



**Seminar organized by the Council of State of France and  
ACA-Europe**

**“The Judicial review of Regulatory Authorities”**

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**Answers to questionnaire: Czech Republic**



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## ACA-Europe symposium

### Disputes concerning acts by regulatory authorities

Regulatory authorities have gradually emerged as one of the new forms of State intervention. In addition to the Regal State or the State as a supplier of goods and services, the regulatory authorities, in the broad sense, cover a wide range of administrative activities: they may be authorities responsible, in a given sector or across the board, for correcting market imbalances in a context of opening up markets to competition, or for ensuring that free competition is reconciled with other general interest objectives; in the broadest sense, regulatory activities may refer to any administrative activity that seeks to reconcile interests that may be contradictory or to organise access to scarce resources in a manner consistent with general interest objectives. In this broadest sense, this notion can refer as much to the transversal authorities responsible for enforcing competition law (e.g. the French Competition Authority) as to sectoral authorities (electronic communications, transport, energy, etc.), including national data protection authorities or authorities responsible for the marketing or evaluation of health products.

The symposium planned for December 2021 should be an opportunity to examine the specific issues that disputes concerning acts taken by these regulatory authorities may raise in the administrative courts. These questions arise from certain characteristics of the acts of these authorities, characteristics over which they do not have a monopoly compared with other forms of administration, but which combine or take on a particular role. These characteristics are at least three in number: firstly, the use of a wide range of acts or intervention tools, from flexible laws and codes of conduct to more traditional regulatory acts or sanctions, via a variety of communication media (press releases, public statements, FAQs, etc.); secondly, the degree of expertise and technicality of the decisions taken in a given activity sector (energy, health, electronic communications, etc.) and/or a certain technological context (personal data protection, cyberspace, etc.); finally, integration into complex economic and social ecosystems, often with a significant European or even international dimension, and likely to have a high media profile.

In this context, from the particular object of study that is disputes concerning the acts of these regulatory authorities, the symposium planned for December 2021 will make it possible to address the important challenges that these appeals raise for the effectiveness and credibility of the court's intervention.

### Courts with competence to hear disputes concerning regulatory authorities

1. Does your supreme administrative court have competence to hear appeals against acts by regulatory authorities? **Yes/no**

If yes:

Without being exhaustive, could you present the main regulatory authorities in your country whose acts are brought before your supreme administrative court, specifying if these appeals are subject to several levels of jurisdiction? Please distinguish, if necessary, according to the nature of the acts concerned (in the event, for example, that individual acts taken by these authorities are subject to separate jurisdictions from their general acts, notably regulations).



The main regulatory authorities in the Czech Republic are (in no particular order):

1. Office for the Protection of Competition ("OPC")
2. Czech Telecommunication Office ("CTO")
3. Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting ("CRTB")
4. Energy Regulatory Office ("ERO")

Individual decisions of regulatory authorities and measures of general nature (*Allgemeinverfügung*), which some regulatory authorities may issue, can be reviewed directly before administrative courts – regional courts (first instance) and eventually before the Supreme Administrative Court, if an extraordinary remedy (in this case cassation complaint) is lodged by one of the parties.

2. In particular, can any of these authorities themselves impose sanctions (including fines)? Yes/no

If yes:

is it possible to challenge them before your supreme administrative court?

Yes, as a verdict about the imposed fine/sanction is a part of the authority's decision, which can be challenged as described in question no. 1.

3. Are any of these regulatory authorities subject to judicial review by civil courts, for some or all of their acts? Yes/no

If yes:

Please give examples.

Yes, they are, but not for all of their acts, only for some. For example, decisions of the Czech Telecommunication Office issued in proceedings on due telecommunication charges under the Act no. 127/2005 Coll., Electronic Communications Act, or part of the decisions of the Energy Regulatory Office according to the Act no. 458/2000 Coll., Energy Act.

Those decisions are reviewed by civil courts based on sections 244–250l of the Act no. 99/1963 Coll., Code of Civil Procedure. These provisions provide protection in cases where an administrative body has decided on a dispute or other legal matter arising from private law relations.

4. Are the courts with competence to hear the acts of regulatory authorities:

- specifically identified by the texts in force, by way of derogation from the normal rules of territorial or material competence? Yes/no

- or do they result from the application of the general rules on the distribution of competences? Yes/no

Is there any specific distinction in relation to the rules of competence applicable to equivalent acts of other administrative authorities in your country? Yes/no

If yes:

Please explain.

5. Are the remedies available against the acts of these authorities of the same nature as those available against the equivalent or similar acts of other administrative authorities? Yes/no

If no:



Please explain.

### Admissibility of appeals against regulatory acts

6. In your view, do disputes concerning “hard law” acts (regulatory acts, sanctions, individual authorisation decisions, etc.) of these authorities raise particular issues of admissibility? Yes/no

If yes:

Please explain.

