

Analytical report:
Situation in the field of
national security and defence
of Belarus (April 2017)

Minsk

The most important events of the month. On April 21, 2017 Aliaksandr Lukashenka made an annual message. It's necessary to highlight the most important moments of the performance.

The Belarusian leader expectedly spoke about the PRC policy in complementary tones.

President Lukashenka once again intimidated the audience with the threat of destabilization in the country. He called for creating a strong and secure Belarus (instead of the former strong and prosperous) and recognized that he personally took a decision on the repression in March 2017.

Lukashenka underlined the serious contradictions within the Eurasian Economic Union (hereinafter referred to as the EAEU). He also expressed dissatisfaction with the sharing of the funds of the Eurasian Stabilization and Development Fund.

The Belarusian leader burst out with claims to the West: everything was mixed up there. Dissatisfaction about the protectionist barriers for the Belarusian products in the EU markets. Annoyance because of the West's reluctance to give Minsk money (even in the form of related loans), which was accompanied by a demand to give money "... under normal conditions". There was also a demand for Europe to change approaches to Belarus in the field of democracy and human rights. To crown it all, Lukashenka accused the Europeans of provoking a migration crisis, and now treating migrants brutally. Europe, according to the Belarusian leader, should think about it as soon as possible. He expressed his readiness to promote the security of the EU. Of course, it is not free: Minsk would like to receive money for this, at least some amount.

Aliaksandr Lukashenka confirmed the successful development of the national missile program.

There were accusations against NATO in the militarization of Eastern Europe. Then the readiness of Minsk to develop relations of trust with the Alliance was declared.

Lukashenka criticized the officials who questioned the possibility of achieving the level of the average salary in USD 500 in the current conditions. He also confirmed his determination to continue the fight against corruption.

The developments within the month. In early April, there was information major overhaul of four Su-27SK fighters of the Indonesian Air Force in Belarus. Obviously, the executor is the 558th Aviation Repair Plant in Baranavichy.

During the month, there were news about testing the armored vehicle "Cayman" produced by the Barysau JSC "140th repair plant" and production of the first five units. The vehicle was tested for the ability to overcome water barriers, maintainability and operability during a daily run, the combat survivability of the vehicle and crew.

In April, it was also announced that the MiG-29 fighters and Su-25 were being modernized for the installation of satellite equipment "Satellite", designed for protection from guided missiles.

According to preliminary data, in January-March of 2017 the organizations of the State Military Industrial Committee (hereinafter referred to as the SMIC) produced industrial products for the amount of USD 130.6 million or 132.5% in comparison with the same period of the previous year. The profitability of sales was about 15% with a plan

for 13%. Exports of goods exceeded the forecast by 23%. It's necessary to note that industrial products include not only newly manufactured products, but also industrial works (repair and modernization).

On April 1-5 in Vitsebsk region the exercises of the Special Operations Forces of Belarus and the Airborne Forces of Russia were held. Traditionally, recently the legend of the exercises is based on the fight against illegal armed formation (hereinafter referred to as the IAF). Specifically, these exercises became noteworthy in three aspects:

- geographic scale (200 to 300 km);
- participation of units of the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus (hereinafter referred to as the MIA Internal Troops);
- using UAV-quadrocopter equipped with rocket-propelled grenade launchers or flamethrowers.

It wasn't reported, which troops the UAV belongs to, but UAV units were not mentioned among the Russian units involved in the exercises.

The event was attended by servicemen from the MIA Internal Troops brigades from Minsk and Vitsebsk. According to the legend practiced by them, certain militants captured one of the districts of the Vitsebsk region. "Assault" of the city building was conducted by the soldiers of the MIA Internal Troops in conditions, when the opposing side used explosive devices and snipers. In turn, the Belarusian and Russian paratroopers practiced the use of howitzer artillery and mortars as well as the actions of snipers during fights in inhabited locality. There is an analogy with Mosul, which is being assaulted by Iraqi army for six months already.

In April mechanized units trained the action during "hybrid war" as well. They trained the protection of important infrastructure facilities, repulsed the attack of subversive and reconnaissance groups on a column of military equipment, filtered the population in order to identify combatants, reconnoitered and blocked the area of the conditional IAF, and made thorough inspection of certain territory.

