

## THE FIRST YEARS OF CHANGE (1998-2002) CONSIDERATIONS OF THE MILITARY REFORMS AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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*Abstract:* Active interest in the military reforms had been observed since the end of 1980's, when the whole society underwent radical conversions. This may have been related to the more and more open image of the Hungarian National Defence Forces, the orders given by the subsequent governments, the public awareness of the legal regulations and so on, just to mention the most important ones. In this article, we would like to draw the readers' attention to some of the factors we hold for principal in the history of the military reform: the rapid social and economic changes, the changes in the public attention, and their effects on the developments of the military reform between 1998 and 2002.

*Keywords:* Armed Forces, military reforms, national military strategy.

The reforms of the Armed Forces in Hungary have never been so vigilantly paid heed by civilian society as it is in our days. Not even the Kosovo conflict made the public so concerned with this issue than the 2004 change to a voluntary scheme of recruitment and its consequences. For a certain time, the transformation of the military fell into the focus of public attention again.

The resolution of the Parliament about the principles of security and defence politics (94/1998, 29<sup>th</sup> December) accepted by 5-party parliamentary consensus was a major sign of the coming changes. Although Hungary was not a member of NATO in 1998 yet, but it seemed that it became clearer and clearer for the senior leadership of the military and the political government of the country that the Hungarian National Defence Forces had to be developed at faster pace, because serious and responsible tasks would be expected from the full-fledged membership. Naturally the direction and pace of development could not be absolutely foreseen before the full-fledged membership which was supported by a referendum, but the requirements of the structural reform of the Armed Forces were

not finalised yet, as it was outlined only short time after the receipt of NATO membership.

The membership requirements and the regular consultations made it clear for the senior leadership of the military and the government that if we wanted to meet the challenges we faced, the development of the Forces must be financially prioritised. Also, more attention had to be paid to the execution of the reform of the Forces, which had meant that a permanent process of more than ten years had to be accelerated. The relevance and priority of the tasks the Hungarian Defence Forces as a member of NATO had to face were clearly demonstrated in 1999 when NATO intervened in Serbia. Also Hungary took part in this armed intervention in accordance with our membership. Our participation had an accelerating effect on the reform of the Forces as well. It seemed obvious that this part of Southeast Europe could be classed as an instable one, but it was hardly foreseeable that the instability would end up in such a large-scale conflict. These events made the issue of the reform of the Forces' structure, its acceleration and the increase of necessary financial expenditures a

priority.

The principles and the methods of the development of the Armed Forces had to be elaborated those days. The security and defence policy principles of the Republic of Hungary were accepted which indicated new ways and therefore it modified the objectives of the previous developments. The hierarchy of strategy and doctrines has also been changed. The national security strategy became dominant compared to the national military strategy. It became also clear which military doctrines had to be considered as a guideline in the joint service, service and arms of the service, and how perspectives had to be deduced from the strategies. The national security and the national military strategy were not elaborated yet. Its reason was that our membership in NATO made the strategy of the Alliance so dominant that our one had to be adapted to it. The Alliance's Strategic Concept adopted in Washington in April 1999 had to be adapted and implemented also in the National Strategy.

The changes in the status and the policy of the Hungarian Defence Forces originating from the NATO membership have shaped the Forces since then and they will also affect them in the future as well. The assessment and evaluation of risks threatening the Republic of Hungary, for example, underwent a significant transformation after joining the NATO. Before the membership the presence of threats and risks had been evaluated from a particular Hungarian point of view, while after joining NATO a task-oriented judgement became necessary.

The assessment of forces, means, and optional procedures necessary to cope with threats went through changes, too. From that point of time, we could face external threat and risk factors as part of an alliance, while we had been on our own before that. The necessity of a full-fledged self-defence lost of its importance; quick reaction, specialisation and cooperation became the new buzzwords of strategic development.

The members of the Corps, too, had to learn how to meet the new requirements. They became obliged to participate in the defence of a NATO member as well as peace support

operations, or to serve at bases offering infrastructure and background services for NATO air or land campaigns launched (partially) from Hungarian territory.

The new political situation produced new requirements. New abilities had to be created and new organisations to be set up in accordance with them. The review of the strategy ordered by the government in the summer of 1999 which covering the whole of national defence had the objective of forming such new organisations. The review aimed to identify the necessary size and structure of the Forces as well as the essential equipment to be financed by the frame of budget and personnel determined by the government, so it focused on the considerations of the Treasury rather than preparing an analysis of threats and risks the Forces may have to counter or the tasks that should be carried out. Therefore the review results show how the initiators and contributors dropped the previously used professional process of the strategic planning based on the assessment of the mission and objectives, operations and processes of the Army.

The definition of the tasks in a usual manner has to be done by comparing the military needs and the financial possibilities, and the allocation of at least the minimal level of the army to avert the highest possible threat, or multiple threats. It is only in this way possible that a rational and realistic military budget, which is in line with both the estimated financial capabilities of the country and the assessed funds necessary to provide for the establishment and maintenance of the Forces capable of countering threats, can be determined.

