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**THE ARMED FORCES IN THE PROCESS
OF TRANSFORMATION OF THE STATE –
THE CASE OF VENEZUELA**

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INTRODUCTION

The National Armed Forces were created in Venezuela at the beginning of the 20th century. Gradually they became the main instrument in the political game and were used in forming a centralized national state. Along with subsequent transformations of the political system the position of the Armed Forces was getting stronger and they started to expand their role.

The present article offers an analysis of the position and role of the Armed Forces in the process of transformation of the state in Venezuela. I will focus my attention on the changes that took place in the period of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. I will also analyze some earlier crucial phases in the 20th century history of the formation of the Venezuelan state.

I distinguish three principal periods of the transformation of the state. Their analysis will let me define the position and role of the Armed Forces. The first period of formation of the centralized national state, during which the 19th century *caudillismo* was eliminated and contemporary “praetorianism” was developed, began with the government of Cipriano Castro and

Juan Vicente Gómez and ended with the military dictatorship which was introduced after the coup d'état in 1948 and lasted until 1958. The second period can be distinguished as a period of party democracy based on the Punto Fijo Pact. This period was characterized by the tendency to subject the Armed Forces to civil authorities and political parties, while retaining the position and influences of military circles. The third period is the period of neomilitarism. The economic, political and social crisis in the 80's resulted in the military coups d'état in 1992 and democratic elections which in 1999 brought Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez Frías to power. As a result of systemic changes within the frames of the Bolivarian revolution, the Armed Forces started to play again the role of the main subject in the political game and the administrator of the state.

I formulate the thesis that in the crucial periods of change in the political system of Venezuela, which I described and analyzed above, the Armed Forces were used to introduce and legitimize new political projects. As a result they occupied the key position in the state, not only as an institution responsible for security and military tasks, but also as a political mediator, administrator of the state and supporter of development.

THE ARMED FORCES IN THE PROCESS OF CONSOLIDATION OF NATIONAL STATE

The process of formation of the Venezuelan state in the 19th century was dominated by the *caudillismo* phenomenon¹. It was a system based on power and the political influences of regional leaders who, as heads of their own armed bands, participated in revolutions and civil wars. *Caudillismo* was, in a way, supported by the federalist system and undoubtedly it constituted an alternative project in comparison with the concept of a national state, based on the control of the whole territory of the country by the central administration². *Caudillismo* had a great impact on the

¹ K. Krzywicka, *Caudillizm*, [in:] *Myśl społeczna i polityczna współczesnego świata. Encyklopedia politologii*, t. 4, Warszawa 2011, p. 74.

² K. Krzywicka, *Kształtowanie państwa wenezuelskiego w XIX wieku – między cen-*

formation of the social structure and political culture in Venezuela. The liberal governments from 1870 to 1903 were maintained on the basis of an arrangement: political party – army. However, the national army did not play the leading role in the consolidation of state power. The defense system was, in fact, based on local armies headed by regional leaders. The Constitution of 1864 introduced the system of state militias controlled by every political-territorial unit (Art. 93)³ and simultaneously it was forbidden for the federal authorities to install centrally-commanded armed forces on the territory of a given state without the permission of the local state government (Art. 100 and 101)⁴. The federal system was not favorable to the creation of a strong national army, however, the Constitution provided for the creation of a national army composed of volunteers. Every state had its own troops which could be used according to laws (Art. 94 and 95)⁵. Thus, there was no real national army which could defend the federal government and the armed forces were recruited by state governments only when they were needed for defense or the solution of conflicts.

The situation radically changed when General Cipriano Castro took power. Under Castro's government the process of fragmentation of the state, caused by the military activity of regional leaders, came to an end. The civil wars were ended. At that time a new system of power shared by the leader, the armed forces and the administration was created and it was maintained until 1945⁶.

From 1900, General Castro, using the „Ejército Restaurador”, started organizing the national armed forces. The Constitution adopted in 1901 lifted the ban on the interfering of the federal government in the military policy of states and introduced the rule that it was the national government which held exclusive responsibility and competence concerning the mili-

tralizmem a federalizmem, „Teka Komisji Politologii i Stosunków Międzynarodowych – OL PAN” 2009, No. 4, pp. 110–132.

³ *Constitución de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, de 22 de abril de 1864*, [in:] *Compilación Constitucional de Venezuela*, Congreso de la República, Caracas 1996, p. 144.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ D.H. Levine, *Conflict and Political Change in Venezuela*, Princeton 1973, p. 22.

tary issues on the whole territory of the Republic (Art. 89, Clause 12⁷, Art. 120, 121 and 122⁸). Moreover, the federal authorities could use the National Armed Forces for solving the military conflicts between different states of the country (Art. 89, Clause 22)⁹. The military successes of the Vice-president General Juan Vicente Gómez who suppressed revolts of regional leaders in 1901 (La Victoria) and 1903 (Ciudad Bolívar) also contributed to the organization of the national army. Apart from that, there existed some external factors which threatened the sovereignty of Venezuela. In the years 1902–1903 the European countries attacked and blocked the Venezuelan ports demanding the settlement of debts¹⁰. Venezuela remained in strained relations with Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Holland. Moreover, there was a border dispute with Colombia. These events aroused nationalist feelings which favored the centralization of power in the hands of the president supported by the armed forces.

Therefore, the process of institutionalization of the national army advanced gradually and it was accompanied by the creation of infrastructure aimed at its professionalization. On the 20th of February 1901 the National Constituent Assembly was convened and Cipriano Castro demanded the financing for creating modern armed forces. There were 30 battalions formed, new uniforms were introduced and modern weapons were purchased for the army¹¹. In 1903 the Military Academy was established and it started functioning on the 5th of July 1910 thus commemorating the centenary of the Declaration of Independence. In 1911 Escuela de Aplicación Militar was founded in order to educate the higher ranking officers and in 1912 started functioning Escuela de Clases for the lower ranking officers. In 1912 Escuela Náutica de Venezuela in Puerto Cabello was founded and in 1920 Escuela de Aviación Militar in Maracay.

