and Iran** intensified after the US administration issued an order to liquidate General Qassem Soleimani, the military commander of al-Quds troops (one of the elements of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards), considered to be the second most powerful man in Iran. Soleimani was identified by the Americans as a terrorist, accused of approving attacks on American targets in the Middle East. The events preceded the attack on the US air base in Iraq at the end of 2019 and the subsequent attack on the US embassy in Baghdad, Washington attributing the attacks to Shia militias supported by Iran. Ultimately, Soleimani's murder contributed not only to the escalation of tensions in US-Iranian relations, but also to the partial unification of the Iranian people around the murdered general, as well as to the strengthening of anti-American narrative in Iran. Commentators point out that the attack on Soleimani ultimately weakened reform trends in society and, conversely, strengthened those factions that refused to normalise relations with the West.²⁹ Iran promised retaliation, which eventually came five days after the murder in the form of a rocket attack on American bases in Iraq. The situation was partially alleviated only after a tragic incident in which Iran shot down a Ukrainian civilian plane under intense tension, which, on the contrary, sparked further anti-government unrest in Iranian society. In addition, Iran lost its nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in 2020, likely liquidated by Mossad, exacerbating ongoing tensions in Iran-Israeli relations. These events also had a direct impact on events in Iraq, where anti-government protests continued in 2020, intensifying tensions just after Soleimani's murder. Against the background of intensified relations between Iran and the US and the escalating conflict within Iraq, the security situation also deteriorated for foreign missions in Iraq, which led to the withdrawal of part of the foreign troops and directly affected the Czech activities in Iraq.

Tensions also persisted in relations between **Ethiopia and Egypt** due to the construction of the Blue Nile dam, which Egypt considers to be an existential threat. Donald Trump even said that Egypt could bomb the dam if the conflict was not resolved politically.³⁰ Ethiopia condemned the statements as "inciting war", and shortly thereafter negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan were resumed with the participation of the African Union, the European Union and the World Bank. This time, however, negotiations failed and the states failed to agree on the filling and functioning of the dam in such a way as not to threaten the flow of water to Egypt and Sudan. The Ethiopian project is currently

²⁹ KANGARLOU, Tara. Despair, defiance in Iran after US killing of Qassem Soleimani, 4.2.2020, Al Jazeera. Available from: <https://rb.gy/zp8ewj>

³⁰ AL JAZEERA. Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia resume Nile mega-dam talks, 2.11.2020. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/hjqU0s6>

more than three-quarters complete and the dam is expected to reach full energy efficiency in 2023.³¹

Mitigation of the conflict potential between the Arab states and Israel

2020 is a significant year for the normalization of relations between **Israel** and the four **Arab states**: United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. These states thus followed the example of Egypt and Jordan that recognized the State of Israel in 1979 and 1994. The agreement to fully establish Israeli diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain was signed in September in the US that mediated the agreement. In October, both Sudan and Israel signed an agreement to normalise relations, in parallel with which President Trump announced that Sudan would be removed from the list of states sponsoring terrorism.³² Subsequently, in December, following the announcement of normalization of relations between Morocco and Israel, Donald Trump declared that the US recognized Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. It is speculated that other Arab states could follow, with Oman, Mauritania, or even Saudi Arabia most often inclined in this context.³³ On the contrary, Qatar, Kuwait and Algeria categorically refused to recognise Israel until the question of occupied Palestinian territory is resolved and a Palestinian state is created. On the one hand, tensions are easing between Israel and part of the Arab world, but on the other hand, Iran, which sees Israel as its main enemy in the Middle East, is following this new trend with concern. At the same time, the question is how President Joe Biden will address the issue, as the US, under the leadership of his predecessor in office, played the key role in normalising relations between Arab states and Israel.

Global level - superpower rivalry against the pandemic background

The pandemic has affected the dynamics of superpower rivalry. Some argue that the possibility of a larger-scale confrontation has diminished in the short term,³⁴ given that states are concentrating on the pandemic, with the armed forces also playing an important role in this direction. Others point out that the great power rivalry itself has intensified exactly as a result of the pandemic,³⁵ with several "pandemic deterrence" incidents occurring, in which the great powers demonstrated their strength and interests, whether these are Russian manoeuvres in NATO airspace in northern Europe or near Alaska, or the deployment of US destroyers to the Arctic and subsequently to the Barents Sea (for the first time since the 1980s), or the deployment of a Chinese aircraft carrier near Japan and Taiwan after the US aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt withdrew due to the SARS-CoV-2 infection of hundreds of crew members.³⁶ In addition to the traditional demonstration of strength that accompanied the superpower rivalry in previous years, some new trends can be observed against the background of the

³¹ AL JAZEERA. Nile dam talks between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan fail again, 5.11.2020. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/mjqU33c>

³² CHAPPELL, Bill. Sudan And Israel Agree To Normalize Relations In U.S.-Brokered Deal, 23.10.2020, e.g., available from: <https://rb.gy/vutet3>

³³ ASEM, Sondos., BENOIST, Chloé. Arab normalisation with Israel: Who is next? 16.9.2020, Middle East Eye. Available from: <https://rb.gy/qtrts2>

³⁴ CHILDS, Nick. Great-power competition and COVID-19, 29.5.2020, IISS. Available from: <https://rb.gy/fuxd3q>

³⁵ OWEN, John M. The pandemic and great power competition, 16.9.2020. University of Virginia, Miller Center. Available from: <https://rb.gy/tzmcnl>

³⁶ CHILDS, ref. 34

pandemic, in particular the rivalry for the position of a responsible global leader in the fight against the pandemic, but also for the control of information flows related to the coronavirus. In the first area, we see a certain retreat of the US in line with Tump's "America First" policy, while the PRC is trying to fill the resulting vacuum to a certain extent.

Despite the fact that the origin of the virus was in the PRC, from which it spread to the whole world (Beijing is accused of initially denying the existence of the virus, which allowed its uncontrolled spread), it was later the PRC that wanted to act as a responsible power and global player in the fight against the pandemic,³⁷ and it was one of the few to control the virus and avoid the so-called second wave. On the other hand, US President Donald Trump downplayed the pandemic from the start and, despite warnings, refused to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation.³⁸ The US has been criticized for not having a national test plan, while rejecting the WHO Pandemic Action Plan.³⁹ The fight against the pandemic had also become one of the key topics of the presidential election campaign, which culminated in the third wave of the epidemic in the US. While in November the US recorded daily increases in the number of infected people exceeding the 100,000 threshold, according to official data the PRC had fewer than 50 new cases per day. By the end of December, the gap had increased by 240,000 to 100.⁴⁰ The different approach of the PRC and the US during the Trump administration to the pandemic and the different course of the pandemic itself in both countries threatened the reputation of democracy and American soft power. Both suffered as a result of an uncontrolled pandemic in the US, while the authoritarian regime in the PRC was ultimately able to cope better with the crisis on the basis of official Chinese data.⁴¹

Beijing's success in suppressing the virus has served the Chinese Communist Party in propaganda efforts to point out the superiority of the Chinese system.⁴² In addition, the US rejected Donald Trump's leadership position in the global pandemic solution, leaving room for others, including the PRC. Just days after Donald Trump declared that the US would not contribute to the WHO, Beijing announced that it would contribute USD 30 million.⁴³ The PRC even accused the US of politicising the pandemic⁴⁴ and underlined that it would cooperate with the international community, including the Russian Federation, to support the leading role of the WHO in global anti-pandemic cooperation.⁴⁵ But the fact remains that it was the initial approach of an authoritarian Chinese regime that

³⁷ OWEN, ref. 35

³⁸ MANNING, Robert A. COVID19 Aggravates Great Power Competition, 5.5.2020, Valdai Discussion Club. Available from: <https://rb.gy/i6stcf>

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ JHU. COVID-19 Dashboard..., John Hopkins University, Coronavirus Research Center, 1.1.2021. Available from: <https://rb.gy/6ymoch>

⁴¹ OWEN, ref. 35

⁴² WEISS, Jessica Chen. The pandemic and great power competition, 16.9.2020, University of Virginia, Miller Center. Available from: <https://rb.gy/tzmcnl>

⁴³ MANNING, ref. 38

⁴⁴ A group of Republicans in the US expressed outrage at the election of the PRC as a member of the UN Human Rights Council. They argued not only that China misled the world at the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, but also pointed out the systematic human rights violations in Xinjiang.

⁴⁵ JOSCELYN, Thomas. The Coronavirus Pandemic Exposes Fault Lines in the 'Great Power Competition', 15.4.2020, Foundation for Defence and Democracies. Available from: <https://rb.gy/wb06ct>

caused a potentially controllable epidemic to spiral out of control and into a pandemic⁴⁶ that killed over 1.7 million people worldwide by the end of 2020⁴⁷. For this reason, too, the PRC is trying to rewrite the narrative and applies the so-called “mask diplomacy” in which it exports masks, protective suits and ventilators to countries in need, especially in the Middle East and eastern and central Europe. At the same time, Beijing is trying to send a signal inside the country because, as a result of the pandemic, the PRC experienced an economic decline of 6.8% in the first quarter of 2020, with economic growth being one of the pillars of the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China.⁴⁸ In addition, the PRC needs to calm the social unrest associated with its initial approach to the virus.

Unlike the US, the Russian Federation adopted anti-pandemic measures earlier. In addition, the Russians supported their Chinese counterparts investing in the WHO when, after Donald Trump questioned the organization’s operation, Moscow took the stand in its defence.⁴⁹ Superpower rivalry was also manifested in the field of vaccine development. The Russian Federation was the first in the world to approve its vaccine (Sputnik V) already in August 2020, but this raised some doubts on the international scene about sufficient scientific research and discussion on the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine. Nevertheless, the Russian Federation already concluded the first contracts for the export of the vaccine in 2020. But Vladimir Putin faces both economic and political challenges due to the impact of the pandemic as well as the fall in oil prices on the economy, which has experienced weak growth in recent years,⁵⁰ which may also affect the perception of the legitimacy of the government and regime.⁵¹ At the same time, two other events need to be mentioned, which, although not related to the pandemic, are important for the domestic political development of the Russian Federation as well as its reputation on the international scene. First of all, Russian president Putin strengthened his position in 2020 by holding a referendum that approved a constitutional amendment to allow him, among other things, to run for president for the next two terms. In addition, there has been another media attack on the Kremlin’s opposition critic, Alexey Navalny, who was poisoned by Novichok, as demonstrated during his subsequent hospitalization in Germany. According to Bellingcat’s investigative project, an FSB intelligence unit specialising in chemical weapons is behind the poisoning,⁵² but Moscow refuses this claim. Against the background of the pandemic, great power rivalry was traditionally taking place also in the information area. Donald Trump adopted the term “Chinese virus” to emphasize its origin and discredit the PRC, while Zhao Lijian, spokesperson for the Chinese State Department, came up with a theory that the virus originated in the US, allegedly brought to Wuhan by the US military.⁵³ Russian state television, in turn, took over the narrative that the virus was artificially created and therefore not of natural origin.⁵⁴ Traditionally, European states were also the target of disinformation activities

⁴⁶ TWINING, Daniel, QUIRK, Patrick. Winning the Great Power Competition Post-Pandemic, 11.5.2020, The American Interest. Available from: <https://rb.gy/ibwtvr>

⁴⁷ JHU, ref. 40

⁴⁸ MANNING, ref. 38

⁴⁹ JOSCELYN, ref. 45

⁵⁰ WORLD BANK. GDP growth (annual %) - Russian Federation, 1.1.2021. Available from:

<https://rb.gy/7yfacu>

⁵¹ MANNING, ref. 38

⁵² BELLINGCAT. FSB Team of Chemical Weapon Experts Implicated in Alexey Navalny Novichok Poisoning, 14.12.2020. Available from: <https://cutt.ly/0jqUHYb>

⁵³ ZHAO, Lijian. Twitter, 12.3.2020. Available from: <https://rb.gy/ngwgbf>

⁵⁴ SARDARIZADEH, Shayan, ROBINSON, Olga. Coronavirus: US and China trade conspiracy theories, 25.4.2020, BBC. Available from: <https://rb.gy/i4r0er>

and hybrid strategies of the superpowers, which may also adversely affect the trust of citizens in the state or in integration groupings which the Czech Republic is a member of to some extent.

Implications for the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic

In 2020, on the one hand, we could observe continuing trends from previous years (civil dissatisfaction and anti-government protests in Poland and Hong Kong, political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela), in the case of Mali resulting in a military coup, which also directly affected the Czech Republic, because in the given period the Czech Republic commanded the EUTM mission (for the Czech Republic, the first command of the EU foreign mission). Developments in Mali will continue to have an impact on the CR, given that in the second half of 2022 the CR plans to take over the command of the EUTM mission again. Iraq, in turn, revealed the risk that the domestic conflict, but also the possible spillage of the conflict on the territory of the state where the Czech Armed Forces operate as part of an international mission, may directly affect not only the tasks, but also the very presence of Czech soldiers on the territory of a particular state.

Moreover, destabilization and protests took place at national level in Belarus following the presidential elections, but also in Armenia following the adoption of the peace agreement. Both territories belong to the sphere of interest of the Russian Federation, which also has an impact on the development of the situation (recognition of Alexander Lukashenko's legitimacy by President Putin) and the dynamics of the conflict (mediation of the agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan and supervision of its observance by Russian soldiers). The Russian Federation can be expected to continue to play an important role in the region. At the same time, in general, with each new destabilization of states or escalation of conflict, the possibility of a potential deployment of armed forces within the framework of international crisis management operations arises in the future, which may also directly affect the Czech Republic as a member state of collective security and defence organizations. On the other hand, in the Middle East, we have seen a partial calming of the situation, both in terms of normalization of relations between the Arab states and Israel, and in terms of progress in efforts to peacefully resolve the conflicts in Afghanistan and Libya. It is exactly the political resolution of these conflicts that can affect other tasks for the Czech Republic, whether in terms of withdrawal of troops (the case of Afghanistan) or in terms of a potential new UN mission or other international organization that would supervise the observance of the ceasefire (Libya, South Sudan). The policy of the new US President Joe Biden, which will affect not only bilateral relations with the PRC and the Russian Federation, but can also influence the direction of NATO, and thus the tasks for the Czech Republic as a member of the North Atlantic Alliance, will be crucial for the further development of superpower relations and the future form of the global order. In addition, the influential activities of the superpowers, targeting also the Czech Republic, and thus to a certain extent also by the CAF, are a manifestation of the superpower's rivalry. In this context, it seems necessary to strengthen the resilience of the population but also of the Czech Republic itself to hybrid activities, mainly by the Russian Federation and the PRC.