First the military budget had been determined for a longer period in the scope of the strategic review, afterwards the Forces set up and maintained from that budget were to be surveyed and analysed. Certainly the reverse order of the steps of the classic flow of the planning process resulted in a situation when the Forces to be established seemed to be independent of the possible effects and sizes of threats they were to oppose.

This special approach seemed absolutely acceptable for the decision takers in Hungary

since they had a higher self-confidence due to the NATO membership. At the same time, our allies are also aware of the capability of our economy – they knew they should not have too excessive demands or set too hard conditions for us to meet. The capability of the economy and the obligations taken had to be in balance. Even so, the costs of establishing that balance and coordinating the efforts meant a heavy burden on the Hungarian budget.

The organisation, weaponry and other equipment, readiness, implementation, principles and practice of leadership of the Hungarian Defence Forces must be established so that they are able to respond effectively to a possible armed conflict evolving from the instable situation on our borders *in addition to* carrying out allied tasks and peace support operations. This objective is clearly the primary one in the current restructuring process of Forces, because these abilities provide the basis of other tasks assigned to them.

These requirements seemed to harmonise well also with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, as the provision of the capabilities necessary for peace supporting operations and the preparation for reacting to instable situations were a major target of the current reforms. In accordance with these requirements, a task-oriented force structure with sufficient capabilities to meet such challenges was taken for the best choice to be established. This Force was thought to have limited size but should have been provided with up-to-date arms and equipment so that it would be capable of meeting the requirements.

Views on political and security policy changed completely in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century worldwide and especially in Europe. These views have had extreme influence on the opinions and plans about the necessary reengineering of the Forces as well as their realisations. The most typical of the Hungarian military reform was the fact that the proclamation of the Republic of Hungary in 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1989 started a new period in the interpretation of security. The next milestone in the developments was 12<sup>th</sup> March 1999 the date when the country became a full-fledged member of NATO. As a result of this, the

national security (including military security) was not to be organized independently any longer, but within the framework of the political and military alliance. Joining NATO meant a quality leap in development and application of capabilities of the Hungarian Defence Forces that has been defining the course of the progress since then.

The Hungarian Defence Forces have done a lot for “freedom and order” since 1999. The Hungarian results in foreign policy, in the NATO cooperation and the successful management of the Kosovo conflict proved that Hungary and the Hungarian military can take an active role in helping the democratic developments in the world.

Let us list up a couple of the important steps and some of the major achievements:

- 1989 (23 October): the proclamation of the Republic.
- 1989 (30 November): governmental decision to transform the Hungarian People’s Army into a modern international defence force.
- 1990 (15 March): the new official name for the Hungarian military is “Magyar Honvédség” (Hungarian National Defence Force).
- 1996: Hungary officially expresses the wish to join NATO.
- 1997: following the official invitation of Hungary to NATO (Madrid, 8 July), a Referendum (16 November) gives national support to the government to continue the process.
- 1999 (12 March): Hungary joins NATO.
- 1999: The Kosovo conflict and war (24 March – 10 June).
- 2000: the first NATO-compatible budget of the Ministry of Defence sets military expenditure to 1.51 per cent of the GDP.

The NATO membership had a number of positive effects on the Hungarian National Defence Forces. Joining NATO, our international and regional role strengthened and new opportunities opened for the HNDF to prove themselves in learning and exercising their profession. Their successes may form the new basis of a new identity and self-image of the Officer Corps as well as of the whole NHDF.

The rationalisation and restructuring processes of the decade slimmed the military down radically. While in 1993 the total number of personnel reached 100.000, by 2000 it was halved (48.000). The structural integration served mostly as pretence for governmental cost-saving decisions. Even so, the military budget for 2000 was 189.4 billion HUF. The expenses, partly due to the bad conditions of tangible equipment as well as the military premises (garrisons and other sites), were high. The centralisation of logistics, the outsourcing of auxiliary activities (cleaning, cleansing, guarding, etc.) did not always have the expected effect of lessening expenses. The conditions of the working environment had to be considerably improved. Beside renovations, also the modernisation of office and information technology had a serious impact on the atmosphere of the workplace. Also the welfare system of provisions, clothing and medical support had to be rethought.

The reform process of the Forces in the examined period shows that it was the political management that took decisions. No wonder, therefore, that more often than not senior military leadership found themselves in the crossfire of financial, political interests and professional perspectives. The low-budget decisions with high-flying political objectives created a discrepancy. The military reform, however, is not a question of short-term governmental tactics – it is truly a strategic issue. Without considering professional arguments and properly targeted investment, the Hungarian National Defence Forces may never meet the high international requirements. It is therefore time to reconsider what kind of a

military would serve the national interests as well as those of the alliance.

The events between 1998 and 2002 show what the main problems are with a centralised system with a power centre outside and above it – the dominance of politics above the military profession did not bring the expected positive results.

The following years have shown a slow change in this respect – seemingly a transition from the era of political dominance towards one with more professional argumentation has begun. We can only hope that legal and financial conditions of military professionalism will soon develop and a new phase in the history of the Hungarian National Defence Forces may start.

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