

SCIENCE AND  
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**NATO Parliamentary Assembly**

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VISIT TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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SECRETARIAT REPORT

**27 JUNE 2007**

International Secretariat

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- \* This Secretariat Report is presented for information only and does not necessarily represent the official view of the Assembly.

*Assembly documents are available on its website, <http://www.nato-pa.int>*

## ***I. INTRODUCTION***

1. Four senior members of the Assembly's Science and Technology Committee (STC) and the Defence and Security Committee (DSC) travelled to the Czech Republic on 27 June 2007 for a fact-finding mission and to discuss the views of the Czech government and parliamentary representatives on the plan to install elements of the US strategic missile defence system ("The Third Site") on Czech soil.

2. The delegation of NATO parliamentarians, led by **Michael Mates** (United Kingdom), Chairman of the STC, met with the Deputy Prime Minister, **Alexandr Vondra**, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Karel Schwarzenberg**, and the members of the Defence Committees of both Chambers of the parliament. The delegation also visited one of the two planned sites of a radar station and met with **Jan Neoral**, Mayor of the nearby village of Trokavec.

3. Considering the acuteness of the recent missile defence debate, the Assembly's Standing Committee recommended during its meeting in Madeira in May 2007 that the Officers of the STC and the DSC organise a visit to Poland and the Czech Republic. Mr Mates was also tasked to prepare a special report on the issue.

## ***II. THE RADAR SITE***

4. The NATO PA delegation visited the Brdy military district in the Western part of the country, where the radar facility would be stationed. **Libor Benda**, Deputy Head of the Local Authority of the Military Area and **Jan Pejsek** from the Press and Information Centre of the Ministry of Defence, introduced the military district and provided details on the geography of the area. The district covers 33,000 hectares and is one of the five military districts of this kind in the Czech Republic. This wooded area is mainly used for artillery training and shooting exercises. The Czech artillery brigade is also stationed in Brdy.

5. Mr Benda and Mr Pejsek explained that the US military experts have chosen Brdy due to hydrological and geographical reasons as well as accessibility of the area and, possibly, its proximity to Prague. The exact site of the radar is yet to be determined. At the moment, several sites are being considered, and the NATO PA delegation was able to visit one of them. (One week after the visit, the Czech government decided that the intended radar site would be the elevation point 718, close to the village of Mišov which is about 4 kilometres from Trokavec). The Brdy district is not fenced and usually accessible to civilians, except during artillery exercises. The radar site (2x2 km), however, would be fenced and guarded. Up to 200 US personnel would be working in the radar facility once/if it is installed.

6. The NATO parliamentarians were asking what causes the opposition of the local population against the installation of the radar. Mr Pejsek said there are a number of reasons. The local population is concerned about possible negative impacts of the radar on their health and the environment. The government is trying to explain that these fears are baseless. The area already hosts a meteorological radar and it has caused neither health problems nor interference on TV broadcasting. The US radar site will also be located at least several kilometres from any village. Mr Pejsek also pointed out that, in Communist times, a Soviet military base was located nearby and the local population still retains a negative attitude toward foreign military presence in their vicinity.

7. The NATO PA delegation also met with one of the most prominent opponents of the US radar plan, Mr Neoral, Mayor of Trokavec village. Under the leadership of Mr Neoral, the village

almost unanimously protested against the plan. The mayor asserted that health risks posed by the radar are not imagined: the radar will emit microwaves that would heat up people's skin, he said. Moreover, the installation of the radar will make Trokavec and other neighbouring villages and towns a potential military target. Mr Neoral said the local population is determined to struggle against the government's plan using all available means. He emphasised, however, that their actions are not anti-American in nature.

### **III. MEETING WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE SENATE**

8. **Senator Josef Zoser** (Independent), Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security, said that he was a member of the Czech parliamentary delegation that visited a US military radar station on the Marshall Islands, where it would be dismantled and brought to the Czech Republic if the deal is concluded. The Czech legislators were absolutely convinced that the radar had no negative health or environmental impact on the people of the Marshall Islands. He felt that the Czech population was somewhat misinformed and it will take time to change the negative attitude. He hoped that by the end of the year (when the US-Czech negotiations are expected to be concluded), the number of opponents would drop to less than 50%.

9. **Senator Vlastimil Sehnal** (Civic Democratic Party) said that the "Russian factor" remains very important: the Czech people are very concerned about aggressive rhetoric used by President Putin and Russia's military leaders, when they promised to target Czech and Polish sites with their nuclear-tipped missiles. However, in Mr. Sehnal's opinion, this rhetoric had an opposite effect and may convince Czechs about the necessity of the American anti-missile shield.

10. **Senator Rostislav Slavotinek** (Christian Democratic Party) emphasised that including "The Third Site" into a comprehensive NATO missile defence architecture would be a preferable and more acceptable solution to the Czech people.