⁷ *Constitución de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, de 29 de marzo de 1901*, [in:] *Compilación Constitucional...*, p. 246.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 246.

¹⁰ W. Dobrzycki, *Ameryka Łacińska we współczesnym świecie*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 291–292.

¹¹ R.J. Velásquez, *La caída del liberalismo amarillo: tiempo y drama de Antonio Paredes*, Caracas 1972, p. 266.

The administration and control of the process of centralization of the armed forces as well as maintaining of the internal order in the country was in the charge of the Ministry of War and Navy.

The organizational structure of the armed forces was established. According to Article 75 of the Constitution of 1904 the president was given the right to become the commander-in-chief of the army or to appoint one¹². After General Juan Vicente Gómez had taken power, the process of political centralization of the state was based on centralizing the command of the national armed forces. In 1914, in compliance with the Provisional Constitutional Statute, established a commanding organ of the armed forces for the first time Comandante en Jefe del Ejército Nacional (Art. 43)¹³. This position was taken and performed by General Gómez, who, in compliance with Art. 79, Clause 22 of the Constitution of 1914, as the president had the right to organize the national armed forces and militia¹⁴. Gómez dissolved regional armed forces and built up and modernized the national army which became professionalized, well trained and equipped. After the reform of the constitution in 1929, Articles 128 and 129 introduced the autonomous status of the organ of Comandante en Jefe del Ejército Nacional¹⁵. In 1926 *Ley de Servicio Militar Obligatorio* introduced obligatory military service. In 1933 *Ley Orgánica del Ejército y la Armada* was introduced in order to replace previous regulations, such as *Código Militar* of 1904 and *Código de la Marina de Guerra* of 1903, which was reformed in 1904.

To sum up, we can say that the formation of the national army by Generals Cipriano Castro and Juan Vicente Gómez served to implement the vision of a centralized state and to eliminate the federalism understood as a system based on autonomy and importance of regional military lead-

¹² *Constitución de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, de 27 de abril de 1904*, [in:] *Compilación Constitucional...*, p. 266.

¹³ *Estatuto Constitucional Provisorio de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, de 19 de abril de 1914*, [in:] *Compilación Constitucional...*, p. 305.

¹⁴ *Constitución de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, de 19 de junio de 1914*, [in:] *Compilación Constitucional...*, p. 323.

¹⁵ *Constitución de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, de 29 de mayo de 1929*, [in:] *Compilación Constitucional...*, p. 421.

ers and their state armies. The professional armed forces and efficient militia were the basis for maintaining the authoritarian power of General Gómez until 1935¹⁶. In the period of transformation of the state in the last years of the rule of General Juan Vicente Gómez and then his successors General Eleazar López Contreras (1935–1941) and General Isaías Medina Angarita (1941–1945) they introduced changes which served economic and political modernization of the state. That process ran gradually, from personal military dictatorship in the style of traditional *caudillo*, through the authoritarian government with the institutional legitimation, to the government of military origins which accepted pluralism, legalized all political parties, permitted political and trade union activity, however, limited and controlled the participation in political life. In that period the first trade unions and political parties were established¹⁷. At the same time, the ideological premises were radicalized and the political opposition became active. In that period the position of the armed forces in the political system was established. They took the role of an administrator of the state, political arbiter and promoter of development.

New conditions in civil-military relations were created after the coup against the government of President Medina Angarita, which was carried out on the 18th of October 1945 by Acción Democrática (AD) and young military men from the organization Unión Patriótica Militar. In consequence a military-civil coup a Revolutionary Government was established and it was headed by AD. The period between 1945 and 1948, so-called „trienio ADECO”, played an important role in the creation of a new character of the political system of Venezuela. The new government intended to establish the representative democracy, guarantee the civil rights and freedoms. On the 27th of October 1946 the Constituent Assembly was convened and on the 5th of July 1947 a new fundamental law was adopted. In compliance with the new Electoral Statute of the 19th of September 1947 presidential elections were held on the 14th of November. The winner was

¹⁶ See K. Krzywicka, *La formación del Estado nacional en Venezuela*, [in:] *Bicentenario de la Independencia de América Latina. Cambios y realidades*, ed. K. Krzywicka, Lublin 2012.

¹⁷ K. Krzywicka, *Partie polityczne i partycypacja obywatelska w Wenezueli*, “Teki Komisji Politologii i Stosunków Międzynarodowych” 2010, Vol. V, pp. 214–231.

Rómulo Gallegos, a member of AD, who was in power from February to November 1948. During the government of AD they introduced progressive political, social and economic rights. Nonetheless, the political practice was characterized by administrative inefficiency, the economic situation got worse and social turmoils increased. The ruling party, in order to fight the opposition, introduced the censorship of mass-media and restricted the activity of trade unions and political parties.

