

THE DEFENCE SECTOR AND ITS EFFECT ON NATIONAL SECURITY DURING THE CZECHOSLOVAK (MUNICH) CRISIS 1938

Aleš BINAR, PhD

University of Defence in Brno

Abstract

The Czechoslovak (Munich) Crisis of 1938 was concluded by an international conference that took place in Munich on 29-30 September 1938. The decision of the participating powers, i.e. France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom, was made without any respect for Czechoslovakia and its representatives. The aim of this paper is to examine the role of the defence sector, i.e. the representatives of the ministry of defence and the Czechoslovak armed forces during the Czechoslovak (Munich) Crisis in the period from mid-March to the beginning of October 1938. There is also a question as to, whether there are similarities between the position then and the present-day position of the army in the decision-making process.

Key words: Czechoslovak (Munich) Crisis, Munich Agreement, 1938, Czechoslovak Army, national security.

Introduction

The agreement in Munich (München), where the international conference took place on 29–30 September 1938, represents a crucial crossroads in the history of Czechoslovakia. By accepting the Munich Agreement, Czechoslovak President, Edvard Beneš, and representatives of his government made a decision that affected the nation not only for the next few years, but for decades thereafter. This so-called Munich Syndrome, then, is infamously blamed by many in Czechoslovak society for the fascist-like orientation of the so-called the Second Czechoslovak Republic (1938–1939) and the acceptance of the Communist coup d'état of 1948.

The study examines the activities and attitudes of representatives of the Czechoslovak Army during the so-called Czechoslovak (Munich) Crisis in 1938. The first milestone in its course was the Anschluss (“Accession”) of Austria to Nazi Germany on 11-13 March 1938; the second was the occupation of the Czech borderland (“Sudetenland”) on 1-10 October 1938. The aim of this article is to describe and to explain the behaviour of the highest representatives of the defence sector with special focus on their reaction to the tasks given them by government. By analysing the key negotiations that took place between army hierarchy and

government and among the highest representatives of army, the study tries to explain why the Czechoslovak Army stood aside from the political decision despite a number of its representatives being determined to undertake a war with Nazi Germany rather than to surrender. Knowing the answer, the second goal is to generalise their attitude using the following questions: Is there any structural similarity to the present-day position of the army in the political system? And if yes, in which respects?

Since the Czechoslovak Crisis represents a key moment in the history of Czechoslovakia, Czech historiography has already paid exceptional attention to the events that paved the way for the moment the agreement was accepted. One of the most distinguished Czech military historians, Pavel Šrámek, devoted his study of 2004 entirely to find out the attitude and involvement of the highest-ranking generals in the decision-making process on the national level (Šrámek, 2004). Focus on the behaviour of Czechoslovak generals is also evident in his earlier book of 1998 (Šrámek, 1998). He concludes that the Czechoslovak Crisis proved the Czechoslovak generals were politically naïve – as a result of relations between army and politicians during the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938).

Karel Straka, who is based in the Institute of Military History in Prague, focused on similar topics in his books of 2007 (Straka, 2007) and 2008 (Straka, 2008), respectively. Among other texts devoted to the Munich Agreement, there is a 1999 book by Bořivoj Čelovský, who also examined the activities of Czechoslovak generals (Čelovský, 1999). Contrary to the above mentioned studies and books, the scope of Jiří Pernes' monography includes the activities of Emanuel Moravec, who did not hold any key position, but who had certain influence due to his journalism (Pernes, 1997).

Because the majority of potential readers of this paper are expected to be from Poland, two selected books in Polish were included; the first is a synthesis about Czechoslovak armed forces (Majewski, 2016), the second is an almanac of studies about the Munich Agreement (Grochalski – Lis, 2009)¹.

Point of view of historiography is not the only one and cannot entirely explain why the representatives of the Czechoslovak Army acted the way they did, i.e. stood aside of political events. Czech political scientist Zdeněk Kříž has another point of view. He analyses the relations between politicians and the armed forces and defines five types of relations. Apart from the form of a government (democracy vs autocracy), it could be said that there are two ideal positions of army in a political sector. In the first type, the army is fully involved in the decision-making process, while in the second one the army is entirely excluded. His analysis of relations between the army and civil sector includes the situation during the Czechoslovak Crisis. He concluded that during the days of the Munich Conference, relations became tense, because army elites tried to persuade the civil politicians to use the army for defence against Germany (Kříž, 2003; Kříž, 2004).