As regards the Euro-Atlantic integration area, the Czech Republic will also face the challenge of facing Turkey in the coming period (especially in the context of Macron's calls for a tougher stance, including sanctions), which, on the one hand, threatens the cohesion of the Alliance, but is also referred to as a source of instability at the EU's borders due to activities in the eastern Mediterranean. Further escalation of the situation may fundamentally affect the functioning of NATO and bring with it new tasks for the NATO and EU member states, including their armed forces. In addition, the Czech

Republic will face the challenge of responding to non-liberal and authoritarian tendencies in Poland and Hungary, especially in terms of dialogue among V4 countries. Hungary and Poland have deviated from the values which the Czech Republic subscribes to and which are also the pillar of the EU, and therefore the question of how these trends in the two V4 countries will affect the functioning of this informal grouping in the near future is legitimate. There is a risk that the instrument, which strengthened Central Europe's voice in the EU, could potentially be paralysed, as well as the potential complication of cooperation within the framework of the V4 and in the field of defence and security. Last but not least, due to the departure of the United Kingdom from the EU, we can expect increased demands and pressure on other EU member states, including the Czech Republic, in terms of the need to compensate for the contributions to European security and defence that the EU lost as a result of Brexit.

MILITARY SECTOR

Long-term conflicts dominated the military sector in 2020 as in the previous period. These were, in particular, regional conflicts of varying intensity, based on long-term tensions with high escalation potential. In some conflicts, fundamental changes can be declared in 2020 due to the projection of military power and the effectiveness of the military solution. In other cases, it is not possible to talk about the significant dominance of any of the actors involved, but it is possible to identify a shift in the pursuit of a political solution.

At the very beginning of 2020, great tensions in the Middle East region aroused a deadly US attack on the general of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and *Quds* special forces commander Qassem Soleimani during his visit to Iraq. This controversial operation, probably motivated by the internal political needs of the US administration, meant, apart from further erosion of international relations standards, exacerbation of the security situation in the Gulf region with great escalation potential. Iran's relatively restrained retaliatory response was limited to an isolated missile strike on the US military base on the territory of neighbouring Iraq, but the growing conflict, due to the reservation of both actors, did not scale further. Following a unilateral US procedure that did not respect Iraq's sovereignty, the Iraqi Parliament called for the immediate withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq. The US responded by limiting its presence and activities in Iraq and subsequently managed to partially resolve the growing discord with its Iraqi partner at the political level. The sensitivity of the events is also evidenced by the fact that the US, apart from verbal condemnation, did not respond to the Iranian missile strike led by regular forces from Iran, which was unprecedented. Although the emerging conflict and the subsequent direct military confrontation between the US and Iran have not escalated substantially since then, the relationship between the two remains one of the most conflicting on a global scale. The confrontational potential of these negative relations is also reinforced by the regional ambitions of Iran's rival Saudi Arabia and its involvement in the proxy conflict in Yemen, where Iran is one of the major external actors, as well as Iran's participation in the Syrian conflict and its close cooperation with the Lebanese Hezbollah movement. In this context, the antagonistic relationship between Iran and Israel, manifested in 2020 in a series of attacks by Israeli forces on Iranian or pro-Iranian armed formations in neighbouring Syria, or the increased intensity of Israel's hybrid war (cyber attacks and continued targeted killings of top representatives of Iran's nuclear programme), cannot be overlooked.

In the context of the conflict in Syria, the relative stability phase, given the results of military operations in previous years, can be observed in 2020. In practice, the marginalization of the Syrian armed opposition can already be discussed, with the exception of the specific position of the Syrian Kurdish forces. Government forces have consolidated control over most of the state's territory, with the exception of the north and northeast of Syria and several smaller isolated locations. The stability here is currently determined by the Syrian-Turkish agreement and respect for the previously established demilitarized zone. Thus, Turkish involvement in the region prevents Syrian government forces from eventually fully implementing the military solution and defeating the armed opposition, but the risk of a military confrontation with the Turkish actor is perceived very sensitively here. Despite the support of its external allies, the Syrian army does not have the potential to become an equal actor in relation to Turkish forces capable of responding to Turkish assertiveness and activities on Syrian territory. According to various sources, Turkey should have approximately 15,000 troops directly on Syrian territory in 2020, however, their reported numbers, or the number of their local allies,

are not relevant due to the immediate proximity of the Syrian-Turkish border and Turkish military infrastructure deployed behind it as these can be significantly increased or reduced in the short term according to current Turkish needs. Turkey's military superiority in the region will probably prevent the full consolidation of Syrian government power throughout the Syrian state's territory in the future. Syrian Kurdish armed opposition forces, which mainly control the north-east of the country, continue to occupy a specific position in this conflict. Their position is confrontational to both regional power competitors, the government and especially the Turkish actor. For this reason, even in 2020, government forces were not seeking military control over the Kurdish controlled territory, and there is an attempt to find a political solution to the stalemate. In principle, 2020 brought a relatively quiet period, with no greater intensity of fighting between all the main actors, and reaffirmed the trend of the fundamental importance of external actors in this conflict.

The long-term conflict in Yemen showed the same characteristics and negative impacts on regional stability in 2020. The Yemeni conflict, reflecting long-standing latent tensions in Yemeni society, gradually gained the character of a regional confrontation with increasing intensity. Long-term war confrontation here has led to one of the greatest humanitarian crises of today in the previous period. Prolonged confrontation of power of regional external actors and varying intensity of military action can be observed here. The conflict does not show the essential characteristics of an intensive military confrontation in 2020, the current seriousness consists in the rather disastrous situation in the non-military sector. Yemen ranked first in *the Fragile States Index*⁵⁵ and second in the *Global Hunger Index*⁵⁶ in 2020. However, due to the nature of the conflict and its actors, there is a permanently present

threat of direct military confrontation between regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia, possibly involving other external actors and the use of local proxy forces in the Sunni - Shia conflict or with other motivations.

The conflict in **Afghanistan** draws constant attention. This primarily domestic conflict with strong external engagement is of a long-term nature and the burden of its engagement primarily on the US has become one of the main reasons for limiting external presence and seeking a political solution. 2020 was again characterized by a process of progressive Afghanization of the conflict, so that government forces in particular were confronted with the activities of the armed opposition. Due to the ongoing negotiations, however, the intensity of combat activity was not as high as in the previous years and the announced complete withdrawal of American troops in the first half of 2021 has led the insurgent formations to overall restraint. Nevertheless, it was been possible to observe the continued erosion of the government's authority in parts of the territory of Afghanistan, while opposition groups, on the contrary, are strengthening control over a number of Afghan regions. Despite significant progress in negotiations between US diplomats and the Taliban, the future position of the government and opposition has not been fully satisfactorily defined, so that 2020 has not brought about a mutually acceptable non-military solution to the conflict and full implementation of the agreements beyond the suppression of the external military presence.

Again, in 2020, a large region of the Sahel, stretching across the African continent, was the scene of many conflicts. While military operations of higher intensity do not take

⁵⁵ FRAGILE STATES INDEX. [online]. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/PKQI7>

⁵⁶ GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX. [online]. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/vKQg1>

place here, the intensity of terrorist and guerrilla attacks remains high and the affected territory and impacts on the local population are increasing. Due to the vastness of the Sahel and different local conditions, general trends cannot be identified here. Terrorist activities in some western regions are of similar intensity as in previous years, while in some cases a certain increase can be observed. However, it can be stated that ensuring at least the current security situation and regional stability by deploying only local security structures would not be realistic and without foreign external military support the region would face more significant security problems and threats that local state authorities would not be able to handle. In the Sahel region, European states, in particular France, are still heavily involved militarily, taking into account their traditional ties, interests and historical experience of active presence. The French forces have about 6,000 soldiers, which is currently the most significant French expeditionary activity. Significant attention has been paid to the region in many European states over the long term; the increase in violence, escalation of local conflicts and regional instability could generate major refugee waves and make the Sahel a significant source of migration to the European continent.

Attention can be paid here in particular to Mali, where the deteriorating economic and political situation manifested itself in civil unrest and subsequently in the military coup in August 2020. This military coup, which removed the democratically elected president and put a military government with limited legitimacy into power, made the operation of foreign forces in the country somewhat complicated. However, the military government declared that foreign military support and competence would remain intact and that the revolution was motivated by domestic political circumstances and unsatisfactory developments in the country and the state of society. Although cooperation with the military coup regime is not an entirely positive circumstances for the involved foreign actors, including the Czech Republic, pragmatic reasons marginalize the generally held democratic values here without much reservation. The coup also affected the activity of the Czech Republic as it took place during the first ever command of the Czech Armed Forces in an international military mission, namely EUTM. Initially, however, the unclear situation and the low level of legitimacy of the new Malian leadership were resolved within a relatively short period of time and EUTM continued under completely standard circumstances, although the global Covid-19 pandemic became a long-standing problem here. From the outset, the military government in Mali profiled itself as an actor with a fundamental interest in strengthening the security structures of the state and stabilising the security situation, so the participation of foreign military entities in training and anti-insurgency activities was not affected in any way. On the contrary, there was an interest in extending the cooperation in the military and security field to the next years. Nevertheless, the conflict potential here is difficult to address only by acting in the military sector, the sources of conflict are based on deep social and environmental causes, which are then reflected in religiously and ethnically motivated violence. The erosion of state power in the last decade has allowed the escalation of a number of latent inter-ethnic conflicts, and the link between ethnic and Islamist radicalism here has strengthened the conflict potential in many local regions.

From the European perspective, the ongoing conflict in **Libya** continued to play a crucial role in the highly sensitive Mediterranean region in 2020. Here, for one decade after the intervention of the North Atlantic Alliance in 2011, a complicated national conflict was taking place, involving a number of local and external actors with their particular interests and motivations. The territory of the former Libyan state continues to be disintegrated into several regions, controlled by different factions in cooperation with local tribes and clans. As in the previous year, in 2020 there was a pivotal armed

confrontation between the *Government of National Accord* actor and its rival actor (or faction) of General Haftar and the *Libyan National Army (LNA)*. At the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, military operations and the participation of foreign actors intensified there. In 2019/2020, significant support to LNA units of General Haftar was provided by the Russian Federation; outside Syria, Libya was the main area for expeditionary activities of elements of the Russian armed forces. The Russian side provided military material and human personnel to the LNA through state organizations and private military companies. However, the comparative advantage of Russian support to the LNA was outweighed by the Turkish military support to the *Government of National Accord*. Turkey's engagement in Libya is part of a broader Turkish strategy in the eastern Mediterranean, and unlike the geographically very remote and isolated Russian Federation and its limited objectives, Turkish ambitions and interests are of a more complex nature. Concerns about the expansion of Turkish power influence in this area motivated some regional and distant states to actively participate in the conflict. Subsequently, Egypt and France participated in the LNA's support and the United Arab Emirates became an important partner for the LNA. In the active phase of the conflict, there was also an unusual situation, in which the military elements of NATO member states (Turkey and France) were represented on opposite sides of the frontline. The importance of the Libyan conflict for the security of European states was then underlined last year by the interventions of the European Union's naval forces against vessels in violation of the UN arms embargo on the supply of military equipment. Since the beginning of 2020, the stalemate caused by the inability of the two main actors in the conflict to achieve a clear superiority by accumulating military power has led to efforts to bring about an internationally mediated end to the conflict. Negotiations in the format of *5+5 Libyan Joint Military Commission* over almost a year resulted in a permanent ceasefire agreement in October 2020. On the basis of this agreement, all foreign military entities were withdrawn from Libya by the end of the year and the political solution to the current conflict was achieved, which should be fully implemented in 2021. However, the agreement did not mean a complete cessation of foreign activities or military cooperation between the two main actors; the Turkish side announced that it would continue advisory and training activities for the benefit of the *Government of National Accord* forces; similar position can be expected for the LNA and its external actors. Full political and military integration of the Libyan state may not be expected even in the medium term under the 2020 agreements.

On the African continent, in autumn 2020, a new conflict with a national and interstate character took place in the second most populous African country - **Ethiopia**. Political tensions between the central Ethiopian government and the government of the federal Ethiopian state of Tigray in northern Ethiopia grew into an attempt at secession with an ensuing armed conflict. In the long run, Tigray ethnic leaders played a major role in Ethiopia's political power, but after the changes in 2018, they lost their influence and began to define themselves vis-à-vis the central government, announcing that they would not respect its authority in the future. At the beginning of November 2020, the incumbent Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner Abiy Ahmed accused the Tigray government and its armed forces of attacking the Ethiopian army base there and launched a military operation aimed at eliminating Tigrayan political leadership and its power base. Despite the global pandemic, the conflict aroused quite a lot of attention, as there were considerable concerns about refugee waves and humanitarian disasters, given the population and local conditions. The Tigrayan government tried to internationalise the conflict and turned to the African Union for assistance and deployment of peacekeeping forces on the lines of conflict. However, the Ethiopian army was able to achieve its goals in a relatively short period of several weeks and concerns about the protracted civil

conflict and the long-term resistance of Tigrayan armed formations have not yet been confirmed. In eliminating the Tigrayan separatist movement, Ethiopian armed forces acted in cooperation with their former opponent from Eritrea, which was due, among other things, to both the geographical location of Tigray and the conflicting past that the Tigrayan ethnicity had with its Eritrean neighbours. The end of the conflict was marked by ethnic cleansing and massacres of civilians by Ethiopian government forces and intervening Eritrean troops at the end of last year. From a military point of view, the operation of government forces was successful, but it is uncertain whether this conflict is definitively concluded and whether it will not lead to destabilization and disintegration of one of the most stable African states to date with a unique historical tradition and legitimacy.

In 2020, there was also a short-term escalation of the conflict between the nuclear powers and the world's most populous states, the People's Republic of China and India. The conflict on the border line between the two global players in the disputed territory in the western **Himalaya** region had very specific characteristics. During May and especially in June 2020, there were several incidents that resulted in the loss of human lives of members of Indian and Chinese military forces in the order of dozens of people. However, human and material losses were not high with respect to the severity and extent of the conflict. Both sides were characterized by relative restraint and clashes in the demilitarized dispute zone were conducted without the use of standard military equipment, using improvised cold weapons and tools, or bars and stones. Subsequently, a large-scale demonstration of military force and the transfer of significant military reinforcements and heavy weapons to the region took place from both sides. However, the ground and air forces of both actors respected the existing lines, the short-term escalation occurred only in the form of an incident of September 2020, when there was also limited enemy fire, thus violating the local, decades-respected, *modus operandi* preventing the use of firearms in border incidents. Moreover, the risk of a wider conflict or even escalation of conflict between two military superpowers, whose armed forces rank third and fourth globally,⁵⁷ in the region that is not a strategic priority for either party led to a mutually moderate approach, although for prestigious reasons of power, there was no return to pre-escalation status by the end of the year. However, like the conflict between India and Pakistan in Kashmir in 2019, this incident highlighted the significant risks of a possible armed confrontation between powers with a nuclear status and a conflicting past in the Asian area.