The unstable political situation and the tension between the military sector and the AD politicians led to another military coup on the 24th of November 1948. As a result, a military government was established, with the participation of Marcos Pérez Jiménez and Luis Llovera Páez, and it was headed by Carlos Delgado Chalbaud, the ex-Minister of Defense in the Revolutionary Government of Rómulo Betancourt. The armed forces again took the role of an arbiter and political and economic administrator of the country. After the assassination of Chalbaud in 1950 and not accepting the 1952 results of the presidential elections which were won by Jóvito Villalba from the Unión Republicana Democrática (URD), the position of provisional president was taken on the 2nd of December 1952 by Colonel Marcos Pérez Jiménez. It was another change in the government made by the armed forces and supported by the Venezuelan capitalist and industrial sectors. The National Constituent Assembly was convened on the 15th of April 1953 and it adopted new fundamental law. Two days later Marcos Pérez Jiménez was appointed to the presidential office. His government based its activity on the doctrine called *Nuevo Ideal Nacional*¹⁸, which developed national and patriotic values and, in particular, the issues of security and defense. In this area there was a development of relations with the USA. In 1951 a new agreement concerning North American military missions in the territory of Venezuela was signed. In 1953 the government of Pérez Jiménez began carrying out projects for the economic development of the country and the construction of road, tourist and military infrastructure. However, in the political practice there were

¹⁸ J. Sanoja Hernández, *Militares y políticos*, [in:] *Venezuela: la crisis de abril*, eds. A. Francés, C. Machado Allison, Caracas 2002, pp. 211–212.

restrictions and infringements of civil rights and freedoms, as they were subordinated to the doctrine of national security¹⁹.

To sum up, we can say that after the coup in 1948, a military personal dictatorship was established. The army was in the process of modernization and professionalization. There was also some internal rivalry and discrepancies within the armed forces which was evidenced by three military coup attempts between the years 1951–1952²⁰. The period of formation of the centralized national state based on the potential of gradually modernized armed forces was ended by a group of military men, supported by a broad coalition of political parties – La Junta Patriótica, the Church, entrepreneurs and trade unions, who forced General Marcos Pérez Jiménez to give up power on the 23rd of January 1958²¹

THE NATIONAL ARMED FORCES IN THE PERIOD OF THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

At the beginning of my reflections on the position and role of the armed forces in the period of democratization of the political system in Venezuela it should be stated that after 1945 and up to the 90's of the 20th century the armed forces were one of the most stable and clearly defined institutions and organizations in Venezuela as well as in the majority of the Latin American countries²². In the opinion of various authors the most important factor for the consolidation of the democratic political system in

¹⁹ See: A. Stambouli, *La crisis y caída de la dictadura de Marcos Pérez Jiménez*, [in:] *12 textos fundamentales de la ciencia política venezolana*, Caracas 1999, pp. 239–256.

²⁰ D. Irwin, *Relaciones civiles-militares en el siglo XX*, Caracas 2000, p. 87.

²¹ See more: A. Stambouli, *Crisis política. Venezuela 1945–1958*, Caracas 1980, pp. 103–162; A. Stambouli, *La crisis y caída de la dictadura de Marcos Pérez Jiménez*, [in:] *12 textos fundamentales...*, pp. 256–263.

²² O. Gutierrez, *Military sociology in Latin America*, [in:] *Armed Forces and International Security. Global Trends and Issues*, eds. J. Callaghan, F. Kernic, Münster 2003, p. 161.

Venezuela from 1958 was the fact that the armed forces were deprived of potential to destabilize the system²³.

At the end of the dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952–1958) there were three factions in the armed forces. The first one was a minority composed of high ranking officers who supported the dictatorship. The second one was made up of higher ranking officers, including General Rómulo Fernández, the Minister of Defense at that time, whose main purpose was to make changes in government and in army command and to overcome the crisis. The third faction was formed by middle ranking officers, headed by Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Trejo, who joined the democratic political project coordinated by Junta Patriótica. The main problem of the democratic government after the fall of the dictatorship was to establish civil control over the armed forces which, until then, were an unchallenged subject of power in the state, playing the role of the administrator, political arbiter and development promoter.

Along with preparations to the universal elections there appeared in the ranks of the army two competing trends. The first one was linked with the party and Hugo Trejo and the other one was connected with the officers cadre supporting General Jesús María Castro León. In July 1958 Castro León stood at the head of the military movement which was planning to bring down Junta de Gobierno and replace it with Consejo de Oficiales. In September another military movement emerged, headed by Lieutenant Colonels Juan de Dios Moncada Vidal and José Mendoza Méndez. The activity of both military movements was brought to a stop by very active social movements which supported the project of democratization of the state. In 1959, President Rómulo Betancourt visited military garrisons in order to ask the armed forces to respect the established constitutional order. It did not stop another revolt inspired by the armed forces: in April 1960 – Castro León and Moncada Vidal, in February 1961 – Colonel Edito Ramírez and the Detachment of the Presidential Guard (Destacamento de la Guardia Presidencial), in June 1961 – „Bar-

²³ E.R. Daniels H., *Militares y democracia. Papel de la institución armada en Venezuela en la consolidación de la democracia*, Caracas 1992, p. 79; F. Rodríguez, *Política, militares y democracia en Venezuela*, [in:] *El sistema político venezolano: crisis y transformaciones*, ed. Ángel E. Álvarez, Caracas 1996, p. 158.

celonazo” under the leadership of Major Luis Alberto Vivas Ramírez and Captain Tesalio Murillo. The last of the mentioned military movements accused the Rómulo Betancourt’s government of getting close to the Venezuelan Communist Party and sharing its program. The above-mentioned military movements can be described as rightist. But then, there was the Carúpano military revolt, led by Captain Jesús Teodoro Molina Villegas and the revolt in the Puerto Cabello naval base, led by Captains Víctor Hugo Morales and Manuel Ponte Rodríguez in June 1962. Those revolts had a national-revolutionary character and were supported by the civil-military movements²⁴.

The democratic government based its policy towards the armed forces on the following three pillars: improving socio-economic conditions in the army, limiting the participation of civil authorities in military issues, eliminating some institutions and practices which were symptoms of militarism and privileges of the army. In the Punto Fijo Pact, signed on the 31st of October 1958, the rule of the subordination of the armed forces to the control of the constitutional organs and the obligation to support the process of democratization by the army was adopted. The Government’s Minimum Program of the 6th of December 1958 contained the premises established by the democratic government in order to modernize the armed forces, improve the education of the military staff and detach the army from politics.

