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Multinational Force Ukraine Series

The Czech Republic: From a High-Profile Supporter to a Low-Profile Abstainer?

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While the Czech Republic participated in the Coalition of the Willing format as well as planning for a possible Multinational Force Ukraine (MFU), it is not a topic that has been discussed much domestically, not least because the ongoing electoral campaign before the parliamentary elections in October of this year. The outgoing centre-right government coalition, which gained some international renown in the past as a staunch supporter of Ukraine through early supply of heavy equipment, an early state visit to Kyiv, and orchestrating the well-known ammunition initiative, lost these elections to the populist ANO movement.

The new government is in a process of formation at the time of writing, with many policies and personnel decisions still unclear. However, it seems likely that the new government, formed on the basis of the dominant ANO party and two minor populist right-wing coalition partners, will be considerably less enthusiastic about supporting Ukraine overall and rather unlikely to deploy any military forces on Ukrainian soil specifically.

Political will

While the ANO party presents itself as a cautious supporter of Ukraine, it is likely to give it lower priority and remain responsive to its electorate's views. The government's populist streak includes plans to rekindle Visegrad 4 cooperation —a regional format that brings together Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary— countries critical of Ukraine and open to cooperation with Russia. The draft Programme Statement of the Government makes no mention of Russia or military support for Ukraine, instead promising to "support diplomatic steps leading to ending the War in Ukraine and eliminating the risk of war in Europe."

Regarding public opinion, recent polling on the preferred course of the new government toward support for Ukraine showed that a narrow majority of ANO party voters favored halting the supply of ammunition, equipment, training of troops, and direct financial transfers altogether. An additional 20-40% supported continuing support but at a reduced level. Even more striking were the views of voters of the far-right prospective coalition partner SPD, 80% of whom favored ending these forms of support.

Although Czech President Petr Pavel, who will remain in office until at least 2028, has expressed support for participation in a MFU, his influence will be limited once the new government secures a vote of confidence. His role will be largely informal and unlikely to singlehandedly push through a military mission.

While a complete turnaround of Czech policy towards Ukraine is very unlikely, the incoming government can be expected to balance international reputation with appeasing domestic public opinion. The policy is therefore likely to grow more passive and low-profile. Deploying troops to Ukraine seems like a too high-profile action. Existence of stable ceasefire

or peace agreement would certainly be a minimum required condition for any serious discussion on troop commitments. Additionally, a NATO mandated operation would likely be more acceptable than a coalition of the willing format.

Military capabilities

As is clear from the discussion above, it is unlikely that the military capability, however limited in many respects, will be the bottleneck for participation in any possible mission in Ukraine under the incoming government. As any naval mission is clearly out of the question, given the landlocked character of the Czech Republic, a contribution would come in the form of land or air assets.

The core of land forces consists of two bridges and a paratrooper regiment. The key problem is personnel, as the armed forces are missing seven thousand soldiers even when compared to the targets predating war in Ukraine. The Czech Armed Forces are also already commited in NATO missions in Slovakia and the Baltic totaling around 400 troops, and the compatibility of further deployments with readiness for Article V deployment is in question.

Based on these limitations, should there be any deployment of land forces at all, it would likely be small in scale (at or below battalion level), limited to supporting or humanitarian roles (such as training or demining) and would take place at a considerable distance from the frontlines.

While the Czech Republic is in the process of acquiring 24 F-35s, these aircraft will not arrive before the 2030s. The current fleet of 14 JAS-39 Gripens could provide only a limited deployment capacity of 4-5 aircraft without rotation, comparable to repeated deployments to air-policing missions over the Baltic states. A larger deployment is highly unlikely due to ongoing domestic airspace protection duties, and any such commitment would also preclude further participation in Baltic and Icelandic air policing operations.

Although the incoming government currently appears unlikely to support the deployment of troops within the MFU framework, the potential for policy shifts and cabinet reshuffling should not be discarded. All other parties—except the two coalition members—ruled out cooperation with the ANO party both before and after the elections, yet their position may change over time. This could either pave the way for a new party coalition to emerge during the term or reduce the dominant ANO party's vulnerability to pressure from the strongly Ukraine-sceptic SPD party. In turn, that could create space for a policy shift in support of Ukraine.

At present, however, any Czech participation in a Coalition of the Willing operation in Ukraine appears unlikely. The electorate of the new coalition is divided: while a majority supports NATO membership for Ukraine, many also favor reduced Czech support to Ukraine. This dynamic makes it improbably that the government becomes an outright spoiler, but equally improbably that it will commit to a high-profile, unpopular or risky mission—something even the outgoing, Ukraine-supporting government avoided publicly.

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In the *Multinational Force Ukraine series* of policy briefs leading experts from allied countries assess key factors for participation in the Multinational Force Ukraine. This includes the political willingness of allies to deploy troops—on the ground, in the air, or at sea—to establish a military presence in or around Ukraine. They also examine the conditions for such deployments to occur (before, during, or after peace negotiations), the roles these forces would be expected to perform (defensive or offensive), the red lines imposed by national governments, and the specific capabilities each country could realistically contribute.

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