¹ See especially for Polish historiography about the Munich Conference.

The text of this study is divided into three chapters. The first one includes general information about the so-called First Czechoslovak Republic and about the Czechoslovak Army with special focus on relations between the army and politicians. There are also two paragraphs that bring information for comparison between the position of the armed forces in the political system in the First Czechoslovak Republic and in the present-day Czech Republic. The second and third chapter deals with the activities and attitudes of representatives of the Czechoslovak Army during spring and autumn 1938, respectively. The reason the description pertaining to the merit of the study is divided into two chapters is due to the nature of the Czechoslovak Crisis; after mid-September, the course of events underwent such significant changes that the characteristics of both of these sub-periods are distinctly different.

Armed Forces in the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938)

Interwar Czechoslovakia was a multinational state. Out of a population of more than 15 million, the Czechs represented roughly one half of population (7.5 million) and Slovaks about one sixth (over 2 million). The remainder comprised national minorities, i.e. (Sudeten) Germans (over 3 million), Hungarians (0.75 million), Ruthenians (Ukrainians), Jews, and Poles. The officer corps of the Czechoslovak Army, however, did not reflect this ethnic mix; i.e. the vast majority of officers and generals were composed entirely of Czechs. It could be concluded that the higher rank, the higher proportion of Czechs (but not Slovaks). Pertaining to the rank of general, out of 139 of them, 134 (96.4 %) identified themselves as Czechs.

According to Zdeněk Kříž, relations between the army and politicians in interwar Czechoslovakia tend to be that “of separate elites of army and politics”. This means that in the First Czechoslovak Republic, the armed forces were controlled by institutions of democratic state; this is also, however, typical for present day democratic states. Armed forces were built to serve Czechoslovak society and the (democratic) state, respectively. Of course, to inaugurate this idea there were some obstacles but, in general, these problems were not serious. The most dangerous issue, the so-called Gajda-Affaire (see below), was in fact – despite its context – a matter of one man. Because of the efforts of civil politicians, the armed forces of Czechoslovakia were completely under civil control, i.e. under the control of government and parliament, the National Assembly (*Národní shromáždění*) (Kříž, 2003:65-71).

Knowing that it was the army, the so-called Legionaries (*Legionáři*) of the First World War, which had distinctively contributed to establishing an independent Czechoslovakia, civil control of army was not just a matter of course. The way the army became under civil control was a process that took years, but the most decisive events took place in the second half of the 1920s. It all started in 1926 with the Gajda-Affair (*Gajdova aféra*). General Radola Gajda was a war hero of the First World War and the Deputy Chief of General Staff (*Hlavní štáb*). A lot is unknown

and alleged about the background to this affair, but one thing is certain: General Radola Gajda was not only a soldier; he also expressed his political ambitions on a number of occasions. There are rumours that it was President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk who “ordered” his expulsion from the army and politics. Anyway, in 1926, Gajda was accused of espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union, demoted to the rank of private and expelled from the army (Šedivý, 1994: 732-758). At the same time, a new legislation pertaining to the armed forces was inaugurated by parliament. According to the new legal norms, soldiers were not allowed to have suffrage. It meant that not only professional soldiers and officers (*gážisté*), but also conscript soldiers, were not allowed to take part in elections; they were also prohibited from being members of any political party.

The roots of “apolitical” armed forces, however, could be traced back to the beginnings of independent Czechoslovakia. A glance at the ministers of defence gives a picture of civilian superiority. In 1918-1938, there were eleven ministers of defence in total, while only two of them were soldiers; General Otakar Husák in 1920–1921 and General Jan Syrový in 1926 and 1938. Together, they were in office for approximately a year and a half, but what is more important, they were appointed to the Ministry of National Defence (*ministerstvo národní obrany*) only in caretaker governments (*úřednická vláda*)².

Generally, despite the fact that democratic control of the armed forces was enforced selectively (Gajda-Affair) and only partially by force, the result was that during the existence of the First Czechoslovak Republic, the army existed as an “apolitical” object that completely obeyed the authority of the civil government.