The position and role of the army in the country which was going through the process of democratization was defined particularly in two articles of the Constitution of 1961. Firstly, Article 131, which introduced the principle of separation of military power and administration from the civil power and administration – this principle did not concern the President of the Republic who, as head of state was also the Commander-in-Chief of the army (Comandante en Jefe de las Fuerzas Armadas Nacionales)²⁵. Secondly, Article 132, which introduced the separation

²⁴ A. Blanco Muñoz, *La conspiración Cívico-Militar. Guairazo, Barcelonazo y Porteñazo*, Caracas 1981, p. 224.

²⁵ *Constitución de 1961*, [in:] *Compilación Constitucional...*, p. 601.

of the army and politics and subordinated this institution to the civil authority²⁶.

In practice, the government guaranteed to the army the improvement of the socio-economic conditions in what refers to the health care, housing facilities and an increase of financial incomes. In the political debate the question of separating the army from politics and not using it for party purposes was highly emphasized. But in reality there existed informal contacts and connections between the party leaders and high ranking officers²⁷. The armed forces participated in carrying out the Plan República and helped logistically in organizing regional and national elections. The military sector, formally subordinated to the power, in the years 1960–1990 it gradually consolidated its political influences taking advantage of the rivalry for power between two parties: social-democrat Acción Democrática (AD) and christian-democrat Comité Político Electoral Independiente (COPEI)²⁸. The political parties and the armed forces managed to establish a system of mutually beneficial agreements²⁹.

In the 70's there was an expansion of institutional civil-military relations. Instituto de Altos Estudios de la Defensa Nacional (IAEDN) was founded, Ley Organica de Seguridad y Defensa entered into force, Consejo Nacional de Seguridad y Defensa and Secretaría Permanente del Consejo were called into being in 1976. The professionalization and integration of the armed forces were carried out on the basis of three aims: security, development and democracy. The security was understood as a basic factor for providing the development – the main goal of the democratic

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ E. Cardozo de Da Silva, *Militares y política: propuesta para el estudio del caso venezolano*, [in:] *Cíviles y militares. Fuerzas Armadas y transición democrática*, ed. C.J. Moneta, Comisión Sudamericana de Paz, Caracas 1990, p. 83.

²⁸ D. Irwin G. , *El pretorianismo venezolano del siglo XXI, una perspectiva histórica*, [in:] *Pretorianismo venezolano del siglo XXI. Ensayo sobre las relaciones civiles y militares venezolanas*, eds. D. Irwin, H. Castillo, F. Langue, Caracas 2007, pp. 15–19.

²⁹ See: Á.E. Álvarez, *El Estado y la Revolución "protagónica"*, [in:] *Venezuela: rupturas y continuidades del sistema político (1999–2001)*, ed. M. Ramos Rollón, Salamanca 2002, pp. 111–113.

political order³⁰. It is estimated that at the turn of the 70's, in consequence of the development of an educational system in the area of the new military technologies and army management, there was a significant increase in the professionalism and educational attainment in the armed forces³¹.

Summing up this part of our considerations it is necessary to emphasize that the subordination of the armed forces to the civil authority was aimed at separating the military and civil spheres. Nonetheless, the possibility of control and regulation of mutual relations. This process was guaranteed by the adopted rules and implemented institutional solutions.

THE ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES IN THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA

The question of civil-military relations in the sense of control of the state or civil authorities over the army focused the attention of various researchers who emphasized that the supremacy of the civil authority in the structure of the power is the canon in a democratic state³². Samuel Huntington distinguished two forms of control over the army³³: „objective control”, which is based on a strict separation of competences and powers between civil and military institutions and „subjective control”, which allows various options of mutual interfering in the competences of civil and military authorities, including active participation of military men in the political, economic and social activities of the state aimed at the pro-

³⁰ A. Müller Rojas, *Militares y política exterior de Venezuela*, [in:] *Reforma y política exterior de Venezuela*, ed. C. Romero, Caracas 1992.

³¹ F. Rodríguez, *Política, militares y democracia...*, pp. 164–165.

³² R. Dahl, *O demokracji*, Kraków 2000, p. 138; S.P. Huntington, *Fuerzas Armadas y sociedad: reformando las relaciones cívico-militares*, [in:] *La democratización y sus límites. Después de la Tercera Ola*, eds. G. O'Donnell and oth., “La Política. Revista de estudios sobre el estado y la sociedad”, Barcelona–Buenos Aires–México 1996, pp. 109–117; S.J. Fitch, *The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America*, Baltimore–London 1998, pp. 134–174.

³³ See: S.P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, Cambridge 1957, pp. 83–85; S.P. Huntington, *Fuerzas Armadas y sociedad: reformando las relaciones cívico-militares*, op.cit.

motion of national development. This new role, adopted by the army in order to expand its activities to the areas traditionally belonging to the competences of the civil powers, Alfred Stepan named as „the new professionalism of the armed forces”³⁴. Also Samuel E. Finer, in his research on the increase of professionalism in the army and its influence on civil-military relations in the Latin American countries indicated the tendency to politicize the army³⁵. In the 80’s and 90’s of the 20th century, in many Latin American countries there was a return of militarism in the relations between state power and the army. The neo-militarism, as Orlando Pérez remarked, was manifested by entrusting the army with new functions³⁶. The army started to participate in peace activities and civilian actions, taking part in the development of the country and its infrastructure. The army organized and managed the enterprises which were also the source of financing for the armed forces. The officers’ cadre got involved in political and social activities as well as those concerning the protection of the natural environment and the army fulfilled many different non-military tasks.

At the end of the 90’s, after Colonel Hugo Chávez Frías had been appointed to the presidential office, civil-military relations in Venezuela were dominated by neo-militarism. There occurred the ideological convergence between the armed forces and the political project of the leader of the country³⁷.

