

# Bbc Monitoring European

## Afghans refuse Czech rifles, will take over helicopters

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Prague, 20 November: Afghanistan announced this July that it is not interested in the 20,000 sub-machine and 650 machine guns the Czech cabinet decided to give to it earlier this year, the Czech Defence Ministry said today, adding that Kabul said in explanation that it was eyeing Western types of arms. On the other hand, Czech Defence Minister Vlasta Parkanova or chief-of-staff Vlastimil Picek are to hand over to Afghan officials the first three helicopters the Czech Republic has given to the Afghan military. Afghanistan will receive a total of 12 redundant helicopters from the Czech military's equipment. The ministry is to inform the government about the transfer of the helicopters and about the unrealized donation of firearms worth over 30m crowns at the cabinet meeting on Wednesday [21 November]. After Afghanistan declined the machine and submachine guns supply, the Czech Defence Ministry started seeking a buyer in a public tender. "The choice of a buyer is still under way," the ministry says now. The planned donation of arms to Afghanistan has been criticized by Amnesty International which feared that the gift might end up in the hands of local rebels. The donation of 12 combat and transport helicopters has been approved across the Czech political spectrum, including part of the opposition. In Afghanistan, the helicopters are to become part of a nascent Afghan national air force. At present, the helicopters are being repaired and equipped by workers in the Prague-based Letecké Opravný Malesice repair company. The costs of the repairs, covered by NATO, are to reach several hundreds of millions of crowns. All 12 helicopters are to be supplied to Afghanistan by the end of 2008.