As mentioned above, there were nearly one hundred and fifty generals by the beginning of 1938, but nine of them held key positions. The highest one was General Jan Syrový, Inspector General of Armed Forces, but his role was ambivalent. Formally, he was the highest general, but in fact his position was rather symbolic. The Chief of General Staff was General Ludvík Krejčí; he was the decisive figure in the Czechoslovak Army not only because of his position, but also because of his practical capabilities and leadership abilities. His deputy was General Bohuslav Fiala. General Karel Husárek was the head of Executive of Fortification Labours (*ředitelství opeňovacích prací*) and because of this, he found himself in charge of fortification concepts and works that took place in the 1930s, and indirectly for the army as such. The head of the Presidential Office for Military Affairs (*vojenská kancelář prezidenta republiky*), General Silvestr Bláha, also ranks among the highest figures, but during the Czechoslovak Crisis, he remained fully devoted to President

² General Otakar Husák was minister in the First Government of Jan Černý (15 September 1920-26 September 1921), General Jan Syrový in the Second Government of Jan Černý (18 March-12 October 1926) and in his own government (so called Republic Defence Government, 22 September-4 October 1938).

Beneš. Then there were four land commanders; General Sergej Vojtechovský in Prague (a Russian who came to Czechoslovakia together with the Czechoslovak Legions), General Vojtěch Luža in Brno, General Josef Votruba in Bratislava, and General Lev Prchala in Košice (Šrámek, 2004:57-59).

After the proclamation of independent Czechoslovakia, discussions about which country represented a potential threat to the nation took place in the General Staff. After the Nazi coup d'état (*Machtergreifung*) in January 1933, the “arch” enemy of Czechoslovakia became Nazi Germany. From then on, the military budget started to grow rapidly. In the second half of the 1930s, new weapons were deployed and newly introduced tanks were integrated into rapid divisions (*rychlé divize*). But despite the investment in attack weapons, the whole concept of national defence was based on fortifications. That is why the Executive of Fortification Labour was established and fortified lines near the German border were built in 1934-1938; there were approximately 10,000 light and 250 heavy “bunkers”. Their task was to withstand a German strike and gain some time to finish the mobilisation (Šrámek, 2004: 80-88).

In accordance with this aim, the so-called Order of Battle Plan no. VII (*Nástupní plán VII*) was accepted in 1938. According to this plan, the Czechoslovak military representatives expected the German army to advance in two main directions; from the South, against South Moravia, and from the North, against Silesia. This strike would have divided Czech lands from Slovakia. That is why the core of the Czechoslovak Army as well as the fortifications were located in South Moravia and in Silesia (and Northern Bohemia). During August 1938, one change was implemented into the plan (the so-called Variation XIII). General Ludvík Krejčí, author of this plan, calculated on the German Wehrmacht having limited goals, i.e. occupation of the borderland without further advancement into the heart of Czechoslovakia.

During 1938, the numbers in the Czechoslovak Army constantly grew. Due to „partial mobilization” that was launched in May the strength of the army increased from approx. 200,000 to approx. 380,000 men. In September 1938, its strength increased even more rapidly due to further mobilisation; to 500,000 on 17 September to finally more than 1,100,000 by the end of the month. This force was divided into four armies (Generals Vojtechovský, Luža, Votruba, and Prchala), 14 army corps (e.g. General Ingr, see below), and the equivalent of about 40 divisions, including four rapid divisions (i.e. armoured divisions); together the Czechoslovak Army disposed of 2,230 guns, 350 tanks and 1,400 planes (Majewski, 2016: 313-325; Straka, 2007:117-141).

There are several similarities when comparing the situation described above and the present-day position of the armed forces in the political system of the Czech Republic. The first and the crucial one is the primacy of civil government and parliament above the armed forces in respect of formulating the security and military policy of country. This means that the highest representatives of the army fully obey civilian decisions even when there are some disagreements. The control of the armed forces

is divided between the executive, i.e. the president of the republic and government, and the legislature, i.e. parliament and its committee for defence (*branný a bezpečnostní výbor* or newly *výbor pro obranu*), respectively. But it is largely the government that is responsible for the decision-making process pertaining to the armed forces and national security policy (Kříž, 2004: 72-75). This civilian supremacy is also connected with the personal situation. The ministers of defence are solely civilians as well as the members of the parliamentary committee for defence (Kříž, 2004:98-105)³.