³⁴ See: A. Stepan, *The New Military Professionalism of Internal Warfare and Military Role Expansion*, [in:] *Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Policies and Future*, ed. A. Stepan New Haven 1973, pp. 47–65.

³⁵ S.E. Finer, *Los militares en la política mundial*, Buenos Aires 1969.

³⁶ O.J. Pérez, *El neomilitarismo latinoamericano y su desafío a la democracia liberal*, [in:] *Militares y civiles. Balance y perspectivas de las relaciones civiles-militares venezolanas en la segunda mitad del siglo XX*, eds. H. Castillo, M.A. Donís Ríos, D. Irwin, Caracas 2001, pp. 15–34; O.J. Pérez, *Dismantling Liberal Democracy: Neopopulism and Reorientation of Civil-Military Relations in Venezuela*, [in:] *Armies and Politics*, eds. E.N. Pashentsev, C.V. Miniar-Beloroutchev, Moscow 2002, pp. 326–346.

³⁷ See: K. Krzywicka, *El papel de las Fuerzas Armadas en el sistema político de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela*, “Cuadernos de Estudios Latinoamericanos” 2009, No. 6, pp. 9–23.

When analyzing the position and role of the armed forces in the period of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, we should first focus our attention on the conditions which have had an influence on the current activity of the army as a subject of political actions, beginning with the crisis of the Venezuelan political system in the 80's of the 20th century. At that time, groups of military men dissatisfied with the situation in the country started to emerge. One such group was Comandantes, Mayores, Capitanes y Tenientes – COMACATE. In December 1983, COMACATE turned into Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 (MBR-200). MBR-200 was founded by Captains Hugo Chávez Frías, Jesús Urdaneta Hernández and Luis Felipe Acosta Carlez. In 1986, the leaders of MBR-200 were joined by Major Francisco Javier Arias Cárdenas. The political program of the movement made reference to the nationalist values based on the political ideas of Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez and Ezequiel Zamora. The program was an attempt to confer to the Bolivarian ideas a more contemporary interpretation by questioning the actions of national power and indicating its discrepancy with the interests of the people. In 1991 they created a military operation plan Ezequiel Zamora and its execution started on the 3rd of February 1992. In order to mobilize the citizens and get their support, on the 4th of February 1992 MBR-200 carried out a coup against President Carlos Andres Perez. The coup was caused by the internal crisis in the country, corruption scandals, permanent impoverishment of the population and disappointment with the neoliberal economic program introduced by the government which did not bring any positive effects. The political leadership was put into question and the traditional political parties got into crisis³⁸. In these conditions the members of MBR-200 who carried out the coup ascribed themselves the messianistic role of „the guardians of democracy and Constitution”³⁹. However, the coup was

³⁸ See: K. Krzywicka, *System partyjny Wenezueli: dylematy reprezentacji i partycypacji*, [in:] *Latynoameryka u progu trzeciego stulecia niepodległości: przywództwo, idee i systemy polityczne*, ed. P. Łaciński, Warszawa 2011, pp. 35–54.

³⁹ T. Delgado, *The Institutional Restructuring of the Venezuelan Armed Forces, National and Regional Implications*, [in:] *Armies and Politics*, eds. E.N. Pashentsev, C.V. Miniar-Beloroutchev, Moscow 2002, pp. 78–80; L. Valderrama, *Evaluación política del 4F y su impacto institucional*, [in:] *Militares y civiles. Balance y perspectivas de las relaciones*

not successful and its participants were imprisoned and later released by virtue of the amnesty announced by President Rafael Caldera. Then, the movement changed its tactics. Hugo Chávez started to prepare a broad political backup and then presented himself for presidential elections which he won in December 1998.

In the new political situation, there was formed a kind of political leadership, not connected with the old scheme of political powers, which was based on the authority of the armed forces perceived by the Venezuelan society as a guarantor of public order and stabilization in the country. One of the first actions taken up by the president after gaining power was to restore the institutional importance of the armed forces. In his inaugural presidential speech of the 2nd of February 1999, Chávez described this task as returning the armed forces to the nation by engaging the army in the service for the benefit of the citizens⁴⁰. Hugo Chávez promised to the citizens to make the executive power efficient and transparent. For that purpose he appointed military men to ministerial offices. In February 1999 President Chávez inaugurated Plan Bolívar 2000. The execution of that project was entrusted mainly to the military specialists and based on the potential of the army. The armed forces became the administrator of the social programs introduced by the government and they used their logistics and military infrastructure. Within the frames of Plan Bolívar 2000 the officers became active in politics. Many of them aspired to occupy posts of governors and mayors. In practice, however, the project brought also some negative effects, like corruption and financial fraud. It also evidenced the incompetence of those military officers who took over the posts from the experienced public servants without any knowledge of administrative work. As a result, instead of building public trust in the executive power, the actions taken up by President Chávez and conferring a special role to the armed forces caused concerns among civilians that the power in the country could get militarized.

civiles-militares venezolanas en la segunda mitad del siglo XX, eds. H. Castillo, M.A. Donís Ríos, D. Irwin, Caracas 2001, pp. 119–128.

⁴⁰ H. Chávez Frías, „Venezuela Analítica”, 02.02.1999, <http://www.analitica.com/bit-biblioteca/> [18.07.2011].

In circles close to the president there appeared a clear division of opinions concerning the political engagement of the army. The project of the militarization of the state was given a test during the presidential elections in 2000 in which Hugo Chávez Frías had to compete for the presidency with Francisco Arias Cárdenas, his former brother in arms and accomplice in the coup of 1992 and from 1995 the governor of the state of Zulia. Cardenas openly pronounced himself against giving a new role to the armed forces. His stand was publicly supported by part of the military sector. Nonetheless, the majority of the population as well as members of the armed forces supported the populist project of militarization of the state.