In another scenario, the IAF crossed the border and attempted to reach a large administrative center "... for organizing terrorist activities in order to destabilize the situation". Traditionally for the last three years, "militants" had armored cars, heavy machine guns, mortars and grenade launchers. The system of control of mechanized battalions, which were in isolation from the main forces, under the conditions of constant attacks on transport highways, was worked out. The troops also trained blocking and assaulting a fortified settlement by a mechanized subdivision.

On April 3, 2017 Aliaksandr Lukashenka and Vladimir Putin met in St. Petersburg. During the meeting the most acute problems of bilateral relations were resolved (for a while).

Negotiations in St. Petersburg were successful for the Belarusian side. As far as we know, President Lukashenka received from Russia even more than he expected. In this case, the terrorist act in the St. Petersburg metro, which occurred on the day of the meeting of the leaders of Belarus and Russia, helped Belarusian leader, even if it sounds cynical. Vladimir Putin was under the psychological pressure of the event and the Belarusian leader succeeded in using the situation, partly to impose his agenda of the meeting. That is why Lukashenka said that the main topic of the meeting was security. Although the oil and gas dispute was resolved on the actual Russian conditions, Minsk

managed to get financial assistance both from Russia directly and through the Eurasian Stabilization and Development Fund.

On April 6, 2017 Ministry of Defence of Ukraine expressed concern about forthcoming Belarusian-Russian strategic exercises “West-2017”.

On April 7, 2017 the second batch of six new Mi-8 MTV-5 helicopters arrived to Belarus. Thus, the company “Helicopters of Russia” has fulfilled the contract of 2015 for the supply of the helicopters to our country. This modification of Mi-8 helicopter allows using it for solving both combat and transport tasks.

On April 11-13 the active phase of the regular exercises of the Airborne Forces of Russia and the Special Operation Forces of Belarus took place in Brest region. The landing on an unfamiliar area, as well as blocking and destroying a conventional enemy was tested. Part of the events took place at night. This is the third joint exercise conducted by the Airborne Forces of Russia and the Special Operation Forces of the Armed Forces of Belarus in 2017.

On April 14, 2017 an informal summit of the heads the Collective Security Treaty Organization (hereinafter referred to as the CSTO) states took place in Bishkek. The main topic of the meeting was the fight against international terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking, organized transnational crime, internal political stability of member countries. At the event, the representative of Armenia was finally approved as the Secretary General of the Organization. This appointment was late for six months after it was blocked first by Kazakhstan in October 2016, and then by Belarus in December 2016. It should be noted that the CSTO summit was held behind closed doors and was covered very poorly. It is reported only about the adoption of some “additional guidance on countering threats to security”. Earlier, on April 13, 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his readiness to support the CSTO countries’ regimes in order to prevent their destabilization and prevent the threat of “coloured revolutions”. This position is shared by the leaders of Kazakhstan, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan.

On April 17, 2017 President Lukashenka dismissed Major General Henadz Kazakou from the position of Chief Communications Officer of the Armed Forces and appointed him the Director of OJSC “AGAT - Control Systems” - the managing company of the holding “Geoinformation Control Systems”. In this case, Henadz Kazakou actually remains in the service at the Ministry of Defence.

On the same day, the beginning of the readiness check of the State Security Committee of Belarus (hereinafter referred to as SSC) 14th separate governmental communication regiment was announced. The main objectives of the event were the following:

- practical checking the previously submitted proposals for optimizing the structure, size, tasks and the development of the regiment;
- testing of new digital communication systems of domestic production, including encryption equipment.

On April 19, 2017 light-engine aircraft entered the airspace of Belarus from the territory of Lithuania for a short time. Such violations are not uncommon, but in this situation Minsk reacted sharply. The Belarusian side informed the Lithuanian one on the possibility of violation of the border in advance. However, the plane continued its flight and violated the border in the area of the constructed Belarusian nuclear power plant,

which itself is a point of tension in the Belarusian-Lithuanian interstate relations. Minsk is satisfied neither with the format of the explanations of Lithuanian officials nor with their content. From the outside it looks like a provocation, although in reality there was a confluence of a number of factors. After the first reactor of the nuclear power plant is put into operation, the security measures in the airspace in the station area will be sharply tightened. Which, if the situation repeats, can result in the use of weapons by Belarusians on the violator of the border. And this threatens with further complications of relations between Minsk and Vilnius.

On April 25-27 in Kyiv, a working meeting of experts from the border agencies of Belarus, Ukraine and Poland on the assessment of threats to border security took place. Experts stressed the controllability of the situation on the borders between the three countries. The main risks include illegal migration, the movement of terrorists, smuggling of weapons, ammunition and drugs. It is worth recalling that during the annual message Aliaksandr Lukashenko said that in 2016 the number of violators of the state border of the country has decreased almost twice.