Given the geographical proximity and current tense relations between NATO/EU and the Russian Federation, the currently militarily inactive conflict in **eastern Ukraine** can still be observed in the European area in 2020. During 2020, the situation was stable, although armed incidents on the dividing line occurred as standard. These were exclusively incidents of local significance with no impact on the actors involved. The Ukrainian party has not given up on achieving territorial integrity from 2013 and similarly the position of the Russian party on the annexation of the Crimean peninsula has remained unchanged. However, the current situation, due to the power potential of both actors, does not have a real military solution, and at the military level, it can be stated in 2020, above all, that the Ukrainian military potential continues to be modernized and strengthened, which, however, remains determined by Ukrainian economic possibilities, and its limits compared to the potential of the Russian actor are obvious. Moreover, the attention paid

⁵⁷ GLOBAL FIREPOWER. Military Strength Ranking. [online]. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/sKQge>

to this conflict by its actors was overshadowed by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, similar to other areas, and even in the local communities the conflict resolution was not a major priority. In practical terms, Ukraine's efforts to reintegrate lost territories are manifested not at military level, but at diplomatic level. Alternatively, in activities aimed at defending Ukrainian cultural heritage against Russian cultural imperialism, such as the attempt to include eastern European borscht as an exclusive Ukrainian product in the UNESCO list. Antagonist attitudes to the principal contentious issues did not see any fundamental changes during 2020 and without a significant shift in the political dialogue between the two main parties, long-term regional tensions and the duration of the latent conflict can be assumed. This conflict is likely to remain long-term with very low intensity, similar to some other unresolved conflicts in the post-Soviet space.

One of the most important armed conflicts in 2020 was the renewed war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed **Nagorno-Karabakh** region. This long-standing frozen conflict since 1994, with its last major short-term escalation to the hot phase in 2016, was one of the longest lasting conflicts in the post-Soviet space. It was a conflict whose active beginning can be dated back to the last years of existence of the Soviet Union and the first conflict that significantly questioned the existence of internationally recognized borders of Soviet federal republics, or their post-Soviet successor variants. In 2020, it was possible to observe the initial escalation and resumption of combat activity during August, however, this phase was limited in time and in terms of deployed resources. From the Azerbaijani side, it was probably a test of the readiness and response of their Armenian opponent, in this case divided into the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh (the entity formed in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent Azerbaijani territories under Armenian control). In autumn 2020, Azerbaijan decided to take advantage of favourable international circumstances (i.e., global attention paid primarily to the Covid pandemic and the US presidential elections) and to use its long-term systematically built military capacity over the quantitatively and qualitatively weaker Armenian opponent. Azerbaijan has never resigned from its territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders since 1994, assuming sufficient legitimacy to launch military operations. Another factor compared to the past was the close cooperation with Turkey, which provided Azerbaijan with its advanced military equipment as well as high-quality human staff with extensive experience of combat deployment from recent conflicts with Turkish participation. At the same time, Turkey provided sufficient political covering against the possible active entry of other external actors into the conflict, both the Russian Federation or possibly other states. The Azerbaijani forces had maintained a strategic initiative since the beginning of the conflict and in a relatively short time they were able to eliminate the terrain-based advantages of an Armenian opponent, favouring defensive positions controlled by the Armenian forces. The conflict was of high intensity, although it remained strictly limited to the territory of the Republic of Artsakh, except for isolated incidents. The primary reason for this was Azerbaijani fear of active Russian interference in the conflict given by the allied treaty between Armenia and the Russian Federation, which, however, is limited only to the territory of the Republic of Armenia within its internationally recognized borders. Due to the standard high military readiness of the Azerbaijani forces (about a third of the total number of ground forces was rotated and deployed on the conflict line in peacetime), it was possible to launch military operations without longer preparations and maintain the required degree of operational capabilities and capacities at a high level. By contrast, the Armenian side underestimated Azerbaijani's military potential and was unable to adequately assess the risk of a major military confrontation. Moreover, in recent years, due to some political instability, Armenia has weakened its ties with its Russian ally and, with a number of personnel changes in leading military positions, has diverted the

attention of its armed forces to topics other than defence against the prospective Azerbaijani threat. In the ongoing military campaign, the Azerbaijani party successfully capitalized on the long-term development of modern armed forces and was able to break through strong Armenian defensive positions and subsequently completely disrupt the defence system in the Republic of Artsakh. One of the most significant elements, which contributed to the Azerbaijani military success, was the large-scale deployment of unmanned means, both for the exploration and guidance of effective artillery fire as well as for direct air strikes. The effectiveness of Azerbaijani drones was also successfully exploited in the information and propaganda dimension of the conflict, but the main benefit was the elimination of heavy Armenian weapons systems and, subsequently, the manpower of the opponent, which led to a profound demoralization of the deployed Armenian troops. Azerbaijan had been focusing on the military use of drones for a long time, with relatively good results already during the several weeks lasting conflict in 2016 and multiplied its capacity in this area during the following five years. It benefited from its superior partnership with Turkey and its second most important economic partner Israel, which enabled it to acquire technologically advanced weapons systems and in the case of Turkish drones to benefit from the experience of Turkish operators. Given Azerbaijan's military achievements, the conflict was probably ended only thanks to the substantial entry of the Russian mediator, which prevented the immediate collapse of Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh and the complete defeat and loss of the entire territory of the Republic of Artsakh. The current peace agreement has resulted in Armenia's resignation to all territories outside Nagorno-Karabakh, but its future status remains unclear, therefore, there is no definitive solution to the disputed situation.

Implications for the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic

In terms of possible external and expeditionary activities of the Czech Republic, African Mali can again be identified as a foreign-policy and military priority of the Czech Republic. In the second half of 2022, it plans to take back the command of the EUTM mission in this country. The security situation in this fragile African state is not guaranteed and requires the strong participation of foreign forces in the future, which has not been changed by the military coup d'état and the new domestic political situation in the country. On the contrary, it can be assumed that both the military government and the European Union will call for greater participation by European states in order to ensure at least the current level of stability and security. The EU Council has extended the duration of the EUTM training mission until the middle of 2024, thus, the activities of the Czech Republic in this field can be a valuable contribution of the Czech Republic to the security of the EU's membership base and its interests until the next period. Due to its current involvement in a number of activities in Mali since 2013, the Czech Republic has been the second most active country here, next to France, and in connection with the possible slowdown of activities in other regions, Mali may thus become the area of priority activity of the Czech Republic in the future.

Geographically, the closest armed conflict, which could have significant effects on the Czech Republic in the event of a wider escalation, is still taking place in the east of Ukraine, however, with very low intensity and its solution lies in the political rather than the military level. In the context of EU-NATO relations with the Russian Federation, in 2020, as in previous years, priority was given to deployment in the Baltic States, in order to deter the potential Russian threat and to underline the credibility of alliance's commitments. In this context, it can be assumed that the Baltic Sea region will continue to be the place of main activity of the Czech Armed Forces on the European continent outside its own territory.

In terms of trends in the development of armed conflicts, it is necessary to reflect the experience of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, which has confirmed the dynamically growing importance of drones and the associated process of robotization of contemporary battlefields. On the one hand, it demonstrated the high effectiveness of unmanned aerial vehicles in the conflicts of the regular armed forces, on the other hand, there were limitations and insufficient effectiveness of contemporary air defence systems against these assets. So far, the use of unmanned aerial vehicles has been directed primarily towards non-state actors in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations, in which advanced air defence systems were completely absent and some drone capabilities due to their different characteristics from those of piloted aircraft were underestimated. Unmanned assets were mainly used as an economically and logistically less costly substitute for aviation technology. However, the deployment of Turkish drones in conflicts in Syria and Libya, where they were confronted with more advanced PVO systems, has already highlighted their capabilities in regular conflicts and resistance to the action of the opponent's PVO. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, this trend was confirmed, because although the Armenian NCA had a relatively robust air defence system equipped with advanced systems of Russian provenance and completely sufficient to eliminate piloted aircraft of the enemy air force, in confrontation with the deployment of Azerbaijani drones it proved to be completely inadequate. This conflict also highlighted the fact that even countries comparable to the Czech Republic can have considerable military capabilities in this field. It also pointed out, in the case of Turkish drones, that even states that are not technological and innovative leaders can independently develop and effectively deploy a weapon system of this type with high quality. These factors will undoubtedly lead to further intensive proliferation of military drones among other actors, and it is probably necessary to conclude from this that all regular armed forces will be forced to pay great attention to the capabilities of their PVO and modify it to enable effective elimination of drones of potential opponents.

ECONOMIC SECTOR

From the economic point of view, 2020 was marked by the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), which gradually hit the global economy since the beginning of the year. Thus, the situation continued, when in 2019 the growth of the world economy was the worst since the financial crisis in 2009. In addition to the previously cited reasons for the economic slowdown, such as the trade war between the US and the People's Republic of China or the increase in uncertainty among investors in financial markets due to increasing tensions within the framework of the trade policies of states, reduction in production due to the mass spread of the pandemic was added.

Back in January 2020, it seemed that the only economic risk of the year would be the November presidential elections in the US. But then gradually, from the beginning of the year, a new type of coronavirus from the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the disease first appeared, spread to all areas and provinces of the country.

COVID-19 spread from the People's Republic of China to Europe and the US within the following month. The affected countries took action in response to this situation. Certain industrial areas were temporarily closed, supply chains were cut off and long-distance and air transport was restricted. Subsequently, states began to implement other emergency measures, closing borders, schools, public events, mass meetings, and most shops and restaurants were closed. On 11 March, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the spread of the coronavirus a pandemic. Thus, throughout the first half of 2020, global economic developments were completely influenced by the coronavirus pandemic.

The pandemic also had an immediate impact on the price of oil, as the PRC is one of the largest consumers of oil. Following the decision of the PRC to close certain major cities, its demand decreased by almost 20%. In addition, on Monday, 9 March 2020, an event took place that was recorded in the history books as the "Black Monday" for the price of oil, with a 30% fall in oil prices. In April 2020, future oil contracts even turned negative. It was caused by overcrowded storage capacities and there was nowhere to store the oil. This unprecedented situation thus portrayed the chaos, which not only the oil market found itself in. There were concerns in the market about insufficient demand in the global economy. At the end of April, however, prices rose again and this upward trend continued until the end of 2020.⁵⁸

The imposition of restrictions on production and transport, including border closures, was linked to a sharp decline in both supply and demand, and ultimately led to an unprecedented decline in GDP, both in individual countries and in entire regions.⁵⁹ However, this is not the case for the People's Republic of China, which showed a total GDP growth of 2.3% at the end of 2020, significantly lower than in previous years, but still an excellent value compared to other countries.⁶⁰

The development of the economy and trade of the countries of the European Union in the course of 2020 followed the development in non-European countries. The development of the EU's external trade was characterized by a deep decline in trade turnover in April

⁵⁸ Mlýnek, Jonáš. Cena ropy v roce 2021: Vše, co musíte o černém zlatu vědět! [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/XKQwO>

⁵⁹ Mezinárodní obchod se zbožím v čase nástupu koronavirové pandemie z pohledu ekonomických regionů [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/yKQw0/>

⁶⁰ Growth rate of real gross domestic product (GDP) in China from 2010 to 2020 with forecasts until 2025 cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/RKQwT>

and May 2020, followed by a gradual recovery in June. Restrictive antivirus measures linked to restrictions on production and transport and border closures peaked in most member states in April 2020. While the decline in the intra-EU trade of the member states culminated in April and May already saw a slight improvement, the extra-EU trade, i.e., EU's trade with the rest of the world, culminated in May, after a significant fall in April, which seems to be related to the spread of the pandemic to the US and Brazil, in particular. While the period of short easing of restrictions in the summer and autumn led to a recovery of the European economy and trade, overall gross domestic product in the European Union decreased by 6.2% in 2020.⁶¹

The decline in the turnover of EU's trade with the rest of the world was mainly linked to the decline in exports of goods.⁶² This was mainly related to the decline in exports of machinery and motor vehicles,⁶³ which reached almost 39% in May and accounted for more than half of the overall decline.

The motor vehicle business was clearly one of the most damaged groups. In many countries, it plays a dominant or at least fundamental role in trade exchange, especially in the European countries of the EU. Significantly different declines in exports and imports were noticeable in April when comparing trade between V4 countries and traditional medium-sized EU countries. The V4 countries were characterized by a deep April drop in exports, which was followed by a moderation of the decline in May and a rapid recovery in June, practically to the level of 2019. Meanwhile, the decline in aggregate exports of medium-sized traditional countries was noticeably less pronounced in April and May. Similar developments, but with a less pronounced return to last June's values, were recorded in imports in both groups. The slighter decline in exports of traditional medium-sized EU countries compared to the V4 countries is clearly related to the bigger commodity diversification of their exports, in particular the significantly lower share of engineering exports. In contrast, engineering exports play a key role in the V4 countries as a result of past FDI inflows, accounting for more than half of total exports, with the exception of Poland. Moreover, the dominant exports in the Czech Republic and especially in the Slovak Republic are in the group of road vehicles; in Poland and Hungary they occupied second and third places last year. This also implies a higher vulnerability of total exports in the event of sudden external shocks and a situation that weakens external demand.⁶⁴ For example, Škoda Auto, a major contributor to the Czech GDP, stopped its production altogether due to the pandemic between 18 March and 27 April 2020.

