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Events in Euro-Atlantic relations (July - August 2015)

The "Breeze" naval exercise began on 3rd July in the Black Sea. The main objectives of the exercise were the improvement of collaboration between NATO member states, the examination of naval response capabilities in the Black Sea in case of a possible crisis, as well as to provide support to former Eastern bloc countries. The Russian Federation has increased its naval presence in the area by two extra ships in order to monitor the western fleet. In these days, the Black Sea Fleet Naval Air Force has also received new equipment, including modern attack helicopter Mi-28 Havoc or strike fighter Su-34 Fullback, a newer twin to US F-15E Strike Eagle. According to Russia, the West is using Ukrainian civil war as an excuse for increasing its military presence in the area.

http://www.natoaktual.cz/nato-cvici-v-cernem-mori-0wc-/na_zpravy.aspx?c=A150714_112809_na_zpravy_m00

The US Department of Defense published on 3rd July the revised National Military Strategy reflecting new global threats. United states still have the largest defense budget and are leaders in technological advancement, but other powers are slowly catching up with US technological progress. According to the document, new conflicts will take place on the hi-tech field. The document also mentions that Russia has contributed largely to the fight against terrorism and war on drugs. On the other hand, the Russian Federation is destabilizing the neighbouring region by not respecting sovereignty of local states. The new Strategy also assures European allies that US are ready to defend them if necessary. Regarding China, Americans are concerned about the Chinese demands concerning the South China Sea that are contrary to international law, while at the same time US support partnership with China on issues of global security. The new Strategy also notes the ongoing threat of international terrorism.

http://www.natoaktual.cz/nova-bezpecnostni-strategie-usa-do2-/na_zpravy.aspx?c=A150714_115154_na_zpravy_m00

The Public Opinion Research Centre of Institute of Sociology of Academy of Science of the Czech Republic conducted a research on the public awareness about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) in the Czech Republic. According to this research, 56% of respondents have never heard about the TTIP and 22% have heard about it, but they do not know what it concerns. The graph shows the respondents' interest in obtaining new information about the agreement. We can see that 16% of respondents are strongly interested, 39% are rather interested, and 38% are rather not interested, while only 4% of respondents are strongly disinterested in the agreement.

http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7403/f3/pm150708.pdf

On 7th July the Romanian Ministry of National Defense announced that NATO Force Integration Unit Command Center is to be set up in Bucharest on 3rd September. In addition to Romanian capital city, another command centers are to be open in Poland, Bulgaria and in the Baltics.

<http://www.romaniajournal.ro/defmin-unveils-opening-date-of-nato-command-in-bucharest/>

On 8th July Pentagon announced cuts in the U.S. Army by 40,000 soldiers as well as by almost 17,000 civilian employees by 2017. After the cuts, the expected number of the US Army personnel should be about 450,000. US have only once had a smaller Army, in 1940 when the number of soldiers in active service declined to 270,000.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33437533>,

<http://www.defensenews.com/story/breaking-news/2015/07/09/us-army-troop-cuts-hit-nearly-every-base/29932107/>

Great Britain declared on 8th July reaching 2% of GDP on regular yearly defense expenditures by the end of this decade. Additionally, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne claimed that this level will be reached despite the overall financial cuts in the national budget.

<http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/budget/2015/07/08/british-government-commits-to-nato-spending-target-for-5-years/29857201/>

Czech pilots from the 212th tactical squadron from Čáslav, armed with two-seated fighters L-159 ALCA, participated in the Czech-Lithuanian exercise "Baltic Eye" from 30th June to 14th July. Czech pilots cooperated with Lithuanian forward air control as well as with fellow colleagues from other NATO members taking part in Baltic air-policing mission under the NATINAMDS. Also, L-159, together with Norwegian F-16 and Italian Eurofighters, participated in a ceremonial flight over Vilnius on the occasion of Lithuanian national holiday.