Czechoslovak Crisis: March to Mid-September 1938

In the period from March to mid-September 1938, the crisis was initially an internal Czechoslovak crisis. Under the influence of Nazi propaganda, Sudeten Germans started to make national and Nazi claims; according to the agreement between the Fuehrer and Konrad Henlein, the chairman of the Sudeten German Party (*Sudetendeutsche Partei*), the Sudeten German tactic was to extend their claims in such a way that the Czechoslovak government would be forced to refuse them – and provide “evidence” of Czechoslovak oppression of Germans. The Sudeten German Party played a decisive role because it managed to supposedly speak for all Czechoslovak Germans, especially abroad.

Occupation of Austria by German forces on 11–13 March 1938 worsened the military situation of Czechoslovakia. Not just because the manoeuvres of the Wehrmacht near Czechoslovakia’s borders represented a potential threat, but also in the perspective of geopolitics; even a simple glance at a map showed that the western part of Czechoslovakia, the Czech lands (Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia) were almost completely surrounded by Nazi Germany. Although the Czechoslovak government did not commence any military preparations, this was a trigger for the Czechoslovak Army to at least start to press the government.

During the second half of March, two meetings of the Czechoslovak Army representatives took place. The first was between the Czechoslovak military attaché in Bucharest, Major Otakar Buda, and Lt. Colonel Stanisław Zakrzewski from the Polish general staff. Major Buda proposed establishing some kind of Czechoslovak-Polish union as a mutual defence platform against Nazi Germany. Soon after that, General Krejčí met Soviet Ambassador Sergey Sergejevich Alexandrovsky. General Krejčí expressed the idea that the German army would not be able to destroy Czechoslovakia with one swift strike. That would have meant that the action of world powers would result in a European war. The reason why Krejčí used these

³ The only (and partial) exception was the short period of 2013-2014 when the office of the minister of defence was occupied by Vlastimil Píček, former Chief of General Staff and civilian at that time.

words was to discover whether the Soviets were willing to get involved in military engagement (Šrámek, 2004:61-62).

The crucial moment was the alleged piece of information from 20 May 1938. Czechoslovak military intelligence found out that the German Wehrmacht carried out manoeuvres in Saxony near Czechoslovak borders. General Krejčí immediately asked the authorities to call up the reserves and to prepare the Czechoslovak Army to defend the territory. The same day, the government – with Czechoslovak generals in attendance – decided to call up reservists, together about 180,000 men.

There is no evidence that the Czechoslovak government made its decision under direct pressure from the generals, but the context suggests it. Next day, on 21 May, the Minister of Interior, Jan Černý, spoke with Karl Hermann Frank, representative of the Sudeten Germans. The Czechoslovak minister explained that there was a threat of “revolt” of Sudeten Germans. The second, indirect proof is the fact that Czechoslovak generals had demanded the mobilisation at least since 7 May 1938 (Čelovský, 1999:173-174). There is also a lack of evidence of German manoeuvres. Czechoslovak military intelligence claimed to have proof of eight to ten divisions being deployed in Saxony, but international investigation, as well as German archival resources, disproved this information (Čelovský, 1999:175-176; Šrámek, 2004:63-65).

The Czechoslovak generals succeeded in their effort to promote their demands. On the other hand, the mobilisation had international consequences. Czechoslovakia was victorious in its effort to secure its territory, but totally failed in public relations. Around the world, Czechoslovakia was accused of being an aggressor that voluntarily worsened the crisis in international relations by sending its army towards German borders and lost sympathy, especially in the United Kingdom and France. So, the Czechoslovak government blamed the generals and mistrust arose between the government and the army. This had its consequences at the end of September (see below).

Meanwhile, the United Kingdom came with its own initiative to mediate in negotiations between Sudeten Germans and the Czechoslovak government in summer 1938 (the so-called Lord Runciman Mission). During months of negotiations, the Czechoslovak government made a series of concessions resulting in the so-called Fourth plan in early September (because it was preceded by another three plans); in this plan, the government accepted all the Sudeten German demands which, consequently, would mean the establishment of an autonomous Nazi government within Czechoslovakia. The reaction of the Czechoslovak Army was imminent. On 9 September, the General Staff presented its memorandum. Its content was far from original, but the message was clear. The generals refused any concessions and demanded to fight at any cost. The Chief of General Staff, General Krejčí, added his famous sentence, “If to die, so honestly”. The memorandum of the generals was discussed in the Highest Committee for National Defence (*Nejvyšší rada obrany státu*), the advisory body of the Czechoslovak government in matters of national security. Despite the fact that members of the committee agreed and supported the generals’ effort, there was neither any decision, nor any arrangement to be issued. The attitude of Prime Minister Milan Hodža was, however, symptomatic, and he reminded General Krejčí not to intervene in politics due to the fact that he was

a soldier (Šrámek, 1998:67). This meant that the memorandum remained only an empty manifestation.