In the first quarter of 2020, the Czech economy recorded the deepest decline since 2009, when the global financial crisis escalated. Due to measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, gross domestic product fell by 3.3% quarter-on-quarter and 2.0% year-on-year.⁶⁵ Overall, the deepest decline in economic performance in the history of the independent Czech Republic was recorded in 2020. Gross domestic product (GDP) adjusted for price effects and seasonality was 5.6% lower in 2020 than in 2019.⁶⁶ The decline was mainly influenced by household consumption and investment expenditure,

⁶¹ Eurostat. Real GDP growth rate - volume. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from:

<https://1url.cz/RKQwT>

⁶² Ref. 100

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ MPO ČR. Analýza vývoje ekonomiky ČR - červen 2020. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from:

<https://1url.cz/TKQwv>

⁶⁶ Ref. 102

but also by the decline in foreign demand in the first half of the year. Government expenditure was growing. The decline in gross value added had the most significant impact on developments in the business, transport, accommodation and hospitality sectors. Industry, construction and most services sectors also suffered.⁶⁷

The positive development of the Czech budget in the first two months of the year, when the collection of taxes and premiums exceeded expectations and covered the growth rate of the current expenditure, was weakened by efforts to counter the COVID-19 epidemic in the rest of the year. Measures taken to mitigate its impact resulted in significant reductions in tax revenues and increases in expenditure aimed at helping individuals, companies and other parts of public budgets.⁶⁸ The total management of the state budget ended in a deficit of CZK 367.4 billion in 2020, which is the worst result in the modern history of the Czech Republic.⁶⁹

Great Britain, currently the 5th largest economy in the world measured by the volume of gross domestic product and the second largest European economy (after Germany), continued its departure from the European Union (Brexit) during 2020. In total, it accounts for 2.3% of the global economy.⁷⁰ Regarding trade with the European Union, exports from the EU to Great Britain accounted for 21.3% of total exports and imports to the EU from Great Britain accounted for 18.4% of total EU imports.⁷¹

The original date for Brexit was set to 29 March 2019, but after the British Parliament rejected the withdrawal agreement, Brexit was set to a new date of 31 October 2019. The United Kingdom then formally left the EU on 31. 1. 2020. Brexit hit the German and US economies hardest in absolute terms and Norway and Ireland in relative GDP impacts, respectively.⁷²

The preparation for Brexit and the long-term uncertainty surrounding its form affected the European and global economies throughout 2020. Germany, for example, saw a steep decline in exports, which was due, among other things, to the fact that Britain was its fifth most important export destination. The British economy has started to stagnate. The financial sector and some service providers, such as consultancy or insurance, have largely withdrawn from London. They have newly settled in Paris or Dublin, which they have easier access to than, for example, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, where London based companies were originally expected to relocate. Due to concerns about future economic developments, some shops in Britain have also decided to close completely.

As far as the economy is concerned, under the agreement concluded, goods exchanged between the United Kingdom and EU countries are not subject to tariffs or quotas. However, there are new procedures for the transport of goods to and from the UK as border controls are in place to assure compliance with internal market rules (such as hygiene, safety, social and environmental standards) and compliance with the respective

⁶⁷ ČSÚ. Předběžný odhad HDP - 4. čtvrtletí 2020. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/XKQwR>

⁶⁸ MFČR. Plnění státního rozpočtu ČR za leden až prosinec 2020. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/kzPej>

⁶⁹ Deník veřejné správy: COVID-19 a jeho vliv na hospodaření státního rozpočtu v roce 2020 - výdaje. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/pKQwk>

⁷⁰ Brexit. Analýza odchodu Velké Británie z EU. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/4KetZ>

⁷¹ Eurostat. Main EU trade partners in services in 2019: the USA and the UK. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/AKQwd>

⁷² Ref. 111

UK rules. As a result, this means more bureaucracy and additional financial costs. For example, all imports to the EU are subject to customs formalities and must also comply with all EU standards. This does not apply to goods transported between Northern Ireland and the EU.⁷³

So far, the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union has not changed the fact that the European bloc remains a key destination of goods from the Isles. 43% of all British exports end in the Union, and nearly £300 billion worth of goods were shipped to the EU in 2019.⁷⁴

Brexit will also impact the Czech Republic. Although no massive influence is expected on the Czech Republic, exports will be particularly affected. Britain is the 3rd largest market for Czech exporters and the 6th largest import market. Britain accounts for less than 5% of total exports from the Czech Republic and 2.3% of total imports.⁷⁵

Another problematic point in 2020 was the question of energy security or the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.⁷⁶ Nord Stream 2 is expected to double the transport capacity of the already existing Nord Stream pipeline to 110 billion cubic metres per year. The project divided the closely cooperating French-German tandem on other issues, however, Germany, as the intended main customer, did not intend to resign from the implementation even in 2020.

The pipeline is currently 94% complete. Roughly 120 kilometres of pipeline in Danish waters and less than 30 kilometres in German waters remain to be completed. Work on the pipeline resumed in December 2020, after a break of about a year, which resulted from the announcement of sanctions by the United States targeting private companies involved in the construction.

Until now, the pipelines supplying Russian natural gas to the German port of Lubmin have been criticized mainly by the USA, Poland and some eastern European countries. According to them, Europe would be too dependent on Russian raw materials when it is completed. Voices against it increased in the summer of 2020 after the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, which, according to the investigative server Bellingcat, was executed by agents of the Russian FSB. Even then, German Chancellor Angela Merkel insisted on her position on the completion of the pipeline, and most experts believe that the project worth nine billion Euros can no longer be stopped. Apart from Russia itself, other states and private companies would suffer. For example, the Finnish state-owned group Fortum bought a share in the German company Uniper, one of the key players in the construction of the pipeline. This is also the basis for national views on the future of the 1200 km long gas pipeline.⁷⁷

US President-elect Joe Biden has also joined the critics of the project. However, analysts believe that the United States' efforts to operate on the European market for its liquefied natural gas (LNG) may be behind the criticism.⁷⁸

⁷³ Evropský parlament. Dohoda o brexitu: Jak se vás mohou dotknout nové vztahy mezi EU a Spojeným královstvím? [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/KKQwh>

⁷⁴ ČT24. Čekali slunné dny, přišel brexit. Jeho dopady po měsíci pocítuje Británie i Evropa. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/YKQw3>

⁷⁵ Euractiv. Brexit hýbe evropskou ekonomikou. Komu působí největší potíže? [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/tKQw4>

⁷⁶ ČT24. Stavba plynovodu Nord Stream 2 se chýlí ke konci. Gazprom letos očekává jeho spuštění. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/RKQwV>

⁷⁷ Seznam zprávy. Plynovod Nord Stream 2 získal silného nepřítele. Proti je i Francie. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/WKQwP>

⁷⁸ Aktuálně zprávy. Nord Stream. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/8KQwp>

Although this project presents the Czech Republic with the possibility of strengthening the transit potential and positive economic impacts, on the other hand, it does not rank among the open supporters of Nord Stream 2 with respect to its partners from V4. The gas pipeline project does not appear to pose a political or economic threat to the EU's energy security nor does it substantially strengthen Russian influence. Restricting some of the existing routes is a very sensitive issue for some countries of transit, including the Visegrad Group, as there may be a loss of revenue from transit charges.

The largest free trade agreement in the world was signed in November 2020. The agreement, referred to as RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), was signed by a group of 15 countries from the Asia-Pacific region, including the People's Republic of China, Japan, South Korea and Australia. It includes countries with the total population of 2.2 billion and an aggregate gross domestic product of USD 26.2 trillion (CZK 585 trillion). The treaty enforced by the PRC reduces customs duties and lays down common commercial rules. It concerns trade, services, investment, telecommunications and copyright. The newly established trade structure in the region will allow sustainable trade, revitalise the supply chains affected by COVID-19 and help the economy recover from the pandemic. Reducing tariffs, strengthening supply chains through shared rules and introducing new and shared rules for online commerce should also contribute to this. For the RCEP, which covers about a third of the world economy, to enter into force, six ASEAN members and three partner states thereof still need to ratify it.⁷⁹

In general, in relation to the global economy, the following general conclusions can be drawn from the development of the COVID-19 pandemic so far:

1. Investment in healthcare should return to the spotlight.
2. The People's Republic of China can further strengthen its position and its influence will increase as a result of providing assistance to Europe and the US in coping with the pandemic. This may particularly influence China's Silk Road project.
3. This situation is another major blow to globalization. Globally, therefore, emphasis is expected on stronger control of goods flowing across borders.
4. The way we fight other exponential and collective shocks, such as the climate crisis, may change. The importance of individual activities will be more proportionate to the current urgency of the situation rather than to resources.
5. The effects of the stock market crisis could change the way investments are made towards more prudent investment strategies and shift some of the research, development and production capacities (e.g., in the production of medical supplies, etc.) back to the EU so that dependence on the PRC is not so pronounced.

Implications for the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic

The period of 2020 was strongly influenced by the global pandemic caused by the spread of COVID-19. This unfavourable epidemiological situation fundamentally influenced the functioning of the economies of all states, including their armed forces, and affected the forecasts for the following period.

⁷⁹ ČT24. Dvě miliardy lidí, třetina světového HDP. Asijsko-pacifické země podepsaly největší dohodu o volném obchodu. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/JKQwa>

As far as the Czech Republic is concerned, in the early days of the pandemic, the Czech Army assisted in transporting medical equipment and devices to the Czech Republic, unloading them from aircraft and delivering them from warehouses. The most significant involvement of the Czech Armed Forces in the second wave of the epidemic in autumn 2020 was assistance to social and health facilities, which faced a shortage of personnel due to the infection. Gradually, soldiers were sent to help 120 social and medical facilities, 1879 of them took their turns during the year.

In total, almost 15,000 soldiers of the Czech Armed Forces were deployed in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. In addition to assistance in social and health facilities, they helped in guarding the state border or in the construction of a reserve field hospital in Letňany, Prague. In a significant way, the army was also involved in the Smart Quarantine project.⁸⁰

The North Atlantic Alliance was also involved in helping to combat COVID-19. Since the beginning of the crisis, NATO military personnel and allied forces supported civilian efforts: providing military transport, organising flights to deliver critical supplies, setting up field hospitals and sharing medical knowledge. During the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis, more than half a million military personnel supported civilian authorities. Since the start of the pandemic, the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre coordinated requests for assistance from NATO and partner countries, as well as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Through the Centre, allies and partners were supplied with vital medical supplies, alleviating the burden on national healthcare systems and helping save lives.⁸¹

After the initial hesitation on how to respond to the crisis, the European Union also intervened in all of the following areas: health, research, economy, employment, social impacts, travel and transport.⁸²

While the 2008/2009 crisis, which mainly concerned a significant drop in demand with no additional implications for natural mobility (internal crisis of economies and significant anti-inflationary effects), in the case of this pandemic crisis, it is the first experience in modern history, where, in addition to a significant decline in demand, global natural mobility and supply chains were disrupted, generating significant inflationary pressures (negative supply shock). This also makes the current COVID-19 pandemic very different from previous crises, which were either short-term or on a small global scale in terms of the number of territories affected, and thus the inflationary impact of these crises was minimal. Given that the impact of the epidemic on economic development, especially in terms of duration, cannot yet be fully estimated, it is currently very difficult to predict developments in the Czech Republic.

It has certainly been confirmed that preparation and preparedness for any crisis must not be underestimated, as this could jeopardise our security. Countries that see security spending as an investment are always better off. Depending on how we manage the COVID-19 crisis, we will be ready for the next one to come sooner or later. The crisis has confirmed the need to increase self-sufficiency in key areas such as the food industry, health, telecommunications, energy and also defence. It is not realistic for the Czech Republic to be independent in all critical products, but strategic self-sufficiency needs to be increased. At the same time, cooperation within the EU needs to be more coordinated

⁸⁰ Irozhlas. Proti koronaviru bylo v Česku už nasazeno téměř 15 000 vojáků. Pomáhali se zásobováním i s testováním. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/9zns6>

⁸¹ NATO. Výroční zpráva GT NATO 2020. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/gKQwb>

⁸² Evropský parlament. 10 kroků EU ke zvládnutí koronaviru. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/RKQwZ>

in this area as well. The Czech Republic is a pro-export-oriented economy and the coronavirus emphasized its sensitivity. Dependence on foreign subcontractors has also proven to be risky. Cooperation should therefore be further developed not only between individual companies, but also between the private and public sectors.

The crisis has disrupted numerous supply chains and Czech companies now have a great opportunity to operate on foreign markets. The state should ideally support them in this. The fact that we are members of both the EU and NATO significantly increases the chances of domestic companies, and not only in the field of defence industry. The effects of Brexit have had an impact on the economies of the countries of the Central European region with consequences for the defence industry, namely on the link between Germany and the Visegrad Four countries.

Despite the negative effects on the economies of all countries, NATO states have been increasing their defence spending for the sixth consecutive year in 2020, which increased by 3.9% year on year this year, more than the year before. The US included, this growth was 2.7%. According to data converted into prices from 2015, the Czech Republic invested 1.34% of GDP in defence in 2020.⁸³ Despite the fact that the Czech Republic has improved its year-on-year comparison, it remains seventh from the end in the NATO ranking. The Czech government continues to count on reaching the 2% limit by 2024, when countries are supposed to meet their commitment at the latest.

Despite these optimistic reports, the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus could affect NATO's defence budgets very noticeably in the future, because the financial impact of the crisis will be huge. Alliance countries, including the Czech Republic, will face difficult decisions, as, on the one hand, the security environment is getting worse and, on the other hand, individual state budgets are coming under pressure due to the effects of COVID-19. Due to the fact that since the very beginning of the pandemic crisis, the Czech Armed Forces participated in the implementation of tasks to eliminate it, politicians exert great pressure to maintain the predicted defence expenditure even in the period of the downturn of the Czech economy.

The economic crisis in the Czech Republic, but also in other countries of the world, had its negative impact on the arms and security industry. Despite the preservation of declared defence expenditures, there may be a situation in the future when the Czech Republic will not be able to successfully complete any modernization project. Especially due to its unavailability on the market, but also due to the fact that, in the result, nominally 2% of GDP will be much less than calculated when the strategic development documents were issued, such as the Concept of Building of the Czech Armed Forces 2030 or the Long-Term Perspective for Defence 2035. This situation may be further exacerbated by the reduction in defence expenditure, especially in connection with the response of some political parties in the Czech Republic.⁸⁴

⁸³ Ref. 122

⁸⁴ Hospodářské noviny. Přesuny miliard na obranu škodí modernizaci i pověsti armády mezi našimi spojenci, upozorňují generálové. [cit. 2021-03-23]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/bKQwI>

SOCIETAL SECTOR

From the point of view of the development of the societal (social) security sector, long-term trends observed in the past, such as migration or rivalry of identities, cannot be ignored. While each of these trends significantly affect the identity of society as a key protected value within the social security sector, they were all overlapped by an unexpected, albeit predictable,⁸⁵ event in 2020, the global pandemic of COVID-19 caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

The coronavirus pandemic proved to be an exemplary strategic shock not only to the Czech but literally to the global population. While still in mid-2019, the population of the Czech Republic perceived the risk of a global pandemic as a secondary, if not tertiary threat, and believed that the country was sufficiently prepared to cope⁸⁶ with it; in 2020, the coronavirus pandemic became the main topic of securitization in the Czech Republic and worldwide. The political, social and economic consequences of the pandemic became the most serious security threat as subjectively perceived by Czech citizens during the year.⁸⁷

Migration

As in other sectors, 2020 was an exceptional year in terms of migration in view of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which mainly contributed to the reduced mobility both outside and inside Europe. Firstly, we will focus on the issue of illegal and legal migration to the EU, where we could observe a significant decrease compared to 2019 in both trends. Subsequently, we will focus on the situation in the Czech Republic, which goes against the overall trends of the EU and we can observe both an increase in the number of records of illegal stays in the Czech Republic and an overall increase in the number of legally staying foreigners.

