



GENEVA CENTRE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF  
ARMED FORCES (DCAF)

POSITIVE AND/OR NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF THE  
ABOLISHMENT OF  
FORMER SECRET SERVICES  
IMMEDIATELY AFTER DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

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for the International Conference  
“Security Sector Reform in Serbia –  
Achievements and prospects”  
29 – 31 October 2006, Belgrade

Geneva, December 2006

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me express my gratitude to you and to organisers of this conference for the opportunity to deliver my presentation here. I have to say that when I started preparing my speech I had only vague information of this meeting. My presentation's topic – „Positive and/or Negative Impacts of Abolishment of Former Secret Services Immediately after Democratic Change“ – made me worry.

I do not feel competent to deliver any recommendation. I have no expertise in Serbian situation. My present notes do **not** by any means reflect an official position of the Czech Republic or the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I worked in the Czech secret services for twelve years. Since 2001 when I left my service, I have been engaged in security studies rather from theoretical and academic point of view. I am one of the few who have got involved in public debate about the accomplished transition of secret services in my country. That is probably the reason why I was invited here. Therefore let me stress that I am presenting only my personal views, which should be taken as my „loud meditation“ on given topic.

The process of transition from authoritarian regime (communism in our part of the world) to democracy was a terrain we entered unprepared, and it could not be otherwise. We cannot understand completely present situation, which we are living in. Only a historic detachment can bring fuller understanding of the current epoch and events, which we witness. The most important breaking points of transition are often not recognized by their contemporaries (they are not present in common awareness). The showy emphasizing of discontinuity is often only a camouflage of continuity. Jadwiga Staniszkis does not entitled her key work „Post communism – the emerging enigma“ (1999) without a good reason.

Many researchers explored transition of political systems and regimes towards democracy and produced a lot of studies on this topic. If we look at transition only from the perspective of efficacy of administrative bodies we see that countries employing part of their old elites in their transition process from dictatorship to democracy exhibit more stable developments.

„Per se, bureaucrats are not democratic, but they have a function in making democracies efficacious“, wrote Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan in their work „Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation (Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe)“, 1996. If there are no other bureaucrats (here I use the term „bureaucrat“ in strictly neutral social-scientific sense of the word) at disposal, existing ones have to be used. I add to that statement: officers of secret services are only bureaucrats *sui generis*. However, this piece of knowledge is useful for academic discourse only. Nobody wants to take any political risk to come out from ivory tower and bring it into public political or mass media debate.

However, the problem is that success and social acceptance of the transition processes are not measured only by their technocratic side that means **not only** by the *efficacy* of state apparatus.

There are other important dimensions – **dimensions of symbols**. It is necessary to distance from the past. It is necessary not only to prevent recurrent abuse of the apparatus in reality, but also in the symbolic way. That is why there is a need to condemn the previous practice and perhaps even to punish it. Calling for justice – and in some cases for revenge – is possibly vain, but it is inherent in human nature.

This fact represents a great dilemma for intelligence reform in emerging democratic climate. Is it better to adopt and to adapt the old legacy apparatus or to build services from the scratch with completely new personnel?

As it is known, there is no international standard recommending or even regulating a shape of the state security system or organizational form of its intelligence services. That is regarded as a sovereign right of each country. Concrete intelligence systems in individual countries – as it is known also – can vary from country to country a lot.

However, there are some recommendations - so called *best practices*. From time to time they are conveyed discreetly through diplomatic channels. Likewise, there are recommendations of international and renowned political-science community (I include *security studies* into

political-science in this case). I have to highlight excellent and influential research work of Geneva based think-tank Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) at this place, and its papers published after 2002. Unfortunately, we could not take advantage of such thoroughly researched materials in the beginnings of the Czech transition.

I shall not analyse here such key requirements as civil management and democratic control of armed forces and of whole security sector, political non-partisanship, statutory mandate of secret services and their independent parliamentary or similar external control. They became standards and you know all of them well.

Besides already mentioned and relatively large production of DCAF there are not many studies devoted explicitly to intelligence reform. Let me mention one of them - a very relevant book by Kieran Williams and Dennis Deletant „Security Intelligence Services in New Democracies: The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania“, 2001, as well as a study by Larry L. Watts „Intelligence Reform in Europe's Emerging Democracies“, Studies In Intelligence, Vol. 48, No. 1, 2004.

I do comply with general statements and conclusions of both authors – regardless the fact that they consider the situation from British or American points of view. I only want to draw the attention to the fact that particular data on Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic come from secondary sources and cannot be fully taken as valid. Watts e.g. publishes false data about the percentage of ex-StB officers remaining in my former service (ÚZSI), which I have to disclaim strongly.

Let me return to the basic dilemma whether to take over and adapt former personnel or to build services from the beginning with completely new personnel. I will try to list briefly (not to analyse in details) advantages and disadvantages of both these solutions.

In general, there are two extreme solutions:

- 1) adoption of the “zero option” that is a new service built from the scratch,
- 2) maintaining some of legacy personnel – except of its most blatant components.

The first solution, as far as I know, was applied only in the Baltic countries. However, most post-communist countries have chosen **compromise** in the scale between two given extremes. The Czech Republic – at least in its civilian services – has chosen solution close to the “zero option”, but not completely. This change was executed in several stages, rather in evolutionary way, but with some „leaps”.