7. Are “soft law” acts (opinions, recommendations, warnings, position papers) of these authorities and, more broadly, their various positions on the behaviour to be adopted by the actors in their field of intervention (whatever form they take: code of conduct, guidelines, etc.) liable to be the subject of a direct action for annulment? Yes/no

If yes: under what conditions? Make any distinction you think useful according to the degree of normativeness of the acts.

8. Can positions taken by these authorities, possibly with little or no formality (press release, website section, FAQ, etc.) be challenged in court? Yes/no

9. Who can challenge the acts of regulatory authorities? Specify the criteria for assessing the interest in bringing proceedings, making any useful distinction according to the type of act (soft law act; individual decisions of a non-repressive nature; sanction; etc.).

Acts of regulatory authorities can be challenged by anyone who claims that their rights have been prejudiced directly by the individual act or due to the violation of rights in the preceding proceedings (including State authorities).

10. Please indicate any other particularities that you consider relevant to the admissibility of appeals against the acts of these authorities (interest in bringing proceedings, time limits for appeal, specific means of appeal open to State authorities, etc.).

Act of the regulatory authorities must be subsumed under the definition of “decision” set out in section 65 par. 1 of the Act No. 150/2002 Coll., Code of Administrative Court Procedure (hereinafter referred to as “the CACP”), which states the following: Anyone who claims that their rights have been prejudiced directly or due to the violation of their rights in the preceding proceedings by an **act of an administrative authority whereby the persons rights or obligations are created, nullified or bindingly determined** (hereinafter “decision”) may seek the cancellation of such decision, or the declaration of its nullity, unless otherwise provided for by this Act or by a special law.

Those “decisions” of regulatory authorities can be subject of an administrative action filed within the regional court, which can be filed within **two months** after the complainant was notified of the decision by being delivered its written copy or by another manner prescribed by law, unless a special law prescribes another time limit. The time limit is met if the complaint is submitted within the time limit to the administrative authority whose decision is contested (sec. 72 par. 1 of the CACP).

Decision of the regional court then can be challenged in proceedings before the Supreme Administrative Court by lodging a cassation complaint - a remedy against the final decision of a regional court in administrative justice whereby a party to the proceedings from which this decision arose, or a person participating in the proceedings (hereinafter “complainant”), seeks the quashing



of a court decision (sec. 104 of the CACP). The cassation complaint must be submitted within **two weeks** after the delivery of the decision (sec. 106 par. 2 of the CACP).

11. Can the general acts of a regulatory authority, whether “hard law” or “soft law”, be challenged by way of exception in an appeal against an individual decision (sanction, follow-up to a complaint, etc.) taken by that same authority and applying that general act (for example, if a sanction imposed on an economic operator refers to previously issued guidelines or recommendations to set out the applicable legal rules and the authority’s interpretation of the texts in force)? **Yes/no**

If yes, to what extent? Will the plea of illegality against this general act, if upheld, lead to the (retroactive) annulment of this act?

“Hard law” general acts can be reviewed on the basis of an action against individual administrative act (administrative decision).

Unlawful measures of general nature (*Allgemeinverfügung*) may be revoked by a court decision. This decision leads to *ex nunc* annulment.

Unlawful secondary legislation shall not be applied by the court in the concrete case (it is thus not annulled).

12. Where the actions of these authorities have harmful consequences, should liability claims be brought:

- against these authorities? **Yes/no**

- or against the State on whose behalf they may have acted? **Yes/no**

#### **Internal organisation of the courts and hearing of appeals**

13. Are cases concerning these authorities assigned, within the courts and more particularly within the supreme administrative court, to panels specifically dedicated (to the authority concerned, or more generally to regulatory litigation), in order to allow for an increase in the level of competence or a critical mass of cases? **Yes/no**

If yes: please explain and give examples.

- Or is it a distributed dispute with no particular allocation rule? **Yes/no**

Please indicate, in a more general way, any notable particularities in the internal organisation of your courts that may be relevant.

14. What investigative or examination techniques can you use in particular in the examination of particularly technical cases:

- **expert’s report,**

- **amicus curiae,**

- **testimony of a witness**

Please explain, where applicable by giving some examples from your experience.

Do you feel that these regulatory cases require a particular method? **Yes/no**

If yes:

Please explain.





15. What is the role of the traditional administrations (especially when the act of an independent administrative authority, distinct from the ministry concerned, is at issue) in the examination of appeals against regulatory authorities:

- are they invited to comment? Yes/**no**
- or do they remain outside the case? **Yes**/no

16. More generally, when examining appeals against acts with a high socio-economic impact issued by these authorities, in particular those in charge of a field of economic regulation, does the court collect (on the initiative of the court or the interested organisations) observations from other stakeholders? Yes/**no**

If yes:

Please explain.

17. What role does orality play, even before the hearing, in the investigation of complex cases, in particular those involving regulatory acts?