Since the Czechoslovak government fulfilled all the German demands, the tactics of the Sudeten German Party were at a dead-end. That is why the Sudeten Germans revolted in order to take control over the borderland by force, and were swiftly defeated. General Krejčí, when meeting the Highest Committee for National Defence, demanded another mobilization on 13 September. Two days later, on 15 September, a second memorandum from the generals followed. This time, mobilization of at least one year of reservists was demanded. The third memorandum of 17 September then demanded mobilizing even two years of reservists. President Beneš, recalling May's events, decided that because of international reaction, any such mobilization was out of question. At a meeting between him and General Krejčí, who expressed his desire for general mobilization, a compromise was made: one year of reservists would be drafted. To understand the meaning of this meeting, it is necessary to stress that General Krejčí had the unanimous support of army representatives; among others, generals Vojtechovsky, Luža and Prchala (Šrámek, 2004:68-69).

Among holders of the colonel rank, there is one person worth mentioning. He is Emanuel Moravec. As well as being an officer, he was also a diligent author and journalist. Under the pseudonym Stanislav Yester, he commented on the events of the day. Evaluating the international situation, he believed that Czechoslovakia would organise a broad coalition of states against Germany; he literally dreamt of a union of Italy, Poland, the Soviet Union, and even of Hungary that together with Czechoslovakia and its allies, Yugoslavia and Romania, would defeat Germany (Pernes, 1997:119-135). All in all, this union never existed and relations between the involved states were often hostile. The visions of Emanuel Moravec which were expressed in a number of articles help us understand the way the officers and generals of the Czechoslovak Army thought; he was not the only one dreaming in his own world.

Czechoslovak Crisis: Mid-September to Beginning of October 1938

In 1938, the astronomical autumn began on 23 September. But for Czechoslovakia, metaphorically, the autumn started two days earlier. After the defeat of the Sudeten German uprising, representatives of the Sudeten German Party, e.g. Konrad Henlein and Karl Hermann Frank, fled to Germany. Since any negotiations between the Sudeten Germans and Czechoslovakia were no longer possible, the European powers, especially Nazi Germany, started to act on behalf of the German minority. After a meeting of British and German representatives, the British-French ultimatum followed. Both Western powers demanded that Czech territory inhabited by more than 50 % of Sudeten Germans be handed over to Nazi Germany. The Czechoslovak government accepted their decision on 21 September but, because of huge disapproval among the population, the government resigned.

The British-French memorandum once again activated army representatives. The same day, on 21 September, Generals Luža and Prchala went to Prague to meet the President and to persuade him not to capitulate, and if necessary to call upon the Czechoslovak Army and to resist the aggression. They argued, together with Generals Krejčí, Husárek and Bláha, that national values and honour were also at stake. The meeting was full of emotion but did not end up with any clear decision (Čelovský, 1999:324; Majewski, 2016:292; Šrámek, 2004:69-70). But maybe there was one result after all. The very same day, the caretaker government of General Syrový was appointed by President Beneš. Its first decision was a declaration of general mobilization. When General Jan Syrový, the one-eyed hero of the Battle of Zborov became prime minister, his resemblance to medieval warrior Jan Žižka misled the opinion of Czechoslovak society to consider him to be another military and national leader. Nothing could have been further from the truth. If anything, General Syrový was known as a devoted supporter of Edvard Beneš (Fidler, 1999:264-265). Anyway, mobilization also meant that the highest command of the Czechoslovak Army, with General Krejčí as a supreme commander, was moved to its war-command in the small village Račice near Vyškov about 200 km from Prague. Because of this, army went into some kind of isolation for the next few days and did not interfere in the decision-making process (Šrámek, 2004:72); if anything, their demands were in fact fulfilled at that moment (i.e. the general mobilization and defence readiness). Since Fuehrer Adolf Hitler declared his determination to attack Czechoslovakia if his demands were not fulfilled, the Czechoslovak government expected war.