On April 26, 2017 Belarusian Defence Minister Andrei Raukou spoke at the 6th Moscow Conference on International Security. The Minister once again declared Belarus' adherence to peaceful means of resolving interstate contradictions. He stated that Europe is in a state of uncertainty. He accused NATO of constantly searching for the enemy. He noted Ukraine's consistent policy of integration into the Alliance and expressed fears that NATO contingents in the Baltic countries and in Poland in the future will acquire the shock potential. Mr. Raukou called for urgent measures to resume the dialogue between the parties (obviously implying Russia and NATO). He was critical of the growth of defence spending in European countries, saying that this is a consequence of the US's lobbying for the interests of its military-industrial complex. This was a transparent hint at Poland, which at the expense of building up its military might has aspirations to become a regional center of power. He expressed fears that the withdrawal of the UK from the EU would lead to a more aggressive military policy of London.

Andrei Raukou noted that the main damage to Belarus is caused by the economic consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war:

- the investment attractiveness of the region as a whole is reduced;
- traditional markets in Ukraine are closed;
- the production ties with the Ukrainian military-industrial complex are being severed.

In addition, the illegal weapons are spread, and an class of people who can't do anything but fight appears.

The Defence Minister of Belarus described the current state of security in the region as a temporary truce.

On April 27, 2017 Aliaksandr Lukashenka met the Chairman of the State Security Committee Valery Vakulchyk. Among other issues the sides discussed the external security of Belarus, which, in Lukashenka's opinion, influences the development of the situation inside the country. Obviously, it is primarily about issues of penetration into Belarus of extremists and participants of military operations in Ukraine. But at the moment these threats are hypothetical.

During April, the SSC didn't reduce the intensity in terms of protecting the state's economic interests and fighting corruption. A number of officials of the republican and region level, as well as officials of the state enterprises were arrested.

Conclusions. The message of President Lukashenka caused a wave of sarcastic comments in Belarus, especially, in terms of claims to the EU. Meanwhile, the statements of the Belarusian leader give a very clear idea of the priorities of Minsk in relations with the West, the current state of the Belarusian-European relations, as well as about the extremely high level of psychological tension experienced by Lukashenka in recent months. The March wave of repression, absolutely illogical and harmful for the regime itself, could be one of the manifestations of this tension.

In December 2015, it was reported that two Indonesian Su-27 were sent for repairs to Belarus. It is not clear whether the four above-mentioned aircraft include them. However, the period of repair work and the modernization is 10-12 months according to the experience of the previous contracts. Taking into account the fact that the Indonesian Air Force has five Su-27s, Su-30 of the Indonesian Air Force could be sent to Baranavichy. Belarusian engineers have the experience in servicing such aircraft: major repairs and modernization of ex-Indian Su-30MKI, which were later sold to Angola.

The reports on the installation of satellite protection equipment "Satellite" on MiG-29 and Su-25 planes calls into question the previously announced plans to replace these aircraft with new Russian Su-30SM and Yak-130, respectively. The reason is the financial limitations of the budget, the inability (and unwillingness) of the authorities to finance the rearmament of the Belarusian army on the necessary scale.

It should be noted that with respect to exports, SMIC provides the growth rate not in comparison with the same period of the previous year, but only compared to the planned indicator. Thus, it is not possible to determine the scale of growth of supplies for domestic needs. However, such secrecy indirectly indicates that the supply of domestic defence products to the Belarusian law enforcement agencies has significantly grown, according to the Belarusian standards. Given that the costs of national security are stagnating, it can be stated that this growth is carried out at the expense of funds not included in the state budget.

Concerning the Belarusian-Russian summit in St. Petersburg, it's necessary to note that the Russian side initially lowered the significance of the event. The meeting of Aliaksandr Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin took place at the event, which is far from being the most important one in Russian public life and was just accompanied by the summit.

The second important point, calling into question the length of the peace between Minsk and Moscow, is the fact, that the Supreme State Council of the Union of Belarus and Russia has not yet taken place. The event is largely ritualistic. But such rituals matter in international relations. The fact that this year the State Council has not been held so far doesn't allow us to speak about the stable nature of bilateral relations. As well as the Lukashenka's harsh criticism of the EAEU during the April message.