According to Frontex statistics, the number of illegal border crossings in the EU decreased by 13% compared to 2019 (roughly 124,000 people), which is the lowest value since 2013. As in the previous year, Syria is one of the most common countries of origin of illegal migrants, followed by Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria.⁸⁸ Trends have also changed in terms of the exploitation of individual migration routes. In 2020, we could see a significant decrease both on the eastern Mediterranean route (76% reduction compared to 2019) and on the western Mediterranean route (28% reduction compared to 2019). On the contrary,

⁸⁵ Interestingly, Vaclav Smil, a Canadian interdisciplinary academic of Czech origin, was also part of a large group of natural scientists, political scientists and forecasters warning of the global pandemic in recent years and decades. For details, see HOFFOWER, Hillary. *Bill Gates has been warning of a global health threat for years. Here are 12 people who seemingly predicted the coronavirus pandemic*, 15. 12. 2020, Business Insider. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2T9khIG>

⁸⁶ PILNÁČEK, Matouš. *Celospolečenské hrozby podle veřejnosti*, 23. 12. 2019, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3x8NDp9>

⁸⁷ IPSOS. *Obavy z koronaviru mírně klesají, mají je dvě třetiny lidí*, 8. 12. 2020, IPSOS. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3g3SoKY>. See also SPURNÝ, Michal. *Nový typ koronaviru - obavy, média a informace o něm - Naše společnost - speciál - prosinec 2020*, 4. 1. 2021, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3itNDMu>

⁸⁸ FRONTEX. *Irregular migration into EU last year is lowest since 2013*, 8. 1. 2021, FRONTEX. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3g3iUEq>

the trend for the central Mediterranean route reversed and we see a significant increase of 154% compared to the previous year.⁸⁹

In the case of legal migration to the EU, we could see a significant reduction in the number of applications in 2020 compared to 2019. The total number of applications reached 416,632, compared to 2019, when the number of applications reached 612,685, a year-on-year decrease of 32%. As with other migration-related metrics, the decline is attributed to the reduced mobility due to the coronavirus pandemic.⁹⁰

Contrary to the overall trends of the EU, in 2020 in the Czech Republic we can observe both an increase in the number of records of illegal stays in the Czech Republic and an overall increase in the number of legally staying foreigners. The only decrease occurred in applications for international protection. The number of detained foreigners illegally staying in the Czech Republic increased significantly in 2020 compared to the previous year. 7093 individuals who stayed illegally in the Czech Republic were detained on the territory of the Czech Republic, which is the largest number since 2015. These were mainly foreigners from Ukraine, Moldova and Vietnam.⁹¹ Despite the current pandemic, the number of foreigners legally residing in the Czech Republic is increasing and 634,790 people were registered in 2020. Half of the foreigners (50.8%) temporarily residing in the Czech Republic came to work, while 17.3% for family reunification, 7.7% for studies and 5.7% for business. These figures practically replicate the previous year and there are no fluctuations. Ukrainians (26%), Slovaks (19.6%) and Vietnamese (9.9%)⁹² represent the largest share. Concerning applications for international protection, we can see a significant decrease and a change in the trend compared to 2019. In 2020, 1164 individuals applied for protection, 39.4% less than in the same period of the previous year. Applicants from Ukraine, Georgia, Vietnam and Azerbaijan accounted for the largest share.

The issue of migration was put behind in 2020 and long-term opinion polls on migration were not carried out. The last guideline of the Czech public attitude to migration may be a survey from the end of 2019, in which migration emerged as the most significant concern (21% of respondents), followed by their own health and deteriorating environment, suggesting a persistent state of negative perception of migration among the Czech public.⁹³ Compared to the previous year 2019, we can see a strong decline in news and attention devoted to migration from both the media and political parties. Although there is no indication that the Czech public has changed its view, migration as a topic has been subdued by the coronavirus crisis.

⁸⁹ FRONTEX. Risk Analysis for 2020, 2020, European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). Available from: <https://bit.ly/3w3DwC9>

⁹⁰ EUROSTAT. First-time asylum applicants up by 132% in Q3 2020, 17. 12. 2020, EUROSTAT. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3gbYfwQ>

⁹¹ MVČR. Čtvrtletní zprávy o situaci v oblasti migrace, 2020, Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic. Available from: <https://bit.ly/34XzjUv>

⁹² MVČR, ref. 7

⁹³ TUČEK, Milan. Veřejnost o svých obavách, pocitu bezpečnosti a spokojenosti s policií - listopad 2019, 23. 12. 2019, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3w74g4D>

Competition of identities

On the issue of national identity, we can observe the continuation of the trend since 1989, associated with the pro-Western direction of the Czech foreign policy. In addition to the national - Czech - identity, we can encounter a transnational identity shaped by the relationship to the European Union, the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) and the United Nations (UN).

The public position on NATO membership is the subject of ongoing public opinion polls. In general, the number of addressed citizens who are satisfied with NATO membership in the Czech Republic has been between 50% and 60% for twenty years. In 2020, the same values as in the previous year were measured and the number of satisfied respondents remained at 58% (the distribution within this group was also maintained, where 18% said that they were “definitely satisfied” and 40% “satisfied”). Less positive is the increase in dissatisfied respondents, which increased to 24% (22% in 2019). The increase in dissatisfied respondents is beginning to shape the trend that could be seen since 2018 (by 5% since 2018)⁹⁴. The second survey, which focused not on membership but on trust in the NATO institution, of July 2020, recorded a decrease in the confidence of respondents from 61% to 54%. People between the ages of 30 to 44, university graduates, declaring a higher standard of living, voters of ČSSD, ODS, TOP 09 or Pirates are much more convinced about the need for NATO membership. On the contrary, people over 45 years of age, with primary or secondary education, declaring their standard of living to be poor and voting for KSCM, SPD, or Trikolóra, are convinced that it is unnecessary.⁹⁵

The Army of the Czech Republic has long enjoyed high trust of citizens; 81% of respondents trusted the army in 2020 (77% in 2019). Its involvement in addressing the epidemiological crisis also had a positive impact, when 89% of respondents considered the involvement of the army to be beneficial.⁹⁶

Regarding the relationship with the EU, in July 2020, exactly 50% of respondents trusted the EU while 45% said they did not. The European Commission, the President of the European Council and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy have the least trust among citizens. The reason given include alienation of respondents from these institutions and ignorance of both the staffing and the agenda. Thus, a large number of people are unable to express their views on these EU institutions. In terms of the overall trend, the respondents' confidence in the EU fluctuated around 50% over the last 3 years; 2020 returned to the 2018 value, compared to 2019, when confidence in the EU was at 52%. Regarding the demographic factors of respondents, we can observe the same distribution as in the case of the position on NATO, which is defined among supporters with higher education and living standards and a tendency towards right-wing or centrist parties.⁹⁷ Trust in the UN fell more markedly from 63% to 55% of UN supporters. In the case of the UN, this is the third lowest measured value since 2003, since measurements are made (lower values were recorded only in 2012, 2016 and the same value of 55% in 2007).⁹⁸

⁹⁴ ČADOVÁ, Naděžda. Občané o členství České republiky v NATO - únor 2020, 12. 3. 2020, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3g1J4Yh>

⁹⁵ HANZLOVÁ, Radka. Důvěra v evropské a mezinárodní instituce - červenec 2020, 31. 8. 2020, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3v2vkAK>

⁹⁶ MO ČR. Armáda a veřejnost 2020. Závěrečná zpráva z výzkumu veřejného mínění, 2020, Praha: Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. (Inside material.)

⁹⁷ HANZLOVÁ, ref. 11

⁹⁸ HANZLOVÁ, ref. 11

For comparison, we can mention the opinion on Russia from the research carried out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic in 2020.⁹⁹ This research shows that on certain issues the opinion on Russia is clear to the Czech public, for example, only 22% of respondents support Russia's involvement in the completion of the Dukovany nuclear power plant. On other issues, opinions are inconsistent and contradictory; 63% of respondents would continue trade with Russia regardless of its political action, while 54% disagree with the lifting of sanctions against Russia.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, the relationship with Russia is not the subject of regularly repeated research and, for this reason, it is not possible to determine the trend.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an interesting development of the relationship with China, which has not been good in the Czech Republic for a long time and China is one of the least popular countries.¹⁰¹ The global pandemic with its first occurrence in China only supported this trend and the Czech Republic, together with Germany, France and Great Britain, is one of the countries with a strong negative attitude in the public opinion towards China (only about 15% of respondents view China positively).¹⁰²

Persisting demographic trends

As of 31 December 2020, 10,701 million people lived in the Czech Republic, which means that during 2020 the total population of the Republic increased by less than 8000. This is an unprecedentedly low number, the lowest since 2013, when the population of the Czech Republic even decreased in absolute numbers.¹⁰³ There is no doubt that the fundamental cause of such a sharp year-on-year decline in the rate of increase is the global COVID-19 pandemic, which caused both higher mortality of the population, but also significantly reduced the possibilities of migration to the Czech Republic during the whole of 2020. Migration is the only reason why the absolute population of the Czech Republic has been growing for the seventh consecutive year (albeit minimally in 2020), as the mortality of the local population is also slightly higher than its natality for several years.¹⁰⁴ The total fertility, i.e. the average number of children per woman, currently reaches the level of 1.71 children per woman, which is more than the average of 1994-2011 (1.50 children per woman), but it is still far below the limit of natural reproduction of the population (2.10 children per woman), which the Czech Republic last achieved as part of the former Czechoslovakia in the early 1980s.¹⁰⁵ According to current projections, the trend of moderate population growth due to immigration will continue until the end of the 2020s,

⁹⁹ VALÁŠEK, Lukáš, KUDRNA, Ondřej. Interní průzkum ministerstva: Češi nechtějí, aby nový blok Dukovan stavěli Rusové, 26. 2. 2021, Aktuálně.cz. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2TRNY1l>

¹⁰⁰ HANZLOVÁ, ref. 11

¹⁰¹ HANZLOVÁ, Radka. Sympatie české veřejnosti k některým zemím - listopad 2019, 13. 12. 2019, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění. Available from: <https://bit.ly/355tHHL>

¹⁰² TURCSÁNYI, Richard Q., ŠIMALČÍK, Matej, KIRONSKÁ, Kristína, SEDLÁKOVÁ, Renáta et al. European public opinion on China in the age of COVID-19, 2020, Palacký University Olomouc, Central European Institute of Asian Studies. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2T377wR>

¹⁰³ Český statistický úřad. Obyvatelstvo. Přírůstek/úbytek počtu obyvatel, 30. 4. 2021, Český statistický úřad. Available from: https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/obyvatelstvo_lide

¹⁰⁴ The difference in the number of live births (natality) and the number of deaths (mortality) is about 1500 - 2000 per year. See Czech Statistical Office. Pohyb obyvatelstva - 1. - 3. čtvrtletí 2020, 14. 12. 2020, Český statistický úřad. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3v264ur>

¹⁰⁵ Český statistický úřad. Aktuální populační vývoj v kostce, 29. 1. 2021, Český statistický úřad. Available from: <https://1url.cz/6z7WX>

when it should reach its maximum level of 10.78 million, but then immigration to the Czech Republic will stop “managing to compensate” for the declining birth rate.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, as a result of increasing life expectancy combined with lower birth rates, the Czech population has been growing older in average since the 1980s and its age structure has fundamentally changed.¹⁰⁷ The higher proportion of older people in the population is reflected in the lower proportion of other age groups, especially those of working age, whose number is already decreasing at a rate of around 18,000 per year.¹⁰⁸ Increasing numbers of older people and simultaneous decline in the workforce are already exerting a higher financial and staffing burden on social, pension and health systems.

Polarization and Radicalization of Society

While in recent years, the response of the 2015-2016 migration crisis,¹⁰⁹ which accelerated and deepened the polarization of Czech society to a large extent, the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-political consequences played a catalytic role in the social radicalization and polarization during 2020. Already during the “first wave” of the disease that hit the Czech Republic in the spring, the coronavirus became not only a health, but also a social, economic, political and, last but not least, a security problem. During the year, the level of dissatisfaction of the Czech population with the management of the crisis by the political elites increased continuously - while in May the current government measures against the spread of the coronavirus were considered ineffective by roughly 10% of respondents, in December 37% of respondents criticized the government measures.¹¹⁰ The so-called government confidence index also dropped significantly, its value at the end of December 2020 was at 41 points out of 100 - it is half of the value compared to spring 2020 and at the same time the lowest value measured during the period of monitoring the index.¹¹¹ The weakening of the confidence of a critical part of the population in the political leadership of the state and state authorities necessarily entails negative consequences for the stability of the state and the confidence of its inhabitants in the functioning and effectiveness of the existing liberal democratic regime. Moreover, at a time of pandemic, the authority of the state and credibility of its leaders were weakened by an unprecedented wave of disinformation, hoaxes, conspiracy theories and hate speech spreading especially in the online social networking environment.¹¹² These then transfer into a completely irresponsible, irrational and ultimately risky behaviour of a part of the population, questioning the seriousness of the situation and threats resulting from the pandemic, or en bloc ignoring, rejecting and targeted violation of restrictive

¹⁰⁶ Český statistický úřad. Projekce obyvatelstva České republiky 2018-2100, 28. 11. 2018, Český statistický úřad. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3g4eihw>

¹⁰⁷ FIALA, Tomáš, LANGHAMROVÁ, Jitka. Changes in the Age Structure and the Ageing of the Population of Czechia after the Year 1989, Demografie, r. 62, č. 4, 2020. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3cpPuyi>

¹⁰⁸ NĚMEČKOVÁ, Michaela. Lidí v produktivním věku bude ubývat, 27. 2. 2019, Statistika a my, Magazín Českého statistického úřadu. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3gfU0QN>

¹⁰⁹ BIS. Výroční zpráva Bezpečnostní informační služby za rok 2018, 2019, Bezpečnostní informační služba. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3w2hSOI>

¹¹⁰ ČERVENKA, Jan. Hodnocení reakce státu a jeho institucí na epidemii COVID-19 - Naše společnost - speciál - prosinec 2020, 14. 1. 2021, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3csnzO1>

¹¹¹ ENP. Reprezentativní průzkum monitorující postoje a nálady ve společnosti s ohledem na probíhající pandemii nového typu koronaviru. Šetření probíhá v pěti evropských zemích, 2020, European National Panels, National Pandemic Plan. Available from: <https://bit.ly/34VPyBw>

¹¹² MV ČR. Dezinformace na sociálních sítích a EU - poučení z krize?, 2020, Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2RDAdmg>

measures. In society, the opinion and value gap is being opened between different segments and groups of society (for simplification, e.g., between the groups of the so-called “mask wearers” and so-called “anti-vaxers”), threatening to further deepen social instability, erode the authority of state bodies and political leadership of the country, or, ultimately, escalate to the level of domestic conflict across the whole society.