The new momentum for the army's effort to affect the decision-making process arrived when the conference of powers in Munich took place on 29 September. The aim of this conference was nothing less than to settle the Czechoslovak Crisis and thus to save the European peace. On 28 September, when the conference was announced, Colonel Emanuel Moravec literally hit President Beneš' Office. As with the Generals, he had no programme or idea how to solve the Czechoslovak Crisis; in his speech, full of emotion, he tried to persuade the President not to accept the decision of the powers (Majewski, 2016:291-292).

The activities of Colonel Moravec were not limited to that one-time meeting with President Beneš. Despite being called for his military duty, he remained a fruitful author. Contrary to his previous articles, he changed his view in these days. It was no longer a multinational coalition that would help Czechoslovakia to win the war. Citing historical examples (Serbia in 1914 and Romania in 1916), he explained that even lonely resistance was worthwhile. Moreover, in his article of 29 September, he claimed that Germany was not prepared for any such "Blitzkrieg" as was widely expected (Pernes, 1997:135-142).

The same day the Munich Conference began, on 29 September, General Krejčí and President Beneš exchanged telegrams. General Krejčí reacted to the fact that the conference was about to decide the fate of Czechoslovakia. In his telegram, he recommended refusing all Hitler's demands and pointed out that Czechoslovak armed forces were fully prepared for defence and that the soldiers' morale was excellent. That day, a meeting of Generals Krejčí, Luža, Prchala, and Ingr in military headquarters

in Račice took place. The participating generals decided to promote some sort of war government, i.e. a government composed of soldiers. And once again, for the fourth time during the peak of the crisis, they went to visit President Beneš. This meeting took place in the afternoon. The demands of the generals (Generals Vojtechovský and Syrový were also present) became repetitive. They wanted to defend Czechoslovakia regardless of the decision of the powers, even if Czechoslovakia remained alone; only General Krejčí specified that the support of the Czechoslovak Army was conditional on the neutrality of Poland. Contrary to them, President Beneš – who was apparently used to the behaviour of Czechoslovak generals – refused all their demands (Majewski, 2016:293; Šrámek, 1998:37; Šrámek, 2004:73-74). Facing disagreement, the generals just simply left the President's office!

Meanwhile, the crucial decision was made in conference in Munich. Representatives of four powers, France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom, signed the agreement during the night of 29 to 30 September 1938; according to the agreement, Czechoslovakia should hand over all its territory inhabited by a German majority. No Czechoslovak representative was present during negotiations; ambassadors in Germany were simply informed that if Czechoslovakia refused, it had no diplomatic and military support.

In the morning of 30 September, a final meeting in the President's office took place. Apart from the generals, representatives of the most influential Czechoslovak political parties attended. The discussion became heated from the start. Generals Krejčí, Husárek, Vojtechovský, and Syrový blamed the President for the international position of Czechoslovakia that led to the Munich Agreement. After the emotion died down, President Beneš asked the generals to analyse the military situation. They said that the Czechoslovak Army was not prepared for war without the support of allies; the precondition was that France and the Soviet Union began operations against Germany as well as the so called Little Entente, i.e. Yugoslavia and Romania. The Generals, then, agreed that if France did not get involved in the conflict, none of Czechoslovakia's allies would do either. And if even the Soviet Union was willing to help Czechoslovakia, it was a problem to get the Red Army to Czechoslovak territory; there were no common borders and the possibility the army passing through Poland or Romania was out of the question. When presenting this, the generals probably realised how difficult the situation was, since after that, no one demanded a fight at all costs. General Husárek argued that Czechoslovak fortifications could resist no longer than fourteen days. Finally, the generals suggested that it was up to the Czechoslovak government to decide (Straka, 2008:20-24; Šrámek, 1998:38).

During the same period, the government had a meeting that lasted nearly all morning on 30 September. General Syrový, as Prime Minister, came back to the meeting of the cabinet to inform ministers about President Beneš' decision. A paradoxical clash occurred among ministers. Professor Stanislav Mantl, who was Minister of Health Care, expressed that Czechoslovakia needed to undertake a conflict at all costs; regardless of the military situation, and for moral reasons. He added that to retreat against such aggression was not an option. At this moment, it was General Syrový who refused such argument and unilaterally supported the

decision made by the President. Among other arguments, he mentioned that a war would mean the loss of human life. This was the very same reason that was used by President Beneš (Majewski, 2016:24-26). So, the Munich Agreement was therefore accepted.