In addition, it was not possible to resolve the problem of the entry of third-country nationals into Russia from Belarus. During the meetings of officials of various levels held in April, it was stated that a single visa space is not a matter of one year. For now, one

can count only on the recognition of visas for Belarus and Russia for the transit needs through each other's territory. But it is not clear when the parties agree at least on this.

Concerns about the Belarusian-Russian exercise "West-2017" will remain until the end of the event. This is also connected with the speculation about the possibility of using the presence of Russian troops to destabilize the situation in Belarus and/or to organize provocations against Ukraine and the Baltic states, as well as to expand Russian military presence in our country as a result of the exercises. At present, there is no evidence that the situation can develop according to these scenarios. Belarusian officials have repeatedly refuted such insinuations. However, the neighbours don't have much trust to the words of official Minsk.

With a high probability, "West-2017" will be accompanied by large-scale measures of combat training of the Russian army in the territory of the Western and/or Southern military districts of Russia, which formally isn't connected with the "West". But it will significantly exceed "West-2017" in scale and have aggressive scenarios, which will be regarded as a threat from Moscow in relation to the Baltic countries and/or Ukraine. In this case, "West-2017" will be perceived by neighbouring countries not as an independent isolated event, but as part of what is happening at Russian training grounds. Many in the West will regard this as evidence of Minsk's complete dependence on Moscow in matters of regional security, and, consequently, of the senselessness of the dialogue with the Belarusian authorities on this topic.

CSTO failed to become a full-fledged military alliance. The strengthening of the gendarmerial functions of the Organization, just like in the Sacred Union of European absolutist monarchies of the 19th century, can be stated. An attempt to meet the challenges facing the countries of the post-Soviet space (and, first of all, economic underdevelopment and social inequality) by reactionary measures, and not by reforms, will only mean further degradation of these states. Reduction of their foreign-policy weight (which is already low) casts doubt on the prospects for the acquisition of international subjectness by CSTO. The organization will increasingly concentrate on ensuring internal security of the political regimes of the participating countries. The issues of external security will be resolved only partially and from time to time. The passivity of the CSTO during the regular exacerbations of the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation is a confirmation for this.

The appointment of Henadz Kazakou the director of OJSC "AGAT - Canagement Systems" is a continuation of the tendency of strengthening the army's influence on the domestic military industry. Thus, on December 21, 2013, Major-General Ihar Dzemidzenka was appointed First Deputy Chairman of the SMIC. Earlier, he headed the Chief Military Inspection of the Armed Forces of Belarus.

Earlier, President Lukashenka sharply criticized the quality of government communication, for which SSC is responsible. A few years ago the main problem was the lack of own cryptographic algorithms and keys. The fact of equipping the SSC 14th separate governmental communication regiment with cipherware implies that software problems are resolved.

Obviously, for the Polish side, the Chechen factor represents the greatest problem along with the smuggling of excisable goods (primarily cigarettes). Currently, a significant number of Russian citizens of Chechen nationality are concentrated in Brest.

Referring to the alleged persecution for political reasons in Chechnya, they seek to infiltrate Poland in order to continue to Germany, Austria and the Scandinavian countries to obtain asylum and social benefits connected to it there. It should be noted that Chechens don't seek asylum in Belarus or Ukraine or find shelter in other regions of Russia. In fact, this is economic migration, and political persecution is mainly used as a pretext for it.

It's necessary to note that Belarusian authorities don't have reliable information on the total number of Chechen migrants in Brest. The Citizenship and Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs operates with the numbers of registered Chechens. Special services and border guards – with the estimated ones, which exceed the data by Ministry of Internal Affairs by 20-25 times: the number of Chechens in Brest can reach 3000 people. But this figure fluctuates all the time. Although Chechens do not have a significant impact on the crime situation, they create problems in terms of sanitary and epidemiological safety: most of them are not vaccinated against highly contagious diseases (measles, whooping cough, diphtheria).

Observers noted the rigidity of Andrei Raukou's speech at the Moscow Conference on International Security. However, it is too early to draw conclusions about changing the policy of Minsk in favour of greater rapprochement with Russia. It's necessary to note that:

- Raukou voiced the position not of the Defence Ministry, but of the state as a whole;
- the rhetoric of the Belarusian officials varies depending on the audience; and it's unlikely that the audience of Moscow conference would have understood the bows towards the West or Ukraine.

Therefore, conclusions should be made according to the business, and not to the words. The exercise "West-2017": their openness, scenario and information support will be a test for the constructiveness of the official Minsk.