Implications for the Armed Forces

By engaging the components of the Czech Armed Forces in crisis management operations against the spread of the coronavirus, the army gained unique and irreplaceable experience from deployment in a crisis situation of a non-combat nature, moreover, executed on its own territory and for the benefit of its population. The army played a crucial role in the import and distribution of medical supplies throughout the territory of the Czech Republic, built several field hospitals, participated in the development, implementation and operation of the so-called Smart Quarantine system and, in cooperation with the Police of the Czech Republic, carried out checks on border and intrastate closures, together with a general control of compliance with security measures. Hundreds of soldiers were deployed to help directly at hospitals, hospices and other social facilities. Unlike the political leaders, the work of the security authorities and Integrated Rescue System units was viewed highly positively by the inhabitants of the Czech Republic, thanks to which the level of trust of the society in the army reached its absolute maximum of 75-80% during 2020.¹¹³ Nevertheless, such a high level of credibility obliges the Czech Armed Forces to take a more proactive approach in the fight against the deepening of social instability and the phenomena that cause it, especially the mass dissemination of disinformation and conspiracies, which some foreign actors (especially Russia or China) do not hesitate to use to achieve their political goals.¹¹⁴ A great help and one of the most active players in this field should be seen in the expert working group of the National Security Council for hybrid threats, existing since 2017,¹¹⁵ currently led by the military advisor to the Prime Minister, Lieutenant Colonel Petr Matouš.

As a paradox, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the ability of the Czech Armed Forces to recruit new soldiers in a positive way. The goal of recruiting a total of 1740 new soldiers in 2020 was completed by the army already in October; it is assumed that the increased interest in serving in the Czech army (and other security units) will continue also in 2021. Thanks to the pandemic, the army also tested the feasibility and effectiveness of a shortened (from 3 to 2 months), but more intensive course of basic training of CAF recruits.¹¹⁶ In the environment affected by the pandemic, the Ministry of Defence appeared to be a responsible, reliable and, above all, stable employer. Multilateral and intensive involvement of members of the Czech Armed Forces in various phases and processes of crisis management in connection with the management of the pandemic throughout 2020 increased the prestige of the Czech Armed Forces in the eyes of the

¹¹³ ČERVENKA, ref. 26

¹¹⁴ MV ČR, ref. 28

¹¹⁵ VLÁDA ČR. Bezpečnostní rada státu schválila ustavení odborné pracovní skupiny pro hybridní hrozby, 8. 3. 2017, Government of the Czech Republic. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3iqxJTe>

¹¹⁶ DVOŘÁKOVÁ, Magdalena. Armáda otevře kurz základní přípravy pro nové vojáky, proběhne za mimořádných opatření, 19. 3. 2020, Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3uXbdnD>

public and contributed to the attractiveness of the service in the army.¹¹⁷ Unfortunately, in terms of long-term trends, the declining number of people of working age already today (except in the current crisis situation) complicates the recruitment of new soldiers, especially if military service is not attractive and motivating enough to compete with other sectors in the labour market. Realistic fulfilment and especially long-term maintenance of one of the objectives of the Concept of Building of the Czech Army by 2030, namely reaching the number of 30,000 professional soldiers,¹¹⁸ remains uncertain.

However, the quantitative decline of soldiers, both male and female, can be dampened and at least partially compensated by appropriate use of several other (mega)trends. Firstly, the increased emphasis on the qualitative and technological attributes of the armed forces, namely the increased robotization, automation and informatization of the army - challenges that the Czech Armed Forces will have to face regardless of demographic development in the country. Another way is to properly use the migrating labour force, especially from culturally and linguistically related countries, such as Ukraine and Slovakia, or, following the example of Germany,¹¹⁹ to facilitate entry for nationals of all EU countries to the Czech Armed Forces. However, if the Czech Armed Forces want to move in this direction, it needs to actively support the relevant legislative changes as part of the Ministry of Defence, since the current legislation allows the service of foreign nationals in the Czech Armed Forces only subject to the exceptional consent of the President of the Czech Republic.¹²⁰ The secondary problem is that although the current migration rate does not pose any direct threat to the Czech Republic, a significant part of the Czech population, subjectively and entirely emotionally, perceives migration as a threat. Therefore, a part of the public could view the service of foreign nationals in the Czech Armed Forces unfavourably or consider it a threat to national security.

Currently, the pro-Western geopolitical orientation of the Czech Republic is not directly threatened, but it is questioned by part of the population. The level of support for the main security-policy integration groupings of the West - the European Union and North Atlantic Alliance - ranges from 50% to 60%. Since 2018, however, the number of people dissatisfied with the Czech Republic's membership of NATO and people who do not trust the Alliance as a whole has been growing slightly. Due to the lack of regular opinion polls mapping in more detail the relationship of the Czech population to other world powers, such as China or Russia, which most often stylize themselves as challenging the West, it is impossible to determine exactly what part of the population of the Czech Republic questions or directly contradicts the geopolitical orientation of its country. In this regard, the army of the Czech Republic, like all other state institutions and bodies, faces the challenge of intensifying its communication with the inhabitants of the Czech Republic about the essence of the country's membership in the EU and NATO, the forms of participation in their activities and the benefits that result for the Czech Republic (and its inhabitants directly).

¹¹⁷ PONCAROVÁ, Jana. Armáda hlásí plno. Do základního kurzu až příští rok, 12. 10. 2020, Armádní noviny. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3pxoBO6>

¹¹⁸ MO ČR. Koncepce výstavby Armády České republiky 2030, 30. 10. 2019, Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2SijZPF>

¹¹⁹ BBC. German army "could recruit EU citizens", 27. 12. 2018, BBC News. Available from: <https://bbc.in/3pyQRA4>

¹²⁰ SAGIT. Zákon o rozsahu branné povinnosti a o vojenských správních úřadech (branný zákon), 14. 2. 2003, Sagit, Právní a ekonomické nakladatelství. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3w4YUXJ>

ENVIRONMENTAL SECTOR

The strategic shock of the coronavirus pandemic necessarily manifested itself also in the environmental security sector. It is still determined by the mega-trend of climate change, which cannot be completely reversed even in the long term, and thus it is only possible to mitigate its effects and at the same time gradually adapt to unavoidable changes. Thus, even temporary reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as a result of restrictions on social and economic activities called for by the anti-pandemic measures could not reverse the ongoing trends associated with climate change, which, moreover, have been steadily accelerating in recent decades, partly as a result of the feedback from the climate system. Not only climate change, but also demographic growth, coupled with unsustainable forms of economic production or management of land and other essential resources, continue to threaten ecosystems, and the survival of populations and the SDGs depend directly on their services.

Scientific Agenda

There are a number of indicators to measure the progressive manifestations of the mega-trend of climate change. At the same time, scientific knowledge enables for increasingly accurate projections of future developments at global and regional levels.¹²¹

Concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere

Much attention has been paid to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, significant and rapid reductions of which are essential to achieving the Paris Agreement's goals of keeping warming below 2 °C by the end of the century, while approaching 1.5 °C as close as possible. While in the first half of 2020 carbon dioxide emissions were reduced by an average of 8.8% due to drastic measures to limit the spread of the new coronavirus, they rose again in the second half of the year. Overall, emissions fell by 6.4% in the course of the year, which means an estimated reduction in global warming of only 0.01 °C by 2050.¹²² Meeting the objectives of the Paris Agreement would require emission reductions of 6-8% each year over the next 30 years.¹²³ Massive fires in Australia, California, the Amazon, as well as in the Arctic during 2020 and the melting of permafrost also contributed to the increase in emissions in recent years. New scientific knowledge brings bad news about greenhouse gas emissions caused by the melting of permafrost, where previous models only worked with its gradual melting and did not include sudden melting, which can double the projection of emissions from this source, implying a more difficult path towards achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement.¹²⁴

¹²¹ See, e.g., FUTURE EARTH, THE EARTH LEAGUE and WCR. *10 New Insights in Climate Science* [online]. 2021 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/RKLa7>

¹²² UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME. *Emissions Gap Report 2020: Executive Summary* [online]. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/SKLa7>

¹²³ TOLLEFSON, Jeff. COVID curbed carbon emissions in 2020 - but not by much. *Nature* [online]. 15. 1. 2021 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://go.nature.com/3crfcSW>

FUTURE EARTH, THE EARTH LEAGUE and WCR, ref. 55

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Global average temperature

It makes sense to assess temperature anomalies only in the longer term due to the significant year-on-year variability, most strongly influenced by the El Niño and La Niña phenomena.¹²⁵ Despite the conditions of the latter phenomenon with a cooling effect, the Earth's surface warmed by 1.02 °C on average in 2020 compared to the average of 1951-1980, which corresponds to the long-term trend of increasing the average global temperature at an ever faster pace. Scientific knowledge on climate sensitivity, the relationship between the increase in greenhouse gas emissions and the global average temperature, has improved in recent years. It is reflected in the new calculations of the likely temperature range at the end of the century between 2.3 and 4.5 °C compared to the original IPCC projection in the range of 1.5 to 4.5 °C. This finding could have a major impact on national ambitions in terms of progressive emission reductions in order to avoid worst-case scenarios and their impacts.¹²⁶

Table 1: Development of global temperature and carbon dioxide concentration over the last five years

Indicator/year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Global average temperature ¹²⁷	1.02 ¹²⁸	0.92	0.85	0.98	1.02
Concentration of CO ₂ ¹²⁹ (in 12/2020)	405.14	407.49	409.75	412.44	414.99

Ocean level, temperature and pH

Ocean levels continue to rise due to the thermal expansion of water and the melting of glaciers and ice sheets. According to the World Meteorological Organization, the rate of the warming of the oceans has been accelerating, particularly over the last two decades, which can be attributed to the melting of the ice sheets. Since 1993, ocean levels increased on average by 3.3 ± 0.3 mm per year.¹³⁰ However, in the five-year period 2014-2019, this increase was already 5 mm per year.¹³¹ The average global ocean level in 2020 was comparable to the previous year, with a small drop in the level in the second half of the year attributable to the effects of La Niña in the Pacific Ocean.¹³² The trend of increasing ocean temperatures on the surface and in depth as well as the increasing acidification due to carbon dioxide absorption is also continuing, jeopardising ocean-bound ecosystems and affecting a wide range of ecosystem services (e.g., fishing or tourism).

¹²⁵ NOAA. *What are El Nino and La Nina?* [online]. No date. [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/gKzM>

¹²⁶ FUTURE EARTH, THE EARTH LEAGUE and WCR, ref. 55, pp. 7-8.

¹²⁷ NASA. *Global Temperature* [online]. 2021 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/global-temperature/>

¹²⁸ The average global temperature in 2016 was significantly influenced by the occurrence of the meteorological phenomenon called El Niño. WMO. *WMO Provisional Statement on the State of the Global Climate in 2019* [online]. 2019 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/czo7S>

¹²⁹ NOAA. *Data* [online]. 2021 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/lzBCq>.

¹³⁰ WMO. *State of the Global Climate 2020: Provisional Report* [online]. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/EKL3L>

¹³¹ WMO. *Global Climate in 2015-2019: Climate change accelerates* [online]. 2019 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/rKL3M>

¹³² WMO. ref. 64

Size of sea ice and ice sheets

The melting of sea ice and ice sheets continues in Antarctica and Greenland, albeit with some decline in 2020 due to storms with large amounts of snowfall in the latter case.¹³³ The melting of sea ice is most closely observed in the case of the Arctic, where global warming is advancing two to three times faster than the global average.¹³⁴ While scientists still talked about the Arctic sea ice reduction by 12.85% per decade compared to the average over the period of 1981-2010, its rate is already 13.1% per decade by 2020.¹³⁵ Siberia recorded record temperatures and the associated melting in 2020, as manifested, for example, in the late freezing of the Laptev Sea and the East Siberian Sea, with a negative impact on Arctic plankton, whose capacity to absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere is thus decreasing, further increasing atmospheric concentrations of this gas, warming and further acceleration of melting.¹³⁶

Political Agenda

Political agreement is essential to both mitigate future environmental risks and avert worst-case scenarios. Due to the pandemic, the regular United Nations Climate Change Conference, scheduled to take place in Glasgow in November 2020 to increase countries' ambition to meet the commitments of the Paris Agreement, was postponed to the following year. In 2020, other countries joined the commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by the middle of the century (127 countries did so by December). However, these commitments still need to be translated into concrete policies and measures - the so-called Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), for which, on the contrary, a certain stagnation can be observed, while the existing ones are not fulfilled in their entirety by national policies. Current contributions aim at warming the Earth by at least 3°C by the end of the century.¹³⁷ Recent scientific evidence (see above) suggests that even the assumptions underlying the Paris Agreement need to be reconsidered and ambitions increased in order to achieve the objectives of the Agreement. In September, at the UN General Assembly, China's President Xi Jinping announced a surprising intention to make the country, producing 28% of all emissions, carbon-neutral by 2060, but only after reaching the peak in 2030, followed by a gradual decline.¹³⁸ A certain optimism is brought by the US's return to the Paris Agreement with the coming of the new administration of Joe Biden, which, however, still has to be translated into concrete commitments.