### **IV. MEETING WITH ALEXANDR VONDRA, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER**

11. Mr Vondra (Civic Democratic Party) pointed out that no decision has been made yet and the official negotiations have not yet started, but at this juncture the Czech government believes there are many reasons to say 'yes' to the American proposal, because it would strengthen the transatlantic solidarity and security. It is important to keep the United States engaged in Europe. While this is a bilateral plan, Mr Vondra agreed that adding a NATO flag to it would be helpful to dissolve the existing opposition and suspicion. He believed some kind of *modus vivendi* could be found to reconcile the American proposal and NATO missile defence plans. As for the command and control (C2) question, Mr Vondra believed the "double-hatted" approach could be a solution.

12. Mr Vondra emphasised that Russia's opposition to the plan cannot be a reason to abandon the idea, as the case of the NATO enlargement has shown. Besides, the recent offer by President Putin to use the Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan for the US's missile defence system demonstrates a certain U-turn in Russia's policy. With this offer, the Kremlin, in fact, acknowledged that the proposed missile defence shield makes sense. However, Mr Vondra stressed the need to communicate with the Russian officials and keep them involved through NATO-Russia Council and other forums.

## **V. MEETING WITH KAREL SCHWARZENBERG, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

13. Mr Schwarzenberg (nominated by the Green Party) stressed that public opinion is important, but the most pressing problem is to convince the parliament to support the proposal when voting. To this end, the "NATO-isation" of the plan would be very helpful. The Third Site was launched as a bilateral project mainly for the sake of pace and efficiency, but in the long-run NATO should be brought on board as well. The Minister expressed his hope that at the end of the day the Czech parliamentarians will act responsibly and will endorse the proposal. There is no 'plan B', he said, in case the parliament rejects it.

14. The Minister believed that the project will reinforce transatlantic relations and will be instrumental in dealing with potential asymmetric threats coming from the Middle East. It will also strengthen the position of the democratic world in its efforts to persuade Iran to abandon its uranium enrichment programme.

## **VI. MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE, CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES**

15. **Michael Hrbata**, Vice-Chairman of the Committee, said that his party (Civic Democratic Party) supports negotiations on the US proposal and expects the parliament to pass all necessary legislation. His party is also convinced that this issue should be dealt with within the parliament and not be subject to a national referendum. Besides, there is no law on referendums in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, the parliament has a mandate of the Czech people to decide on defence and security matters. Regardless, the vote is not going to be an easy one since both the ruling coalition and the opposition have 100 seats each in the lower chamber.

16. **Antonin Seda** (Social Democratic Party) said that the parliamentary opposition could support the US proposal on two key pre-conditions: 1) that the proposed system is integrated into an overall NATO framework; and 2) that the national referendum is called on this issue. According to him, 80% of Czechs want a referendum, and that makes the demand a legitimate one. The opposition believes that one needs more information on potential threats, on the reliability of the proposed system as well as on the possibility to have a NATO label on it. Therefore, the left-wing opposition is likely to propose to postpone the final decision on the Third Site. It would also be reasonable to wait for the decisions of the next NATO Summit to be held in Bucharest, Romania.

17. **Vaclav Klučka**, also representing the Social Democratic Party, underlined that he is not against the Third Site *per se*, as long as it was a part of a NATO system. He said that the public opinion is largely against because people still remember the presence of the Soviet army on their soil. The referendum is necessary in order to avoid the situation when once again somebody would decide for the Czech people on such an important issue. **Sven Mikser** (Estonia) replied that, at least from the Estonian perspective, there is a huge difference between the US and Soviet troops being deployed in a country. Mr Klučka responded that the Czech and Estonian experience was rather different.

## **VII. MEETING WITH IVAN DVORAK, DIRECTOR OF THE DEFENCE POLICY AND STRATEGY DIVISION, MINISTRY OF DEFENCE**

18. **Ivan Dvorak**, Director of the Defence policy and Strategy division at the Ministry of Defence, emphasised that transparency is the key principle underlying the actions of the Czech government in trying to promote the idea of the Third Site. With constructive assistance of the US authorities,

the responsible Czech officials seek to provide all information about the radar to the Czech population and the members of parliament as well as to partners in other countries.

19. Mr Dvorak believed a certain breakthrough was achieved during the recent meeting of NATO defence ministers in Brussels. NATO nations agreed to examine possibilities to link the Third Site to the Alliance's missile defence project and to come up with specific suggestions at the Bucharest Summit next spring. The Czech government is generally supporting the 'NATO-isation' of the Third Site, while the Polish side, for example, seems to favour the bilateral approach.

20. Mr Dvorak also addressed the Russian concerns about the Third Site, and stressed that the US radar cannot pose any threat to Russia's security interests since it would be fixed facing the Middle East, and not the Arctic area, where a hypothetical path of a US-bound ballistic missile would lie. He also pointed out that the Gabala radar in Azerbaijan could be a complementary asset, but could not replace the X-band radar in the Czech Republic.

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