



## Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Bc. Miroslav Kerhart

Title: Czech Militias: Motivations for Walking to the Edge

Programme/year: Security Studies (BS)/2021

Author of Evaluation (supervisor): Mgr. Markéta Kocmanová

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
<b>Major Criteria</b>			
	Research question, definition of objectives	<b>10</b>	10
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	<b>30</b>	30
	Methodology, analysis, argument	<b>40</b>	40
<i>Total</i>		<b>80</b>	80
<b>Minor Criteria</b>			
	Sources	<b>10</b>	10
	Style	<b>5</b>	5
	Formal requirements	<b>5</b>	5
<i>Total</i>		<b>20</b>	20
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100</b>	100



## Evaluation

Major criteria:

Miroslav's Master's thesis *Czech Militias: Motivations for Walking to the Edge* represents a very brave and immensely successful endeavour to address our empirical and theoretical gap pertaining to intrinsic human motivations for membership in and disengagement from paramilitary groups (not only) in the Czech Republic. In his ethnographic research, the author decided to conduct field research to explore why the members of National Militia (Národní domobrana, NM) join the organization. The whole field research is framed by the main research question *What type of factors played role in individual's decision to join National Militia?* while further sub-questions are formulated to enquire about the expectations of individuals when joining NM and the factors affecting their decision to stay or to disengage, especially after the law banning activities of militia-like organizations has been in effect in Czechia. Therefore, the thesis was intended as an authentic and thoughtful contribution to our understanding about why citizens of our country feel urged to join armed groups parallel to the state and it must be stated that Mirek has succeeded in accomplishing this formidable and time-consuming task in an admirable way. Unequivocally, he has managed to present original findings that carry significant theoretical implications, but also invaluable lessons for the state and its policy-making that any security practitioner should read carefully.

The theoretical framework the author presents is very reflexive, adopting interpretivist meta-theoretical approach towards his position as a researcher, thus efficiently addressing the epistemological and ontological assumptions that guided his work. Being aware of meanings constructed during the interviews, considering this perspective also enables the author to acknowledge intrinsic limitations his research entails. The theories and models of radicalization are dealt with in a comprehensive manner, just to enable the author to apply these efficiently, and sufficiently, in the empirical part. What is more, the key conceptual framing of the Three Ps Factors, when the obvious push and pull factors determining (dis)engagement in violent groups are aptly completed with personal factors, brings in a valuable psychological perspective that serves well in the analytical section to capture the essence of militiamen's motivations. All is complemented by an excellent conceptual discussion about the intricacies of violent extremism, terrorism and the obvious trap the concept of radicalization itself represents, while highlighting the symptomatic securitization and politicization surrounding this domain.



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The methodological section deserves special recognition thanks to its remarkable comprehensiveness, far exceeding the Master's-level standards – the author manages to cover all methodological requirements in their complexity, while dealing in detail with the process of data collection (interviews), data analysis (analysis spiral), limitations inherent in the selected approach and also the ethical aspects of the research addressed by securing the approval of the Faculty's Commission for Ethics in Research. Author's thoughtful deliberation on the realist nature of his ethnography represents the most commendable passage of the methodological section where he critically reflects on the dilemma about how to approach an under-researched problem of militiamen's motivations, while oscillating between ethnography grounded in pragmatic realism and phenomenology.

Another brilliant feat that must be particularly appreciated within the methodological section is the actual field research and the empirical data the author was able to gather. Thanks to his extraordinary people skills, genuine empathy and commitment he was able to get access to an incredibly hard-to-reach community and managed to overcome deep mistrust the militiamen have towards academia. The 11 in-depth interviews quantified by about 200 pages of transcripts, 25 pages of interview notes (when the respondents did not agree with being recorded), 25 hours of recordings and observational protocols provide a very solid empirical basis. When further planned interviews could not be held due to the pandemic restrictions, the researcher appropriately enhanced empirical evidence by incorporating a variety of secondary sources, enabling to secure data reliability.

The findings section is unusually extensive for a Master's thesis, but the insights it brings and the conclusions it enables to draw are truly unique and carry wide-ranging theoretical and empirical implications. The core of the most important research findings is presented in Chapter 6 *Motivations of NM Members* – the author reveals that motivations to join NM can be attributed to a set of push and pull factors pertaining to fear and frustration (push factors) and belonging and thrill seeking as pull factors, while these seem to change over time when further engagement of militiamen is motivated especially by bonding and ideological alignment (pull factors) and quest for significance as a personal factor. The disengagement from NM then can be ascribed to perceived ill functioning of the organization, shift in interest and low approval from the broader mainstream society as well as the so-called Hamáček's Law.



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As a much-desired unintended by-product of the research, additional findings emerged. The author gives significant empirical evidence relating to, for example, shared personality traits of the respondents, most importantly heightened conservatism, authoritarianism or moral arbitrariness. Additionally, he suggests that there had been no previous connections to extremist groups prior to joining NM, thus debunking the common media myth about previous extremist links of the members. Furthermore, Mirek is able to critically discuss the implications his research can have for the state when these are two that stand out – two very elaborate and valid assumptions reflecting the consequences and influence of the Parliamentary Leaflet 669 (Hamáček's Law) and four possible future scenarios considering National Militia's development. Last but not least, he also suggests ideas for further research pertaining to the relation between specific personality traits and motivations to join paramilitary groups and the absence (or low frequency) of established acquaintances prior to the membership that could help us understand why organizations like NM emerge.

When reflecting on the overall impression of the entire text, one thing must be highlighted. Mirek frames his research in Zimbardo's deliberations over the thin line between good and evil and this ethos accompanies the whole work. He never forgets to approach his respondents as human beings while leaving one's ideological lens behind. This enables him to get beneath the surface of the superficial or the obvious and uncover real human motivations for actions that have potential to generate security threats. Simultaneously, it is also instrumental in helping identify the factors that are conducive to these threats, thus (hopefully) enabling to address them non-coercively at their very roots or prevent them from even occurring.

Minor criteria:

The thesis text is structured in a coherent manner and reads well. The inclusion of additional theorization in the empirical section proves organic, in my opinion, as it frames unexpected empirical findings. The academic style is appropriate and I appreciate author's initiative to use proofreading services as it would have been unfortunate for such a brilliant piece of research to contain grammar or similar issues. However, if the work was considered for publication, it would definitely need some editing. There are no plagiarism issues present in this thesis.



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Overall evaluation:

It is unimaginable that this Master's thesis would not be recommended for defence. Mirek managed to submit a very mature text of an outstanding quality that far exceeds the standards that can be expected at the Master's level. It presents very original findings of rigorous research which lends a powerful impetus for both theory and practice. After boosting the empirical base by conducting more interviews and honing the text slightly, it could aspire to a very valuable doctoral research. Perhaps unorthodoxly, I must say I feel deeply honoured to be given an opportunity to work with such a talented researcher and amazing personality of high moral integrity and brilliant work ethic.

Suggested grade:

A

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Romanová'.