In the Czech Republic, in December 2020, the Coal Commission adopted a recommendation to cease coal mining and combustion by 2038, initially also considering the dates 2033 and 2043. This decision has been criticized by the so-called Shadow Coal Commission, which considers 2035 as the deadline compatible with the objective of

¹³³ WMO, ref. 64

¹³⁴ NASA. *A Warming Arctic Turns Topsy Turvy*, [online]. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/xKL3r>

¹³⁵ NASA. *Arctic Sea Ice Minimum* [online]. 2021 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/gKL31>

¹³⁶ WATTS, Jonathan. Alarm as Arctic sea ice not yet freezing at latest date on record. *The Guardian* [online]. 22. 10. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/KKL3J>

¹³⁷ UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME, ref. 56

¹³⁸ MYERS, Steven Lee. China's Pledge to Be Carbon Neutral by 2060: What It Means. *New York Times* [online]. 23. 09. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/MKL3Q>

carbon neutrality by the middle of the century.¹³⁹ The government, which has no consensus on this decision, has not yet approved the recommendation. The intention to sign a tender for a new nuclear unit in Dukovany by the end of the year could not be fulfilled. Its prolonged postponement is accompanied by concerns about the negative impact on the country's climate commitments.¹⁴⁰ At the beginning of the year, the Government also adopted the "National Energy and Climate Plan of the Czech Republic", which each EU member state is obliged to adopt in order to coordinate the Union's emission targets. Among other things, it sets the contribution of the Czech Republic to the so-called European energy and climate objectives of the EU in the field of reducing emissions, increasing the share of renewable energy sources and increasing energy efficiency. The document foresees an increase in the share of renewables in the total energy consumption to 22% by 2030 (10% less than the target set at the EU level), which environmental organizations criticize as insufficient in view of both the Paris Agreement targets and the commitment to climate neutrality by 2050.¹⁴¹

Climate change reveals the challenges, faced by the international community with an increasing degree of nationalism, in combating global threats. Measures taken at the level of other units are therefore essential. In 2020, other countries (e.g., Japan, South Korea, New Zealand) and cities (Barcelona, San Diego, Tokyo and others) declared climate emergency, acknowledging the seriousness of the problem and the inadequacy of existing policies. The number of climate lawsuits against states for their insufficient activity is also increasing. To this end, the Czech Climate Litigation (Klimatická žaloba) initiative was established in the Czech Republic, where in December 2020 the Government received a pre-litigation notice.¹⁴²

Risks of Environmental Nature

From the security point of view, sudden as well as creeping disasters pose the greatest challenge, with increasing frequency and intensity as a trend.¹⁴³ The number of climate- and weather-related disasters has increased by around 35% since the 1990s.¹⁴⁴ This includes, in particular, heavy precipitation in the form of rain or snow, heat and frost waves, drought and storms, including tropical storms. They result in a number of negative phenomena, such as floods, the impact of which can be exacerbated by previous extreme droughts in the area due to the water-repellent effect of the soil, landslides, large fires and a number of impacts on human life and health, livelihoods, food and water availability. These disasters also cause enormous economic damage or population displacement.

2020 brought a number of major natural disasters in virtually all regions of the world. At the same time, some countries were affected by the double crisis of the natural disaster

¹³⁹ AČ, Alexander. *Stanovisko stínové uhelné komise k odstoupení od uhlí* [online]. Stínová uhelná komise, 23. 06. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/dKL3i>

¹⁴⁰ ČTK. Havlíček: Na Dukovany máme ve hře čtyři varianty. Včetně těch, jak si ohlídat Rusy. *Aktuálně.cz* 09. 12. 2020 <https://1url.cz/zKzzy>

¹⁴¹ EURACTIV.cz and ČTK. *Vláda přijala energeticko-klimatický plán, podíl zelené energie poroste* [online]. 13. 01. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/HKzKJ>

¹⁴² Klimatická žaloba ČR [online]. 2021 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://www.klimazaloba.cz/>

¹⁴³ IFRC. *World Disasters Report 2020: Come Heat or High Water - Tackling the Humanitarian Impacts of the Climate Crisis Together*. Executive Summary [online]. Geneva, 2021 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/1KL3w>

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

and the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁴⁵ In 2020, large floods affected Africa (Horn of Africa, Sahel, Sudan, Kenya, Yemen) and Asia (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Burma and Vietnam), but also countries in other regions, including Brazil and Indonesia. By contrast, extreme droughts hit South America, parts of South Africa and Europe. The Czech Republic recorded the largest drought in the last 500 years in the first half of the year.¹⁴⁶ In the future, the country can expect to experience similar developments as in 2020, i.e., an increase in episodes in both extreme positions - the occurrence of extreme drought, especially in the first half of the growing season, due to lower precipitation and greater evaporation, but also torrential floods due to the gradual increase in the number of days with high precipitation above 10 mm in the second half of the growing season, although the average annual rainfall is projected to remain unchanged.¹⁴⁷ The bark beetle calamity has also gained unprecedented significance in recent years as a result of the loss of moisture in forests, which have not been able to build up the necessary immunity for pest control. In addition, the number of tropical cyclones with 103 named storms in 2020 was above average, including a record number of 12 storms (including six hurricanes) that reached the US mainland. The increase in hurricane activity can be attributed to a number of factors, including La Niña. Central America, Vietnam, the Philippines and the South Pacific were also significantly affected.¹⁴⁸ The trend of rising storms of high intensity continues. In 2020, storms were a particular problem, the intensity of which increased rapidly over a very short period of time, which reduced the ability of the affected countries to adequately prepare for the arrival of a devastating disaster.¹⁴⁹

Following decades of decline, the number of people affected by hunger has been steadily increasing since 2014 as a result of conflicts, economic downturn and factors related to climate variability and extreme weather. According to recent estimates, nearly 690 million people, or almost 9% of the world's population, are hungry and 750 million face severe food shortages. In the case of food shortages of moderate to high severity, up to 2 billion people suffer from lack of safe and nutritionally adequate food. The coronavirus

¹⁴⁵ FAO. *The dual threat of extreme weather and the COVID-19 crisis: Anticipating the impacts on food availability* [online]. 13. 07. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb0206en/CB0206EN.pdf>

¹⁴⁶ According to the latest scientific knowledge, on the basis of the analysis of stable isotopes of carbon and oxygen in the growth rings of oaks, especially in the Czech Republic, Europe has experienced unprecedented summer droughts since 2015 for the last 2110 years. BÜNTGEN, U., URBAN, O., KRUSIC, P.J. et al. Recent European drought extremes beyond Common Era background variability. *Nature Geoscience*, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41561-021-00698-0>

¹⁴⁷ ČTK. Nejhorší za 500 let. V Česku trpí suchem 80 procent území, deště pomohly jen povrchové vrstvě. *iRozhlas* [online]. 04. 05. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/pKL3o>
ŘEPKOVÁ, Andrea. Současné teplo mělo podle historických modelů Česko zažít až po roce 2040, tvrdí klimatolog. Extrémů prý přibude. *Lidovky.cz* [online]. 28. 09. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/xKL3N>

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE. *Report Name: The Czech Republic Experiencing the Worst Drought in 500 Years* [online]. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/hKL3H>

¹⁴⁸ NOAA. *Tropical Cyclones - Annual 2020* [online]. 2021 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/tropical-cyclones/202013>

WMO, ref. 64

¹⁴⁹ RUPPERT, James H. and WING, Allison. The 2020 Atlantic hurricane season was a record-breaker, and it's raising more concerns about climate change. *The Conversation* [online]. 01. 12. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/4KL32>

pandemic will further exacerbate this trend, expecting to increase the number of malnourished people by 83 to 132 million, depending on the economic downturn.¹⁵⁰ The Food and Agriculture Organization has identified a number of factors associated with the pandemic with an adverse impact on food security, including a reduction in household purchasing power, disruption of supply chains and labour mobility or a reduction in governments' capacities to protect their populations due to overburdening. Food security may continue to deteriorate due to the impact of the successive effects of the pandemic on political instability and conflict dynamics, which would necessarily also be reflected in the deterioration in the availability of basic resources.¹⁵¹

The factors mentioned above lead to the migration of people from the affected areas, which is usually caused by a combination of several vulnerabilities of a socio-economic nature with a possible impact of environmental factors. At the same time, a significant proportion of the people thus displaced move to places where they are again exposed to a high risk of natural disasters. It is estimated that disasters caused by extreme weather events caused displacement of around 23 million people per year on average during the 2010-2019 decade, while most of the movement was limited by the concerned country's borders. During the first half of 2020 alone, almost ten million people were displaced as a result of hydrometeorological hazards and disasters, in particular in the south and south-east Asian regions and in the Horn of Africa. In the second half of the year, large-scale floods in the Sahel and devastating hurricanes in the Atlantic and south-east Asia forced the displacement of other people. In east Africa, the massive drought and devastation of the land by a flock of locusts also set the population in motion.¹⁵²

In order to meet the SDGs, the availability of (high quality) fresh water is crucial, with regard to the fact that water use has increased at an average rate of 1% per year since the 1980s, while over two billion people live in countries with high water scarcity to meet their basic needs and up to four billion are affected by a more severe water scarcity at least for one month per year. Climate change fundamentally affects the hydrological cycle, increasing extremes in precipitation intensity and distribution, leading to an increase in floods and severe drought episodes, while increasing year-on-year rainfall variability with a negative impact on agriculture. The transborder nature of water supply, where the decision to manage the water resources of one country affects the water supply of other countries, is a potential source of conflict. There is a high risk in this respect in the MENA region, in the relationship between India and Pakistan, and tensions also arose between Egypt and Ethiopia in 2020, due to the construction of a dam in the latter country.¹⁵³ The melting of glaciers as natural freshwater reservoirs further exacerbates its scarcity in certain regions (in particular, the Himalayas or the Andes and other mountain areas).¹⁵⁴

The risk of a military conflict continues to exist in the Arctic, where, as climate change accelerates, new trade routes and areas rich in natural resources are increasingly opening

¹⁵⁰ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. *In Brief to The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets* [online]. Rome, 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9699en>

¹⁵¹ FAO and WFP. *FAO-WFP early warning analysis of acute food insecurity hotspots* [online]. Rome, 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/AKL3E>

¹⁵² WMO, ref. 64

¹⁵³ MERSIE, Ayenat. *The Ethiopian-Egyptian Water War Has Begun. Foreign Policy* [online]. 22. 09. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/WKL3B>

¹⁵⁴ WMO. *Count every drop: every drop counts* [online]. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/OKL3G>

up. The militarization of the region is continuing, in particular by the Russian Federation, which is reopening military facilities from the Soviet era and projecting its military power in the region primarily through its Northern Fleet. After 30 years, US military ships, with the support of a UK ship, were sent to the Barents Sea to promote free navigation.¹⁵⁵ In this area, Sweden, still reticent, is calling for the strengthening of its own military capabilities in the north of the country in the newly issued strategy for the Arctic region.¹⁵⁶ Finland, Norway and Sweden then signed a military cooperation agreement, the conclusion of which is largely attributed to the increasing tensions in the Arctic region.¹⁵⁷

Opportunities Associated with Climate Change

Environmental challenges are not necessarily perceived in the zero-sum approach, but provide a number of opportunities for cooperation and transformation that can support the SDGs in the long term. According to the UN, the country has so far missed the opportunity to combine measures to stimulate the economy affected by the coronavirus pandemic in order to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy at the expense of production predominantly based on fossil fuels.¹⁵⁸

Implications for the Armed Forces

The above findings clearly demonstrate the acceleration of climate change trends, implying a security environment that is less stable and more prone to extreme manifestations as well as the increasing intensity and frequency thereof. Competition for scarce resources - especially water - in combination with other conflict lines carries the risk of an outbreak or escalation of armed conflict. Extreme drought or sudden natural disasters will lead to internal displacement within the affected countries or regions. In this respect, the potential role of the armed forces can be seen, in particular, in their deployment in crisis management for the purposes of ending the conflict or overseeing post-conflict stabilization in order to prevent large-scale migration of conflict-affected populations. These operations may also require the deployment of the Czech Armed Forces as part of the so-called burden-sharing. The growing risk of natural disasters, especially floods in central Europe, will probably require more frequent and extensive involvement of the armed forces in disaster management and elimination of their consequences in the Czech Republic and abroad. A particular risk can be seen in the possible need for simultaneous deployment of the armed forces as a result of the concurrence of more crises.

The armed forces are under increasing pressure to reduce their environmental footprint, also in the light of the commitments made in the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal.¹⁵⁹ However, they also perceive this challenge as an opportunity to increase operational efficiency (in the field of logistics, reducing risks to supply convoys, etc.) and possibly improve the reputation of the military operations among local residents. Climate

¹⁵⁵ LARTER, David B. The US Navy returns to an increasingly militarized Arctic. *Defense News* [online]. 12. 05. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/oKL3I>

¹⁵⁶ HOLM, Arne O. Now the Swedes Also Fear Increased Militarization of the Arctic. *High North News* [online]. 02. 10. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/nKL3F>

¹⁵⁷ KHORRAMI, Nima. Finland, Norway, Sweden and the trilateral military cooperation agreement. *High North News* [online]. 12. 11. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/vKL3R>

¹⁵⁸ UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME, ref. 56, pp. 11-13

¹⁵⁹ See, e.g., EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE. *Climate Change and Defence Roadmap* [online]. 2020 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/dKL33>

change will transform the operational environment in which members of the armed forces will operate. EU's "Climate Change and Defence Roadmap" of November 2020 responds to this, proposing, inter alia, the gradual integration of environmental and climate change factors into Common Security and Defence Policy missions (e.g., by developing an operational concept or standard operating procedures). It also draws attention to the resulting requirements for the development of capabilities and armament in conditions that will require equipment suitable for extreme weather conditions or more energy-efficient technology. During training and deployment in operations, soldiers are exposed to the risk of thermal stress and its negative effects, such as heat stroke and, ultimately, death.¹⁶⁰ According to valid conceptual documents, CAF must be "ready to perform tasks without geographical limitations".¹⁶¹ Therefore, the Czech Republic (or the Czech Armed Forces) should actively participate in raising situational awareness in the field of environmental threats and analysing their military implications.