There is a threat that discharged former intelligence officers could join illegal or even subversive activities. New inexperienced security forces are unable to cope with this challenge at that time. Similarly, greenhorns are unable to cope effectively with other negative side-effects of liberalization „when everything seems to be allowed”. Not only that various forms of organized crime can emerge, but all once suppressed feelings of resentment and injustice may be revived and result in growth of extremism.

The discharged officers may decide to be indiscreet and to organise pointed leaks from former secret archives. That causes scandals and destabilization of the political climate. The discharged officers with their feelings of bitterness and entrapment may covertly join the obscure political groups and create parallel secret services.

The advantage of preservation of former (though perhaps renamed) institutions with major number of legacy personnel is a possibility of relatively rapid professional re-orientation against the new threats.

However, it is necessary to nominate trustworthy people into the leadership of such „renewed”services and work intensively on re-education of their personnel. The attitude „we are a special brand of people”must be wiped away. Characters like Luka Laban (from the movie *Profesionalac* by Dušan Kovačević) have to provoke our disgust, not our admiration.

However, the political scene is often unstable in transition period. What was promised and approved yesterday does not necessarily stand tomorrow. I want to underline that **factors determining** democratic intelligence reform do **not stem** from any potential foreign political pressure but from the condition of **internal political scene**.

Transition scenarios adopted in the "fresh post-revolutionary" situation may be criticized very soon by public. Dissatisfaction and frustration may grow inside the society due to the fact that "bright tomorrows" did not come as fast as it was expected. These feelings are articulated in politics and mass media very soon. The anger and disillusion can hit new bosses of secret services, too. Situation in emerging democracies is even more complicated by the dangerous tendency to politicize intelligence services that means to try to associate them closer with particular political parties.

I think that the recurrence of the issue of former officers' engagement can be documented at least on examples from Visegrad Four countries where their departure has been repeatedly demanded. These requirements can even cause **forced belated** solutions. The Slovak service SIS only in 2004 abruptly got rid of those officers who served in former communist regime. It would have been wiser to apply a gradual procedure lasting for example three years.

However, there are also other cases, which I would undiplomatically call "arrogantly neglected" solutions. This can be the case of Polish WSI if at least a small part of the current Polish press is true.

The subsequent dismissal of former officers (that is the "belated zero option") has its impact not only on efficacy of the organization but also represents a significant moral and psychological problem. "New" officers worked and served their country together with former "old" ones for about ten years (and besides professional relations also personal ties developed among them). How to explain people that the „zero solution" is just? How is it possible to identify with it?

I personally support the evolutionary and gradual changes and step-by-step management (including personal issues). Secret services are sensitive organisms and they should be treated like that. Though, if I knew all complications of long transition process in advance, I might have chosen the option „if it has to hurt, let it hurt *now* and *once and for all*".

Once I wrote a short essay. I finished it with a hypothetic speculation based on my assumption I had a time machine and could come back in

time to the past. What experience would I pass to my colleagues and myself back in 1990? That message – which I stress, is my personal opinion and it cannot be taken as any patronizing tutoring – I summarized in ten following points:

1. Transition of intelligence services is an expensive and long process that cannot be accomplished without painful mistakes.
2. It would be useful to prepare several given individuals properly and in advance for their role in management, coordination and conception of new services in democracy.
3. Potential head of a secret service should be a person with no extreme ideological position of the political spectrum.
4. It is necessary to study foreign systems in their full context, not superficially. Each foreign solution resulted from its own historic conditions and practically nowhere resulted from rational consideration. Superficial knowledge is not enough, devil is hidden in details.
5. Old secret police definitely has to be liquidated shortly after the change of power. Though, it is not appropriate to put its officers into a desperate economic situation. Archives of old secret police must be protected carefully. The attitude towards particular units of the old secret service should differentiate – some of them were doing what the new service also will do.
6. After the fall of extremely dictatorial regimes, the idea of new services built from the scratch is likely the best solution. However, **in the very initial phase**, it is probably impossible to execute it **without a part** of former officers. These officers should be promised e.g. five year protection. During this period they would be exchanged and generously repaid. Of course, this promise should be guaranteed and then fulfilled.
7. It is necessary to communicate with new political elites as soon as possible and explain them the purpose of secret services. New political elites should provide secret services with tasks and limits of their activities as soon as possible.
8. After the initial phase of destruction of old services and swift construction of new ones (it should not last more than a year or two), it is good to start communicating with

- public and media.
9. It is important to promote intense but wise policy of recruitment and education of new young personnel.
  10. Directors of intelligence services who were appointed to their posts immediately after the democratic revolutions should consider their own timely resignations. They should be exchanged gradually – if possible, in the middle of election term - by new professionals from their services.



Established in 2000 on the initiative of the Swiss government, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), encourages and supports States and non-State governed institutions in their efforts to strengthen democratic and civilian control of armed and security forces, and promotes international cooperation within this field, initially targeting Euro-Atlantic regions.

The Centre collects information, undertakes research and engages in networking activities in order to identify problems, to establish lessons learned and to propose the best practices in the field of democratic control of armed forces and civil-military relations. The Centre provides its expertise and support to all interested parties, in particular governments, parliaments, military authorities, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, academic circles.

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