The increase of the importance of the army and its engagement in the administrative activities of the state originated a broad discussion among Venezuelan citizens, mass-media and scientists concerning civil-military relations⁴¹. There were concerns that President Hugo Chávez, intending to give political power to the army under the pretext that it was for the benefit of the development of the country, in fact, wanted to strengthen his political position. Opinions changed and it caused a regression of the democracy in comparison to the political practice carried out until the 90's on the basis of the Constitution of 1961 (Art. 132) which, in the spirit of liberal democracy, subordinated the armed forces to civil power, emphasizing their non-political character⁴². In the opinion of many specialists,

⁴¹ H. Castillo, M.A. Donís Ríos, D. Irwin (eds.), *Militares y civiles. Balance y perspectivas de las relaciones civiles-militares venezolanas en la segunda mitad del siglo XX*, Caracas 2001; M. Ferrero (ed.), *Chávez, la sociedad civil y el estamento militar*, Caracas 2002; I.M. Guardia Rolando, G. Olivieri Pacheco, *Estudio del as relaciones civiles militares en Venezuela desde siglo XIX hasta nuestros días*, "Temas de Formación Sociopolítica" 2005, no 42; D. Irwin G., F. Langue (eds.), *Militares y poder en Venezuela. Ensayos históricos vinculados con las relaciones civiles y militares venezolanas*, Caracas 2005; A. Müller Rojas, *La nueva cara de la Fuerza Armada*, "Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales" 2003, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 179–204; A. Müller Rojas, *Nuevo pensamiento militar venezolano*, „Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales” 2006, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 135–138.

⁴² „...las Fuerzas Armadas Nacionales forman una institución apolítica, obediente y no deliberante”, art. 132, *Constitución de la República de Venezuela*, "Gaceta Oficial Extraordinario", 23.01.1961, No. 662.

the Constitution which was changed on the initiative of President Chávez in 1999 and other legal regulations implemented by him eliminated the non-political character of the army.

The new role of the armed forces was established in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on the 30th of December 1999⁴³ and it was confirmed in *Ley Orgánica de la Fuerza Armada Nacional* (LOFAN) of the 26th of September 2005⁴⁴. The LOFAN bill was amended a few times: on the 31st of July 2008, on the basis of the legislative decree issued by President Hugo Chávez: *Decreto con rango, valor y fuerza de Ley Orgánica de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana* (LOFANB)⁴⁵, in October 2009 on the basis of *Ley de reforma Parcial del Decreto con Rango y Valor y Fuerza de Ley Organica de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana*⁴⁶ and on the 9th of March 2011 on the basis of another *Decreto con rango, valor y fuerza de Ley Orgánica de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana*⁴⁷. The status and the competences of the armed forces are described also in *Ley de Carrera Militar*, *Ley de Educación Militar* and *Ley Orgánica de Seguridad de la Nación*. The Article 20 of *Ley Orgánica de Seguridad de la Nación* stipulates the obligations of the National Armed Forces concerning the defense and development of the nation⁴⁸. The above-mentioned legal regulations are the basis for new military doctrine carried out by the

⁴³ Arts. 1, 13, 130, 134, 153, 322, 323, 326, 328, 329, *Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela*, "Gaceta Oficial de La República de Venezuela", 30.12.1999, No. 36 860.

⁴⁴ *Ley Orgánica de la Fuerza Armada Nacional*, "Gaceta Oficial", 26.09.2005, No. 38 280.

⁴⁵ *Decreto con rango, valor y fuerza de Ley Orgánica de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana*, No. 6.239, 22.07.2008, "Gaceta Oficial Extraordinario", 31.07.2008, No. 5.891.

⁴⁶ *Ley de Reforma Parcial del Decreto con Rango, Valor y Fuerza de Ley Orgánica de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana*, "Gaceta Oficial", 21.10.2009, No. 5.933.

⁴⁷ *Decreto con rango, valor y fuerza de Ley Orgánica de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana*, No. 8.096, 9 de marzo de 2011, "Gaceta Oficial Extraordinario", 21.03.2011, no 6.020.

⁴⁸ *Ley Orgánica de Seguridad de la Nación*, "Gaceta Oficial", 18.12.2002, No. 37 594.

government of Hugo Chávez within the frames of *Nuevo Pensamiento Militar*⁴⁹.

The Constitution refers to the position and role of *Fuerza Armada Nacional* (FAN) in Chapter 3 of Title 7 concerning national security. The supreme organ which is responsible for national defense, sovereignty and territorial integrity is, according to Article 323, the Council of National Defense. It is headed by the President of the Republic and other members of the Council are: the Vice-president, the Chairman of the National Assembly, the Chairman of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice, the Chairman of the Republican Moral Council, the Ministers of: Defense, Internal Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Planning and other sectors, if necessary.

Article 328 of the Constitution stipulates that FAN is a professional institution, not involved politically, called into being by the state in order to guarantee its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The armed forces participate in maintaining internal order. The Constitution gave them the right to participate actively in national development. In compliance with Article 329 FAN can fulfill the tasks of administrative police and carry out criminal investigations. Article 330 restored the electoral rights to the military men, however, excluding the possibility to stand for election for active military men and forbidding them to participate in political propaganda (the right to stand for elections is only for retired military men).

The president is the head of the armed forces. His powers are described in Article 236, Clause 5 and 6 of the Constitution and the LOFANB bill, which, contrary to the previous one of 1996, extended the competences and autonomy of the president, especially in a case when the political system stability is threatened. Undoubtedly, it was to a certain extent the result of the experiences acquired during the coup of the 11th of April 2002, when a group of officers cadre managed to push aside President Chávez from power for two days⁵⁰. The powers of the President of the Republic as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces are stipulated in Articles 5, 6

⁴⁹ Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Defensa, *Algunas normas del ordenamiento jurídico de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela relacionadas al Nuevo Pensamiento Militar*, <http://www.mindefensa.gob.ve/>, [13.01.2012].