¹⁶⁰ See, e.g., HASEMYER, David. Military fights a deadly enemy: Heat. *NBC News* [online]. 23. 07. 2019 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/PKL3V>

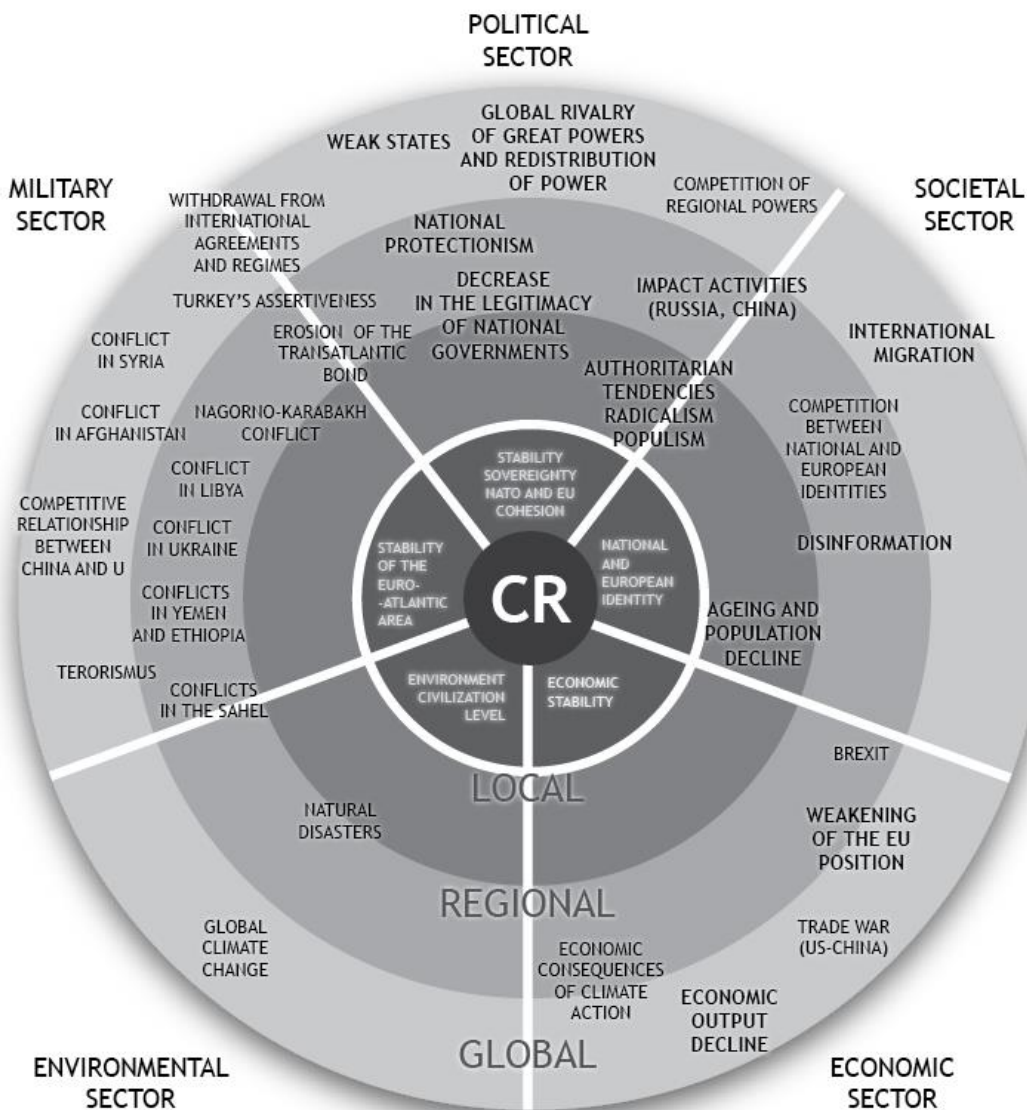
¹⁶¹ MO ČR. *Dlouhodobý výhled pro obranu 2035* [online]. 2019 [cit. 2021-03-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/nzmhe>

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ARMED FORCES - COVID-19

In terms of the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic, it can be concluded that in the military sector this impact was not at a comparable level to some other sectors (mainly economic, political and social). The pandemic and the measures associated with it have not significantly affected the conflicts already underway, nor those that escalated after the global expansion of COVID-19. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw implications related to the armed forces and their tasks in relation to other sectors. From the economic point of view, certain reduction in the resources allocated to the armed forces can also be observed. Health care, ensuring its operation and robust strengthening in the event of a continuing pandemic crisis or its recurrence are becoming a political priority. Defence spending will thus face greater competition in the state budget, and neither political nor social consensus in its favour are likely to be comparable to the economic boom period preceding 2020. Some planned acquisition processes can thus be reduced or even directly postponed.

Anti-pandemic measures also meant a significant reduction in training activities, which negatively affected the planned training of units and personnel. On the other hand, the situation called for the participation of members of the armed forces in supporting the health system and ensuring the established measures. While this support activity is not one of the basic roles of the armed forces and is to a certain extent a burden in fulfilling standard tasks and achieving or maintaining the main capabilities aimed at securing state defence, it is an activity that significantly contributes to the positive image of the army in society. Similarly as in the past, the participation of the armed forces in dealing with an acute crisis in the case of large floods or removing their consequences has become one of the most positively assessed activities, thus, the deployment of military personnel in order to help the overloaded medical facilities in the Czech Republic is currently highly appreciated. Thus, although the military forces were forced to partially limit their own activities, they compensated for this by successful activities falling within the societal sector and showcased the significant role and potential that they can contribute with to ensuring the functionality of the state and society beyond their own agenda. However, this positive aspect raises the question of whether, in the future, political and social demand will not, on the basis of this experience, require the armed forces to strengthen their capabilities in this area, even at the expense of those which are to be their priority from the military point of view. In terms of capacities and limited resource base (and possible reduction of allocated funds from the state budget), it is unlikely that the armed forces would be able to implement these, largely contradictory, requirements or ambitions, to the extent expected by the public.

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AUTHORS

Mgr. Richard Stojar, Ph.D.

Absolvent Filozofické fakulty Masarykovy univerzity v Brně. Od roku 2002 působí na Univerzitě obrany v Brně, v současnosti na Centru bezpečnostních a vojenskostrategických studií. Zabývá se zejména problematikou bezpečnostních hrozeb a rizik, ozbrojenými konflikty a vývojem bezpečnostního prostředí, zejména v oblasti jihovýchodní Evropy.

Mgr. Vendula Divišová, Ph.D.

V letech 2009-2012 absolvovala dvouoborový bakalářský obor Politologie a Bezpečnostní a strategická studia na Fakultě sociálních studií Masarykovy univerzity v Brně, v letech 2012-2015 magisterský obor Bezpečnostní a strategická studia a v roce 2020 dokončila doktorské studium v oboru Politologie na tomtéž pracovišti. Od roku 2018 pracuje jako akademická pracovnice na Centru bezpečnostních a vojenskostrategických studií.

Mgr. Dominika Kosárová, Ph.D., M.A.

V letech 2010 až 2015 vystudovala mezinárodní vztahy na Fakultě politických věd a mezinárodních vztahů Univerzity Mateja Bela v Banské Bystrici. Současně v letech 2014 až 2015 absolvovala frankofonní magisterský program v oboru geopolitika, který realizovala Fakulta politických věd a mezinárodních vztahů ve spolupráci s Universitě de Reims Champagne-Ardenne. Na Katedře bezpečnostních studií FPVaMV pokračovala i v doktorském studiu a svou disertační práci úspěšně obhájila v roce 2018. Od roku 2018 působí jako akademický pracovník na Centru bezpečnostních a vojenskostrategických studií.

PhDr. Libor Frank, Ph.D.

V letech 1993-1999 absolvoval Fakultu sociálních studií Masarykovy univerzity v Brně (obor politologie); v roce 2006 zde také úspěšně dokončil postgraduální studium. Od roku 1999 vysokoškolský učitel katedry sociálních věd Fakulty velitelské a štábní Vojenské akademie v Brně. Od roku 2000 působil na Ústavu strategických studií a následnických institucích. Od roku 2014 působí na CBVSS UO, aktuálně na pozici vedoucího Oddělení bezpečnostních a obranných studií. Přednáší na Univerzitě obrany a CEVRO Institutu.

Ing. Antonín Novotný, Ph.D. (plk. v záloze)

V roce 1985 ukončil Vysokou vojenskou školu pozemního vojska ve Vyškově a poté do roku 1988 vykonával velitelské funkce. V období 1988-1991 absolvoval postgraduální studium obor velitelstvo-štábní, specializace zpravodajská, a následně v letech 1991-2008 působil v různých funkcích u Vojenského zpravodajství. V letech 2008-2010 pracoval jako obranný poradce ve velitelství NATO při stálé delegaci České republiky při NATO a Stálém zastoupení České republiky při Evropské unii v Bruselu zodpovědný za horizontální bezpečnostní a strategické otázky. Od roku 2011 pracuje jako akademický pracovník Centra bezpečnostních a vojenskostrategických studií UO.

Ing. Jan Břeň, Ph.D.

V letech 2011-2016 absolvoval bakalářský a navazující magisterský obor Bezpečnostní management na Univerzitě obrany v Brně. V letech 2016-2019 absolvoval doktorský

studijní program Ochrana vojsk a obyvatelstva na Univerzitě obrany v Brně. Od roku 2019 pracuje jako akademický pracovník na Centru bezpečnostních a vojenskostrategických studií.

Mgr. Adam Potočňák

V letech 2011-2015 absolvent bakalářského dvouoborového programu Politologie a Bezpečnostní a strategická studia (BSS) na Fakultě sociálních studií Masarykovy univerzity v Brně. V letech 2015-2017 absolvent magisterského studia programu BSS, nyní student doktorského studijního programu tamtéž. V roce 2015 působil jako výzkumný pracovník a mladší projektový manažer v Centru pro severoatlantické a evropské vztahy (CENAA), kde se podílel na výzkumu ozbrojených konfliktů a politického extremismu a radikalismu v bezpečnostních složkách. Od prosince 2019 pracuje jako akademický pracovník CBVSS.

Mgr. Jan Hanzelka

V letech 2010-2013 absolvoval dvouoborový bakalářský obor Politologie a Bezpečnostní a strategická studia na Fakultě sociálních studií Masarykovy univerzity v Brně, v letech 2013-2016 pak magisterský obor Bezpečnostní a strategická studia, kde dodnes působí jako student doktorského studia v oboru Politologie. Od roku 2020 pracuje jako akademický pracovník na Centru bezpečnostních a vojenskostrategických studií na Univerzitě obrany v Brně.

AUTHORS

Richard Stojar, PhD.

He graduated in History from the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University in Brno. Since 2002, he has been employed at the University of Defence (former Military Academy) in Brno, initially as a scientific researcher, currently holding the position of a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies. His main fields of interest are armed conflicts, security environment and security policy in the states of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

Vendula Divišová, PhD.

She completed her bachelor's degree in Political Science and Security and Strategic Studies and in 2015 her master's degree in Security and Strategic Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Masaryk University in Brno. In 2014, she spent one semester at the Institute of Political Studies in Bordeaux. In 2020, she completed the doctoral programme in Political Science at Masaryk University. Since April 2018, she works as a researcher at the Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies at the University of Defence.

Dominika Kosárová, PhD.

Graduated as MA in International Relations at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. Simultaneously, she graduated from the Master's programme in Geopolitics in French language, realized by the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations in cooperation with Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne. Afterwards, she continued in doctoral studies at the Department of Security Studies in Banská Bystrica, and in 2018, she successfully

graduated as PhD. Since September 2018, she has been working as a research fellow at the Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies, University of Defence in Brno. She is chairing a research task group within a NATO STO SAS Panel activity on the future strategic environment assessment.

Libor Frank, PhD.

He studied Political Science at the Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University in Brno and graduated as M.A. in 1999 and as Ph.D. in 2006. In 1999, he became a lecturer at the Department of Social Sciences at the Command and Staff Faculty of the Military Academy in Brno (now University of Defence). In 2000, he started working as a lecturer at the newly established Institute for Strategic Studies. Since 2001, he was the head of the Political and Social Studies Group at the Institute for Strategic Studies, University of Defence. Since March 2014, he has held the position of the head of the Department of Security and Defence Studies of the Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies. Currently, he is a lecturer at the University of Defence and the CEVRO Institute.

Antonín Novotný, PhD. (Col. ret.)

In 1985 he graduated from the Military College of Ground Forces in Vyškov and served at commands positions to 1988. From 1988 till 1991 he attended postgraduate studies, branch of study Military Intelligence. In 1991-2008 he served at various positions within Military Intelligence. From 2008 till 2010 he worked as Defence Adviser at Permanent Delegation of the Czech Republic to NATO HQ and Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic to EU in Brussels responsible for horizontal security and strategic issues. Since November 2011 he has been working as a research fellow at the Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies.

Jan Břeň, PhD.

He graduated from the bachelor and follow-up master's programme Security Management at the University of Defence (2011-2016). He completed his doctoral study programme Protection of Population at the University of Defence (2016-2019). Since 2019 he has been working as a research fellow at the Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies.

Adam Potočňák, M.A.

In 2017 he graduated from the master's programme in Security and Strategic Studies at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. Currently studying his Ph.D. in Political Science with special focus on security and strategy at the same institution. In 2015 he worked as a junior project manager in the Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs in Bratislava, Slovakia, with research focus on armed conflicts and political extremism and radicalism within state-sponsored security services. Since December 2019 he has been working as a research fellow at the CBVSS.

Jan Hanzelka, M.A.

In 2013, he completed his bachelor's degree in Political Science and Security and Strategic Studies, and in 2016, master's degree in Security and Strategic Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Masaryk University in Brno, currently studying his PhD in Political Science at the same institution. Since September 2020, he has been working at the Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies at the University of Defence.

SUMMARY

This analytical study evaluated the development of the security environment of the Czech Republic in 2020. The study is based primarily on materials prepared by the Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies, as well as on analytical materials prepared in countries which share the same or similar security environment and security interests. The study presents the results of a comparative analysis of available open sources and contains an evaluation of selected state and trans-national actors. For the purpose of the study, a sectoral analysis based on the principles of the Copenhagen School was used, describing the political, social, environmental, military and economic sectors. The study analyses the period of the past year 2020 and tries to capture the main events and trends in specific sectors with impact on the security environment and to identify the implications for defence policy and the armed forces. The results of the sectoral analysis are shown by the figure at the end of the study. Relevant threats identified in 2020 are aligned with the corresponding sectors, i.e., according to the nature of the protected value or the interest of the Czech Republic, which are endangered (e.g., the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area or the environment). At the same time, the threats are placed in homocentric circles reflecting the levels of their instrumentality: local - regional - global. Some of the challenges are manifested across multiple sectors and levels.

Security Environment. Sectoral Analysis and Implications for the Czech Armed Forces
2020

Authors:

[Richard Stojar](#)

[Vendula Divišová](#)

[Dominika Kosárová](#)

[Libor Frank](#)

[Jakub Fučík](#)

[Antonín Novotný](#)

[Jan Břeň](#)

[Adam Potočňák](#)

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