

NATO and the Czech & Slovak Republics. A Comparative Study in Civil-Military Relations.

By Jeffrey Simon. Lanham – Boulder – New York – Toronto – Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004.

(A comparative review of the book published by Jeffrey Simon in 2004 and the real political output as established at the experts' meeting in Prague in November 2007.)

By reading the year of publication of this book (2004), one might – quite legitimately – raise the question as to civil-military relations around the tenth anniversary of the division of former Czechoslovakia. Where is the present, current value (in 2007/2008) of a book published three – four years ago? The answer is the following: civil-military relations form only a lesser part of the book. A better title would have been *Security Sector Reform and Preparation for NATO Membership*. From the present 2007/2008 point of view, even an ironic title could have been imagined there. It might have used even an ironic proverbial title, like *Promises are Like Pie-Crust, Made to be Broken*.

The book by Jeffrey Simon deals with development in the Czech and Slovak parts of the still common state (before 1993) as if they were semi-independent entities and continues with separate narratives in both new and independent republics. This special initial dichotomy has been

explained and documented in Part I (*Czechoslovakia: From Unity to Federation and Divorce*). Anyway, even in the following three parts of the book (*Czech Republic: Advancing toward Democracy – Part II; Slovakia: Overcoming Instability and Special Problems – Part III; Coming Full Circle: Civil-Military Relations – Part IV*) the author incessantly returns to the time after 1990. The focus is not only on security and foreign policy, but also on domestic development, which was determining the official positions of Czechs and Slovaks, be it in the still common state or in the time between 1993 and the *NATO Summit* held in Prague in 2002.

The value of this excellent book written by one of the foremost experts in Central Eastern European NATO countries at that time (besides a very limited number of famous names like, e.g. Ron Asmus), came to my mind during the workshop: *NATO Five Years after the Prague Summit: Words, Deeds and Challenges*, which was held in Prague on November 22, 2007 (organized by *International Institute of Political Science, Masaryk University, Jagello 2000, Czech Euroatlantic Council* and the *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung* and supported by the Office of Government and by the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

The comparison between the book of Jeffrey Simon and this workshop is very symptomatic, if we select some common aspects (defense reform, defense budget, foreign and security policy, position towards the Western Balkans). Jeffrey Simon was mainly analyzing and comparing the development in both republics (still in the framework of Czechoslovakia) since 1989 up to the *Prague NATO Summit* in October 2002 focusing on the real output in security and defense policy. In between, a lot of promises, obligations and 'gentlemen agreements' were made by Czech and Slovak representatives toward NATO. These preparatory steps were described, called by name and evaluated in the book.

But, five years have elapsed since the first NATO summit held in the post-communist area (Czech Republic) has taken place. The workshop held in November 2007 tried to outline whether intentions and goals outlined in Prague in 2002 were fulfilled or not, and which main obstacles and challenges NATO faced.

Let us compare the relevant findings in the book of Jeffrey Simon (2004) and the opinions that were heard at the conference:

If Jeffrey Simon believes that the Czech Republic was "advancing to democracy" in the given period before the *Prague Summit* and the Slovak Republic was more or less "overcoming instability and special problems" (as

elaborated in the chapters II (pp. 23 – 142) and III (pp. 145 – 248)), then the conclusions of the workshop in Prague did not differ very much from the original finding of Jeffrey Simon. Five years after the *Prague Summit*, the Czech Republic seemed to be in a better position as the Slovak Republic if one takes into consideration the development of foreign and security policy stability. In spite of change of left-wing vs. right-wing (Civic Democrats vs. Social Democrats) governments in the Czech Republic, this country experienced much less foreign ad security policy swings than Slovakia. This can be easily demonstrated in the course of development following the *Prague Summit*, when Slovakia reversed its foreign and security policy, especially after the parliamentary elections in 2006. Some changes in the Slovak policy relating to *Trans-Atlanticism* and to the fight against terrorism (Iraq, Afghanistan), as well as in the issue of anti-missile defense and/or attitudes concerning the problems of Cuba, Belarus or Kosovo have indicated a modified position of the Slovak Republic. From this point of view, Simon's evaluation of the departure positions of both successor states of the former Czechoslovakia were quite accurate.

On the contrary, the very security sector reform (Jeffrey Simon preferred the term "defense reform"), is one of the few relatively positive developments reflected five years after the *Prague Summit*. The armed forces of both

republics became professionalized in between and respective numbers of soldiers have become stabilized. Seeing it in this light, the invitation to NATO (2002), the admission to NATO (2004) and the experience in NATO (2004 – 2007) have heavily contributed to the security sector ('defense') reform as it appears today (2007).

Another conclusion can be, unfortunately (according to the results of the Prague workshop in November 2007), drawn from the development curve of the defense budget in both countries. Here, the Czech Republic has arrived at worse figures than Slovakia, with Slovakia's budget being about 1.7% of the GDP in 2007). Compared to the defense budgets of both republics in 2002/2003 (J. Simon, pp. 169 – 170), keeping the level of 1.7% in 1999 and in 2000, but increasing to the level of 1.9% in 2002 for Slovakia (just in the year of the Prague NATO Summit) with the perspective not to go below 2.0%, afterwards and increasing the budget by 0.1% of the GDP each year, a disappointment was the result. This obligation, however, has not been kept by Slovakia, where the percentage allocated to the defense budget is going to further decline in 2008.

In the Czech Republic, the reality made before the Prague NATO Summit was even better (2.2% of the GDP) in both 2001, and 2002 (Jeffrey Simon, p.57). The worse has been the disappointment. In 2004, the Czechs allocated only 1.9%, in 2006 1.73% and in 2006 1.56% for defense from

the Czech GDP (Prague workshop in November 2007). By the way, for 2008, it is only 1.43% the Czech have allocated for defense from the GDP, which is less than in the Slovak Republic.

In the sphere of foreign and security policy with emphasis on consensus among NATO members, the Czechs, on the contrary, appear to be more stable and consequent. This, once more, corresponds to the original evaluation resulting from the book (pp. 79 – 85 for the Czech Republic and pp. 203 – 204 for Slovakia). In between (in 2007 – Prague workshop), both countries have become quite divergent as to the possible unilateral independence declaration by Kosovo in 2008.

Conclusion: Jeffrey Simon's book about foreign, security and defense policy in the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the first decade after the division of Czechoslovakia published in 2004, could have been easily presented at the Prague workshop of 2007. It would have served if not just a vision, then certainly as a reliable indicator of the future development in both countries in the sphere of foreign, security and (less) defense policies. Even the current incompatibility vis-à-vis the anti-missile defense between both republics could have been approximately deduced from the book by Jeffrey Simon.

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