Nazi Germany started to occupy Czechoslovak territory at the beginning of October, but the efforts of the generals to change the situation continued. In the territory that was taken by the Germans at first, there were no fortresses on which the Czechoslovak defence relied. On 2 October, the so-called Committee for Defence of the Republic (*Výbor na obranu republiky*) formed of politicians organised a meeting. General Prchala and Colonel Moravec were both present. But, despite heated discussion and proclamation made by members of the committee to undertake the action, the only result was that the committee decided to inform President Beneš about its initiative. That is why Colonel Moravec met the President for the second time on 2 October during evening hours. There are two versions about what really happened; both of them, however, have in common that Moravec completely failed in his attempt to persuade President Beneš to agree with the existence of the committee and its aims (Majewski, 2016:293-294; Šrámek, 1998:40).

The next day, on 3 October, members of the committee met General Krejčí and asked him to take power in Czechoslovakia by force and to declare a cabinet of generals. General Krejčí, hoping to reject the Munich decision, came to parliament. Despite the fact that he was assured that everything was prepared for him to gain the support of the National Assembly, the exact opposite was true. When receiving no support after a speech in which he demanded that executive power be handed to the army, General Krejčí left the parliament and lost all interest whatsoever (Šrámek, 1998:40-41; Šrámek, 2004:75-76).

The third and the last attempt to affect the situation took place on 4 October. General Prchala summoned his officers and generals to his headquarters in Jihlava in order to discuss the possibility of a coup d'état by the Czechoslovak Army. The generals formed a plan consisting of occupation of Prague and a declaration of military government. Since General Prchala had been called for duty in Slovakia (he was appointed to be commander of 3rd Army), General Sergej Ingr (commander of III Corps) was authorised to negotiate the rest of this coup. But no striking military action was in the programme. General Ingr decided to talk with Edvard Beneš and with General Krejčí; since neither of them expressed support for his action – not even Krejčí, who attempted something similar just one day before – General Ingr simply gave up. The urgent phone calls of General Prchala appealing for action had no effect either (Majewski, 2016:294; Šrámek, 1998:40-42; Šrámek, 2004:77-78).

The last testimony in the schizophrenic situation among representatives of the Czechoslovak Army is the fact that nobody who tried to affect the decision-making process left his own memoirs (Kvaček – Tomeš – Vašek, 2011:106-108)⁴. This is in

⁴ The other memoirs exist only as manuscript and were not published (e.g. memoirs of General Ludvík Krejčí).

striking contrast to “civilian” politicians; even the insignificant ones who were in some way involved in politics during the so-called “Munich days” felt the urge to describe and to stress their own role in the events of the Czechoslovak Crisis.

Examining the deeds of Czechoslovak soldiers, it seems that one person held a symbolic position. It was General Syrový. Despite also being the prime minister in the days of the Munich Agreement, he fully obeyed President Beneš. And even when facing the option not to accept the Munich Agreement, he remained loyal to civil authority – contrary to his own opinion. Perhaps because he felt that as a soldier he was not allowed to make his own decisions.

The above-mentioned meetings proved three important things. The first was that when facing authority and different opinion, generals were not able to put forward convincing arguments. The second was that in the critical moments of decision taking, they lost their heated “warrior” rhetoric and accepted the arguments of reason. The third and crucial one was that the generals were strong when they forced the politicians to decide, but weak when the decision should have been made by them.

Conclusion

According to the Munich Agreement that was signed on 29 (30) September 1938 and accepted by the Czechoslovak government within a couple of hours, Czechoslovakia was obliged to hand over its borderland (Sudetenland) to Nazi Germany; it meant to capitulate and to withdraw its army without any resistance. The Czechoslovak defence sector, especially the highest representatives of the Czechoslovak Army, carefully kept an eye on the course of events during the Czechoslovak (Munich) Crisis, mostly disapproving of the decisions of the Czechoslovak government. In this respect, the consequences of civil control of the armed forces in interwar Czechoslovakia and the efforts to a-politicize the army became evident. Yes, the representatives of army were willing to defend Czechoslovakia; they were undoubtedly determined to even die fighting for their country. On the other hand, Czechoslovak generals and other high-ranked officers were – in some respects – immature. Analysing the negotiations in which the generals were involved, one thing is clear. The representatives of the Czechoslovak Army had no experience in politics, they were not able to present arguments for their conclusions, they did not know how to persuade others with different opinions, and finally they were frequently insecure when meeting disapproval. All in all, behind the noble gestures of Czechoslovak generals and colonels, there were no real politics, no programme, and no capability to bear the responsibility for the fate of the nation. To sum up, during the First Czechoslovak Republic, they had no opportunity to get used to taking responsibility for political decisions – and their behaviour was a result of this situation.