<http://www.acr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/ceske-bitevniky-podporuji-obranu-nato-v-%20litve-112736/>

A historic agreement on Iranian nuclear program was reached between the Islamic Republic of Iran and six other powers. Generally, this agreement is seen as a deal mainly between the USA and Iran and president Obama denoted the agreement as "a historic solution". However, Republicans in the US are strongly against the deal. The Speaker of the House of Representatives, John Boehner, said: "Instead of making the world less dangerous, this deal will only embolden Iran – the world's largest sponsor of terror – by helping stabilize and legitimize its regime." Another important opponent of this agreement is Israel, because they consider Iran a threat to Israeli existence. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thus called the deal "a historic mistake."

<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/svet/317255-iran-uzavrel-s-mocnostmi-dohodu-o-svem-jadernem-programu/>

On 18th July, Helsinki announced the deployment of rapid response forces along country's 833km long border with Russia. This is the result of increasing concerns Finland has about its powerful neighbor. Finnish army is still based on universal male conscription and it is possible to call to arms up to 230,000 men in case of mobilization. Also, later this year, about 22,000 conscripts in reserve should be called to participate in special military exercises.

<http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/land/army/2015/07/18/finland-tactical-response-units-russia/30197931/>

The first part of Czech Tiger Squadron departed on 20th July to protect the NATO founding member, Iceland. Czech pilots already carried out a similar mission last fall and they are now replacing Canadian Royal Air Force that is fully occupied with the bombing campaign against ISIS. 5 fighters and 70 Czech Air Force members should be involved in the island's defense. Due to one aircraft's defect, the fighters had to return to their home base on 23rd July, but they arrived in Iceland one day later with the rest of the contingent.

http://www.zpravy.idnes.cz/cesi-odleteli-chranit-island-dg5-/zpr_nato.aspx?c=A150720_101903_zpr_nato_inc#utm_source=sph.idnes&utm_medium=richtext&utm_content=clanek-box

The "Rapid Trident" exercise began at the Ukrainian military base in Javovir on 20th July. About 1,800 soldiers from 18 NATO member states participated. Javovir base in Western Ukraine is also where – under the military assistance provided to Ukraine by NATO – the training of Ukrainian forces by

western instructors takes place. Meanwhile, Russia expressed a concern over the maneuvers and accused NATO that this exercise could disrupt peace efforts in the Eastern Ukraine.

http://zpravy.idnes.cz/na-ukrajine-zacalo-vojenske-cviceni-db0-/zpr_nato.aspx?c=A150720_200000_zpr_nato_inc#utm_source=sph.idnes&utm_medium=richtext&utm_content=clanek-box

On 24th July, Turkish Air Force joined the fight against Islamic State (IS) as well as against the Kurds in Northern Iraq (PKK). On the one hand, Kurds are also fighting against the IS, but in order to gain sovereignty, they are undertaking terrorist attacks against Turkey. Under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, Turkey convened North Atlantic Council to explain and defend its actions. The White house spokesman Ben Rhodes then assured Ankara that PKK is still considered a terrorist organization and that Turkey has the right to defend itself. US and Turkey also agreed on the use of Turkish military bases by Americans. However, some NATO members urged Turkey not to give up peace efforts with Kurds.

<http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/europe/2015/07/26/turkey-launches-new-strikes-pkk-nato-meeting-called/30705611/>,

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/24/turkish-jets-carry-out-strikes-against-isis-in-syria-reports>

German concern Kraus-Maffei Wegmann (the manufacturer of e.g. Leopard 2 tanks) and French state-owned Nexter (the producer of e.g. Titus, an armored vehicle build on Tatra chassis) signed an agreement on a 50:50 merger on 29th July. The reason is to gain an easier access to new contracts and thus increase their profit. Each company could obtain around 35 million EUR per year from this partnership. Both companies could also produce a new type of tanks, replacing both the Leopards and French Leclercs. Both partners also mentioned that the door is open to other companies that would like to join the partnership.