It differs from case to case. The parties are entitled to claim an oral hearing before the first instance court (regional court). Oral hearing before the Supreme Administrative Court is held only when it is necessary to take evidence.

18. Do you have, in one form or another (specialisation of magistrates, continuing education, expert decision support unit to assist magistrates, etc.) internal resources in your courts enabling you, if necessary, to familiarise yourself with or master sectoral but also transversal expert subjects (technologies protecting privacy, communication technologies in the case of audiovisual or electronic communications regulators, role and architecture of social networks, etc.)? **Yes**/no

If yes:

Please explain and give examples.

Continuing education is accessible for judges and judicial assistants and it is provided by the Judicial Academy.

### **The extent of the judge's control, the court decision**

19. What are the main categories of grounds that can be invoked and relied upon against the acts of regulatory authorities? Based on your experience and the case law of your country, do you find that appeals against acts of independent authorities raise particular problems (real independence in decision-making, impartiality, etc.) compared with disputes concerning acts taken by other administrative authorities? Please share any relevant analysis you may have.

The main problem is to distinguish if the dispute is of private or public nature. These disputes are settled by the specialized panel composed of three judges of the Supreme Administrative Court and three judges of the Supreme Court of the Czech Republic.

20. Does your court consider itself bound by the technical or economic assessments made by the regulator? Or does it feel entitled to control them? In the latter case, is this control complete or only limited to the manifest error of assessment?

The Supreme Administrative Court is not bound by the technical or economic assessments made by the regulator. In more complicated cases, an expert is summoned.



21. If you receive an application against an act of a regulatory authority or against a sanction imposed by it, is your court only competent to annul the act or sanction or can it also modify the sanction imposed?

First instance courts (regional courts) may moderate the sanction, but only exceptionally on the basis of a request.

22. Have you been confronted with the problem of an independent authority in your country taking into account a foreign element such as an opinion given by an authority in another country or a decision by a European authority (for example, in the context of the mechanisms set up by the GDPR between the European data protection authorities, which lead these authorities to submit some of their decisions to the European Data Protection Committee for approval)? Yes/no

If yes: what kind of legal treatment? Please explain and give examples.

We are not aware of any such case, although without a thorough analysis it can't be entirely excluded.

23. Are these cases a particular field of preliminary questions to the Court of Justice of the European Union? Yes/no

If yes:

Please explain and give examples.

24. Does the drafting of court decisions raise particular issues related to the technical nature or media exposure of some of these cases? Yes/no

If yes:

Please explain and give examples.

### The judge in the regulatory ecosystem

25. Are judgments on such appeals subject to any particular publicity or accompanying measures (press release)? Yes/no

If yes:

Please specify.

26. Are regulatory authorities entitled to challenge acts or decisions taken by other public persons on the grounds that they impinge on their competence?

Regulatory authorities are entitled to file an action in case of competence contest with another administrative authority [section 97 par. 1 lit. c) of the CACP].

There are two kinds of competence contests:

1) A positive competence contest - administrative authorities claim competence to issue a decision on the same right or duty of the same party to the proceedings before the administrative authority

2) A negative competence contest - administrative authorities disclaim competence to issue a decision on the same right or duty of the same party to the proceedings before the administrative authority.



27. Independently of a particular case, do your court or its members regularly participate in general exchanges bringing together professionals (regulatory authorities, operators, doctrine, ministries, etc.) from the regulatory sectors concerned? **Yes/no**

If yes:

Please specify.

**Administrative judges undertake continuing education, including participation in general exchanges [for example those held by the Academy of European Law (ERA)].**

28. Are the judges in your courts, or more generally the staff of your investigating and registry departments, sometimes led in their careers to take up activities in regulatory authorities, and are such careers encouraged where appropriate? Yes/**no**

If yes:

Please explain.

**Judges may not work on secondment.**

#### Quantitative data

29. What is the number of cases concerning regulatory authorities registered before your supreme administrative court in 2020?

**OPC: 45 cases**

**CTO: 14 cases**

**CRTB: 6 cases**

**ERO: 5 cases**

**Total: 70 cases**

30. What is the number of cases concerning regulatory authorities settled by your supreme administrative court in 2020?

**OPC: 50 cases**

**CTO: 11 cases**

**CRTB: 7 cases**

**ERO: 6 cases**

**Total: 74 cases**

31. What is your estimate of the percentage of cases concerning regulatory authorities in the total number of cases registered before your supreme administrative court in 2020?

**Total: 4381**

**=> 1,6 %**

32. What is your estimate of the percentage of cases concerning regulatory authorities in the total number of cases settled by your supreme administrative court in 2020?







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**Total: 4183**

**=> 1,8 %**

**33. What percentage of applications against the acts of regulatory authorities were annulled, in whole or in part, by your supreme administrative court in 2020?**

**46 %**



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