⁵⁰ See: M.F. Sierra, *La fractura militar*, [in:] *Venezuela: la crisis de abril*, A. Francés,

and 7 of LOFANB (Articles 40, 41 and 42 of LOFAN). The President has the highest power in FAN hierarchy and has the highest military rank – Comandante en Jefe. One of his powers is to reactivate retired military staff for military service as well as for peace-time activities (Art. 96 of LOFANB). The president has the right to appoint the highest officers to posts related to defense and national security, including promotion of the officers' cadre (Art. 75 and 76 of LOFANB).

The armed forces are composed of the infantry (*Ejército*), the navy (*Armada*), the air force (*Aviación*) and the National Guard (*Guardia Nacional*) which has the duty to maintain internal order in the country (Art. 328 of the Constitution). The LOFANB bill of 2008, by virtue of Articles 50 and 51, turned the protection of the Bolivarian Republic into a national military mission, creating additionally Reserva Militar and Guardia Territorial in order to complement the FANB. Reserva Militar and Guardia Territorial are subordinated directly to the president (Art. 43 of LOFANB). In the case of internal or external aggression they can be called to arms and during peace-time they participate in the development of the country and contribute to maintaining public order in the country (Art. 44 and 46 of LOFANB). Hugo Chávez has the intention to create the Bolivarian Revolutionary Armed Forces, which is a departure from the traditional form of the army and adoption of the Cuban model according to the idea of „defensa nacional popular integral”. There is a new tendency, confirmed in the *Ley de Carrera Militar*, to appoint the members of the military sector (for a period of two years, with the possibility of extending) the posts in civil state administration. The control of civil authorities over the army, which existed until 1998 by virtue of Art. 131 of the Constitution of 1961, was reduced, allowing only one case of combining the civil and military competences, that is in the hands of the president.

The present Constitution, contrary to that of 1961, allows to engage the armed forces in political life conferring to the army the right to participate actively in the program of national development. These rights were extended by virtue of other legal regulations concerning the armed forces

eds. C. Machado Allison, Caracas 2002, pp. 201–208; J. Sanoja Hernández, *Militares y políticos*, [in:] *Venezuela: la crisis de abril...*, pp. 209–214.

which, in fact, allow the army to engage in the administrative, economic, social, educational and political activities. In Hugo Chávez's political program the armed forces constitute part of the Poder Popular and their consolidation guarantees security in the face of dangers which threaten the Bolivarian revolution.

In 2005 president Chávez started to carry out a revolutionary project of economic, social and political changes which he called „Socialism of the 21st century”. In January 2007 he started the institutionalization of „Socialism of the 21st century” in the form of Proyecto Nacional Simón Bolívar (PNSB). Comisión Presidencial para la Reforma de la Constitución Bolivariana was called into being. One of its most important tasks was to prepare legal bases for the implementation of the PNSB.

In the area of civil-military relations, the implementation of PNSB brought in January 2007 the change of the name of the Ministry of Defense which is now called Ministry of People's Power for Defense (Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Defensa – MPPD). President Chávez took steps in order to redefine again the role of the National Armed Forces and he proposed to introduce amendments to the Constitution. However, the proposed amendments were rejected by the citizens in the referendum in December 2007. According to Teodoro Petkoff, the project of the constitutional reform had a “pre-totalitarian” character and was aimed at subordinating society and strengthening the presidential power by turning the armed forces into the government political party. Other researches define the Hugo Chávez's project as „post-democratic”, pointing out the concentration of power in the hands of the leader with the support of civil-military alliance as well as the politicization of the armed forces in order to consolidate the political system in which the army fulfills the role of the revolutionary institution and carries out the political program of the leader according to national-socialist ideology⁵¹.

⁵¹ See: C.R. Hernández, *La primera revolución postcomunista en América Latina*, [in:] *Militares y civiles. Balance y perspectivas de las relaciones civiles-militares venezolanas en la segunda mitad del siglo XX*, eds. H. Castillo, M.A. Donís Ríos, D. Irwin, Caracas 2001, pp. 81–118; M. Kornblith, *Venezuela: calidad de las elecciones y calidad de la democracia*, “América Latina Hoy”, *Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, Salamanca 2007, No. 45, pp. 112–113.

The implementation of PNSB by President Chávez turned the debate on civil-military relations in Venezuela into a debate on social-military relations⁵². This problem is the result of the evolution of the armed forces in the political system of Venezuela which, as we mentioned before, started to evolve into the ideological presidential party. While in democratic countries the military institutions and political parties have autonomous character in the political system, in the socialist countries the army was subordinated to the political party which monopolized the political system. In this context we can see the parallel between the Venezuelan concept of „Socialism of the 21st century” and real socialism. Thus, the new face of the Bolivarian Armed Forces is based on the socialist concept of subordinating the army to the political party and also brings to mind the tradition of the Venezuelan pretorianism described in the first part of this article.

The armed forces constitute an instrument for consolidation of the Chávez's presidential power and execution of the Bolivarian revolutionary project. It is evidenced by the changes introduced in the legislative regulations, principally LOFANB, including the introduction of new nomenclature: Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana, Guardia Nacional Bolivariana, Armada Bolivariana. However, contrary to the situation in the countries of real socialism, the transformation of the role of the armed forces in Venezuela is carried out with the use of democratic procedures and institutions, through the participation of society in elections and referendums. Thus, we can state that both the army and the sector of civilians who support President Chávez constitute two fundamental bases and guarantors of his power.