<http://www.defensenews.com/story/breaking-news/2015/07/29/nexter-kmw-seal-deal-forge-joint-venture/30831795/>

US and Turkey decided on the creation of a safety zone in Northwestern Syria. Among other things, in the 68km long zone, bounded by Euphrate River in the Aleppo province, refugee camps should be set up. Turkey also agreed with US on Americans gaining an access to Incirlik Air Base, which enables intensification of the campaign against ISIS. The safety zone is also intended to serve as a shelter for refugees from the Syrian war and from Islamic State.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/new-us-turkey-plan-amounts-to-a-safe-zone-in-northwest-syria/2015/07/26/0a533345-ff2e-4b40-858a-c1b36541e156_story.html?tid=pm_world_pop_b

Czech soldiers, alongside their colleagues from the Armed Forces of the United States, Germany, Canada, Great Britain, Hungary, as well as non-NATO members such as Serbia or Georgia, participated in the largest military exercise this year named "Allied Spirit." The exercise was aimed at international cooperation in leading a massive ground operation. The maneuvers took place in German Hohenfels Joint Multinational Readiness Center from 4th to 24th August

<http://www.acr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/mezinarodni-cviceni-allied-spirit-ii-bylo-zahajeno-113130/>, <http://www.acr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/allied-spirit-ii-pocitace-porazit-nemuzeme-ale-nepritele-poradne-potrapime--113475/>

The New York Times published on 4th August an article focused on Obama's administration division on the issue of the fight against terrorism with the regards to the homeland security threats, while the dispute is, of course, in the first place about the allocation of money and other resources. One part of

the staff favors the fight against the Islamic State, because it is much more dangerous, among other things, due to the intensive social media campaign. While the other part prefers the focus to be on the fight against Al-Qaeda, because the terrorist network cells in Yemen are probably capable of causing massive casualties, including the attack at civil planes. This summer, FBI had recorded an increasing activity of the people suspected of connection to the Islamic State. Regarding the Islamic State, the Attorney General, Loretta E. Lynch, said: "It's as serious -- if not more serious a threat -- than Al-Qaeda." According to many experts that agree with her, the ISIS is much more successful in decentralizing its cells and actions and thus harder to capture. On the other hand, there are also strong opinions to fight both ISIS and Al-Qaeda without any priorities, because both these terrorist organizations present a serious threat to global security.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/05/world/middleeast/isis-or-al-qaeda-american-officials-split-over-biggest-threat.html?ref=world&r=1>

On 6th July, French president François Hollande made an agreement with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin regarding the compensations for 2 unsupplied Mistral-class amphibious assault ships. The overall amount of the compensations has not been officially announced. All Russian equipment will be dismantled from both ships and returned to Russia, while the actual ships will become French property.

http://www.natoaktual.cz/rusko-vysadkove-lode-mistral-nedostane-francie-vraci-penize-prs-na-zpravy.aspx?c=A150807_154647_na_zpravy_m00

In the United States, the First Republican Party presidential debate was held on 7th August. So far, the most distinctive candidate seems to be Donald Trump thanks not only due to his anti-immigration rhetoric. The well-known tycoon did not rule out the possibility to stand as an independent candidate if he were not to receive Republican Party nomination. However, according to political analysts, in such a case Trump may contribute to the election of the Democratic Party candidate, specifically Hillary Clinton. Before this debate, Trump led the polls and was ahead of the former Governor of Florida, Jeb Bush. Bush accused Trump of causing a slit in American nation with his statements.

http://zpravy.idnes.cz/trump-usa-debata-republikanskych-prezidentu-na-prezidenta-pot-zahranicni.aspx?c=A150807_071031_zahranicni_aha

On 13th August, the non-profit organization Leadership Network issued an analysis warning that NATO and the Russian Federation are preparing for a mutual conflict. Extensive military exercises in which both parties clearly practice defense against each other serve as the main proof. Thus this think tank urged world leaders to fast tensions de-escalation. However, NATO rejected any possible conflict with the Russian Federation.

http://www.natoaktual.cz/rusko-a-nato-se-pripravuji-na-konflikt-dhq-na-zpravy.aspx?c=A150821_112150_na_zpravy_m00

Prague Hradčany district held a commemoration on 14th August to mark the 70th anniversary since the return of the Czechoslovak RAF war pilots to their homeland. Some of the surviving Czech WWII veterans attended the ceremony – RAF veterans, General Emil Boček and Colonel Pavel Vranský, and Prague Uprising participant Colonel Emil Šnebergr. Mrs. Hana Fajtllová, the widow of the legendary Czech pilot and writer General František Fajt, was also attending. Greetings from the current Minister of Defense Martin Stropnický were read, while the Spitfire Club from Jihlava presented a 1:1 scale model of Supermarine Spitfire Mk IX as a reminder of airplanes inherently associated with the war and postwar service of Czechoslovak pilots.