The behaviour and attitude of the highest representatives of the Czechoslovak Army during the Czechoslovak (Munich) Crisis could be – rightfully – supposed to be just one, unique example, of a kind of “case study”. But it cannot be overlooked that

the position of the army in the political system of the First Czechoslovak Republic resembles the present-day situation of the Czech Republic and democratic countries. That is why some aspects could be generalised. It is crucial that the decision-making process itself and the responsibility for a nation's security are entirely in the hands of civil government. In this respect, any involvement of the army seems not to be desirable at all. In this model, the highest representatives (especially generals) remain soldiers and do not possess the ability of politicians.

Bibliography

- Čelovský B. (1999), "Mnichovská dohoda 1938" [Munich Agreement 1938], Šenov u Ostravy: Tilia.
- Fidler J. (1999), "Generálové legionáři" [Generals-Legionaries], Brno: Books.
- Kříž Z. (2003), "Vztah armády a politiky na území České republiky v letech 1918-1992" [Relationship between Army and Politics on the Territory of the Czech Republic 1918-1992], *Politologická revue*, no. 1, pp. 57-88.
- Kříž Z. (2004), "Civilní řízení a demokratická kontrola armády v České republice. Peripetie transformace vojensko-civilních vztahů po roce 1989" [Civil Management and Democratic Control of Army in the Czech Republic. Ways of Transformation of Relationships between Army and Civil Sector after 1989], Brno: Masarykova univerzita.
- Kvaček R. – Tomeš J. – Vašek R. (2011), "Zasutá svědectví o Mnichovu. Události roku 1938 v nepublikovaných memoárech českých autorů" [Concealed Testimonies about Munich. The Events of 1938 in Unpublished Memoirs of Czech Authors], *Český časopis historický*, no. 1, pp. 81-112.
- Grochalski S. M. – Lis M. (2009), "Układ monachijski jako przykład prawnomiedzynarodowej kapitulacji wobec agresji" [Munich Agreement as an Example of International and Legal Capitulation Against Aggression], Opole: Uniwersytet Opolski.
- Majewski P. M. (2016), "Zmarnowana szansa? Możliwości obrony Czechosłowacji jesienią 1938 roku" [Lost Chance. Possibilities to Defend the Czechoslovakia in 1938], Gdańsk: Muzeum II Wojny Światowej.
- Pernes J. (1997), "Až na dno zrady. Emanuel Moravec" [The Bottom Line is Betrayal. Emanuel Moravec], Praha: Themis.
- Straka K. (2007), "Československá armáda, pilíř obrany státu z let 1932-1939" [Czechoslovak Army – The Pillar of Defence of Nation in 1932-1939], Praha: Ministerstvo obrany České republiky.
- Straka K. (2008), "Vojáci, politici, diplomaté. Československá vojenská delegace na jednáních mezinárodního výboru v Berlíně a odstoupení českého pohraničí v říjnu 1938" [Soldiers, Politicians and Diplomats. Czechoslovak Military Delegation in Conference of International Committee and Handover of Borderland in October 1938], Praha: Ministerstvo obrany České republiky.
- Šedivý I. (1994), "Gajdova aféra 1926-1928" [Gajda-Affair 1926-1928], *Český časopis historický*, Number 4, pp. 732-758.
- Šrámek P. (1998), "Když zemřít, tak čestně. Československá armáda v září 1938" [If to Die, so Honestly. Czechoslovak Army in September 1938], Brno: Společnost přátel československého opevnění.

Šrámek P. (2004), “Odhodlání versus loajalita. Názory a postoje velení československé armády v roce 1938” [Determination vs Loyalty. Opinions and Attitudes of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army in 1938], *Soudobé dějiny*, Number 1-2, pp. 56-87.

Šrámek P. (2008), “Ve stínu Mnichova. Z historie československé armády 1932-1939” [In the Shadow of Munich. From the History of the Czechoslovak Army 1932-1939], Praha: Mladá fronta.