Relations between the citizens and the army are conditioned by the specific political culture of Venezuelan society. The analysis of the historical experiences in Venezuela in the process of constructing the state and the results of public opinion surveys give grounds to say that Venezuelan society is characterized by the military political culture. Although the

⁵² See: R. Sucre Heredia *Socialismo y la cuestión militar...*, pp. 87–104; J.A. Rivas Leone, M. Quintero Acosta, *Estado-seguridad y Fuerzas Armadas en la era de la globalización: una aproximación a Venezuela*, Barcelona 2007, pp. 23–30.

majority of Venezuelans do not approve of the military government, still a large part of society accepts the engagement of the military sector in civilian and state matters and they put trust in the armed forces. In 1995 Mercanálisis carried out a survey which indicated that 54% of the population approves of the participation of military men in civilian matters, whereas 44% of the surveyed persons expressed their disapproval. In 2002, a survey carried out by Compresión de Venezuela and Instituto Venezolano de Análisis de Datos (IVAD) indicated that 68,2% of the respondents accepted the activity of FAN in the civil-state area, whereas 28,3% had the opposite opinion. In the same survey 55% of the respondents were in favour of appointing high ranking officers to the public administration posts. To the question whether military government could have democratic character 50,8% of the respondents answered positively, whereas 44,3% negatively⁵³. In March 2011, IVAD published the results of the survey of Venezuelan public opinion which indicated that 54% of the respondents disapprove of the political activity of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces⁵⁴. In view of the presidential elections which will be held in 2012 the question of political involvement of the army reappears in the debate between the government and the political opposition united in Mesa de Unidad Democrática. They raise the question of infringement of Articles 328 and 330 of the Constitution and the use of the armed forces for carrying out the government's projects of nationalization of industry, land and commerce and organization of the electoral processes. The core of the problem in civil-military relations is not only the politicization of the armed forces but also the civil control over the army which, according to democratic rules, should be exercised by parliament, civil society and civilian experts. In Venezuela there is a deficit in this area. The problem attracts attention because Venezuelan society, being the subject or civil-

⁵³ See: Instituto Venezolano de Análisis de Datos – IVAD, <http://ivad.com.ve/>; R. Sucre Heredia, *Fuerzas Armadas y cultura política: una aproximación a partir de un estudio de opinión en Venezuela*, [in:] *Militares y Poder en Venezuela. Ensayos históricos vinculados con las relaciones civiles y militares venezolanas*, eds. D. Irwin G., F. Langue Caracas 2005, pp. 271–310.

⁵⁴ *Venezuela: Teodoro Petkoff asegura la derrota de Hugo Chávez por encuestas*, <http://www.infolatam.com/>, [08.03.2011].

military relations, is simultaneously an integral element of the new state security doctrine „Proyecto Bolivariano de la Nación en Armas” which involves the citizens in its defense (Military Reserve, Territorial Guard).

The changes introduced in Venezuela after 1999 should be seen as the strengthening of the position and role of the armed forces mainly because such was the will of President Chávez elected by universal suffrage and not as the order forced by the military sector. It is an example of an authoritarian political system in which the armed forces are controlled, politicized and deeply indoctrinated by the ideology and system of values of the ruling leader. The army is the instrument of state policy, becoming simultaneously the tool of the ruling party policy⁵⁵. The army is treated as an integral part of the party system. In military structures there are specialized organs for political supervision, indoctrination and control. The officers cadre is composed entirely of party members. The role of the armed forces in internal affairs is increasing as they are used to carrying out the current policy of the state in the area of economic, social, educational and cultural development. The politicized army acts as a party of executive power and, at the same time, guarantees its stability⁵⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Our considerations on the position and role of the armed forces in Venezuela, carried out in the present article, lead to the conclusion that the armed forces were the key subject and instrument of the formation of the centralized national state in the 20th century. The institutional development of the armed forces accompanied the process of the formation of state administration. Using incomes from the exploitation of crude oil,

⁵⁵ G. O'Donnell, *Contrapuntos. Ensayos escogidos sobre autoritarismo y democratización*, Buenos Aires 1997, pp. 97–127.

⁵⁶ D.H. Levine, *Democratic consensus in two timeframes: 1972–2002*, “Revista Política” 2003, No. 30, pp. 35–36.

two sectors of power, civil and military, established and executed the political principles which guaranteed the functioning of the state⁵⁷.

In the revolutionary project of systemic changes in the state carried out currently, the area of activities of the armed forces has been expanded. The armed forces are a key player and active subject of political, economic and social life. The army and the para-military organizations play a fundamental role in public life. There has been the development of military technocracy. The military men have been appointed to ministerial offices, they are in charge of diplomatic posts and occupy the positions of state governors. They also have managerial positions in the economic sector, including PDVSA – the state-owned petroleum company, the key sector for the development of the country. The methods they use in ruling state administration are similar to those used by the army. Simultaneously, the political and institutional control of the state over the armed forces has been diminished. The army has turned into a state institution, which supports the ideology and program of the president and has the competences which in the democratic system belong to the civil authorities. The introduction of new legislation (LOFAN, LOFANB, with later changes) regulating the activity of the armed forces made it possible to turn them into a political instrument which acts as a presidential party. The Bolivarian National Armed Forces guarantee, at present, the implementation and legitimization of the projects prepared by the executive power and the established political system. As a result, within the frames of the new military doctrine *Nuevo Pensamiento Militar*, apart from the traditional military functions related to the defense and security of country, the armed forces also fulfill the role of the promoter of the economic development, political arbiter and administrator of the state.

⁵⁷ K. Krzywicka *Polityka energetyczna Wenezueli w XX w.*, [in:] *Ameryka Łacińska wobec wyzwań globalizacji*, ed. M.F. Gawrycki, Toruń 2006, pp. 215–236.