<http://www.mocr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/praha-vzdava-hold-letcum-raf-113324/>

US generals have concluded that the USA is in no way prepared for any hypothetical war with the Russian Federation. Based on the secret exercises, the United States may not adequately compete with Russia in case of a conventional conflict, e.g. just about 33% of armored brigades is trained for the conflict with Russia. Some generals consider Russia a "deadly threat" for the USA, yet the troops numbers rather decrease than increase.

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/08/14/pentagon-fears-it-s-not-ready-for-a-war-with-putin.html>

According to the White House statement from 16th August, President Obama will meet South Korea President Park Geun-hye during her second visit to Washington on 16th October. They will discuss not only the South Korea-US political and military relations, but also the "many challenges of the 21st century."

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/12/statement-press-secretary-visit-president-park-geun-hye-republic-korea>

The republican presidential candidate, former Governor of Florida, and the son and brother of former US presidents, Jeb Bush, presented on 17th August his plan for the veterans program. Bush declared that spending "billions of dollars in waste, fraud, and abuse" should be cut in order to financially support veterans in the need of a better access to social and health care, because he considers the current program of care for veterans to be extremely outdated. One part of his program is also focused on female veterans, because women serving in the army have so far received less interest. Bush also criticizes the budget cuts of the current Democratic President Obama. According to Bush, downsizing in military could threaten national security.

<http://www.militarytimes.com/story/veterans/2015/08/17/election-2016-bush-veterans/31840449/>

Czech Minister of Defense Martin Stropnický informed on 20th August the Government that 2,600 troops can be deployed to Czech borders to protect the country from illegal immigrants. However, this number could affect Czech international commitments and therefore the optimal number of deployed troops is about 1,500.

<http://www.mocr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/ministr-obrany-informoval-vladu-o-moznostech-ostrahy-hranic-vojaky-acr-113507/>

On 20th August, Czech Government approved the purchase of additional 20 Pandur armored personal carriers, including logistic support and training. According to available data, the total price should be about 1,274 billion CZK and the purchase will be carried out from 2018 to 2020. Compared to Pandurs bought in 2006, the purchase price decreased by 316 million CZK.

<http://www.mocr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/vlada-schvalila-nakup-kolovych-obrnenych-vozidel-pandur-113503/>

For the first time in the history of American Rangers, two women graduated on 21st August in Fort Benning, after completing an intensive Rangers training. The 26 year-old military police officer and the an Apache helicopter pilot of the same age have thus become full-fledged members of the Rangers.

<http://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/08/21/two-women-make-history-by-graduating-army-ranger-school.html>

According to American server military.com from 21st August, US president Obama declared that the United States may renew the Iranian sanctions or may even use military action in the case of Iran violating the nuclear program deal

<http://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/08/21/obama-us-can-use-military-if-iran-breaks-deal.html>

The USA had once again targeted its focus on China and South China Sea. The People's Republic of China is expanding to be the regional hegemon and both countries have their interests in the region. To be able to face the growing Chinese power, US sent the newest and most advanced weapon systems to the region. The region of South China Sea is also covered by the latest US maritime strategy, with which China strongly disagrees. United States also carried out surveillance flights in the region, now focusing on the area of Spratly Islands, where China is building new facilities, including a 10km long runway able to receive Chinese strategic bombers. Spratly Islands are disputed by China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei.

<http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2015/08/pentagon-pacific-pivot-china-strategy/119355/?oref=d-river>

On 22nd August, US president B. Obama telephoned with French president Hollande. The reason was the heroism of 3 American soldiers who helped to prevent a terrorist attack onboard French high-speed train by capturing the attacker. Together with French and British citizens, the three members of the US armed forces have shown exemplary bravery regardless of their own risk and thus prevented a possible extensive number of casualties. However, according to reports, several people were wounded, including one of the intervening soldiers. Both presidents also agreed on the need to continue in the joint fight against international terrorism.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/22/readout-presidents-call-president-francois-hollande-france>

On 24th August, Pentagon announced a deployment of an unspecified number of Lockheed F-22 Raptor fighters in Europe. Technologically well-equipped Raptors are the only stealth fighters and are generally considered to be the world's best fighter. US still refuse to sell Raptors even to their closest allies such as Japan and Israel. Although Raptors' main purpose is the creation of air supremacy and elimination of enemy aircrafts, so far the fighters were only used as fighter-bombers during the campaign against ISIS. F-22 deployment in Europe is the next step to reassure NATO allies in Eastern Europe that are concerned about Russia.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/24/us-usa-airforce-f-idUSKCN0QT2AM20150824>

Russian server Delovaya Zhizn "accidentally" published the number of Russian military casualties from Eastern Ukraine. According to this economic server, 2,000 soldiers were killed in combat and 3,200 were wounded. The numbers were released in an article on increasing salaries of Russian soldiers. However, the information was quickly removed. But it had already been noticed by Ukrainian newspapers Novy Region. According to Forbes, all information about the killed or wounded Russian soldiers is considered to be a national secret. Russia still refuses the alleged direct involvement of Russian soldiers in the Ukrainian conflict. According to Russia, only Russian volunteers participated.

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2015/08/25/kremlin-censors-rush-to-erase-inadvertent-release-of-russian-casualties-in-east-ukraine/>

On 26th August NATO refused any future involvement in the current immigration crisis. Czech Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Andrej Babiš urged NATO to actively participate in the protection of European borders, but the Alliance Speaker said that there is no military solution to the immigration crisis, so there is no place for NATO participation.

<http://www.novinky.cz/zahranicni/evropa/378802-nato-uprchlickou-krizi-resit-nebude.html>

Czech fighter pilots from 211th Squadron returned on 28th August from Iceland air policing mission. Among other tasks, the pilots also trained flights at a very low altitude of about 30 m, which is not possible to perform in the Czech Republic or elsewhere in Europe.

<http://www.mise.army.cz/aktualni-mise/air-surveillance/zpravodajstvi/letouny-jas-39-gripen-jsou-z-islandu-zpet-v-cr-113763/>, http://zpravy.idnes.cz/mise-ceskych-gripenu-na-islandu-konci-dw7-/zpr_nato.aspx?c=A150827_160844_zpr_nato_inc

US citizen Kevin Dahlgren, accused of murders of his four relatives in 2013, will be extradited from the United States to the Czech Republic. Dahlgren appealed against the extradition order, but the request was rejected by American court. The US Secretary of State John Kerry pointed out on 31st August that the extradition of Dahlgren for prosecution in the Czech Republic is also the consequence of the good Czech-American relations. Dahlgren is the first ever person to be extradited to the Czech Republic from the United States.

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/08/31/us-murder-suspect-extradited-to-czech-republic/>

Pentagon stated on 31st August that the United States are – among their most efficient stealth fighters Lockheed F-22 Raptor– sending to Baltic states also the well-known drones MQ-1 Predator to gain air superiority. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) are deployed at the Liivarde Air Base in Latvia. The aim of this deployment is to test the use of UAV in European airspace and the drones will also be used by the Baltic States' secret services. Last but not least, the United States would also like to test the joint deployment of MQ-1 Predators and A-10C Thunderbolt II. The drones should be deployed in Europe until the first half of September as a part of US assurance of their security commitments in Europe.

http://www.natoaktual.cz/usa-testuji-bezpilotni-predatory-v-pobalti-few-/na_zpravy.aspx?c=A150901_154317_na_zpravy_m00