

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

The most important events of the month. The event of the month was the kidnapping of a Ukrainian citizen Pavel Grib by Russian special services in Homel.

The kidnapped doesn't represent any operational interest for the special services. Provocation was intended to cause a crisis in the Belarusian-Ukrainian relations. That was achieved: Ukrainian top officials made tough statements and accusations of official Minsk in duplicity. The reaction of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry to the statements of Ukrainian officials was completely unsuccessful, which complicated the situation even more.

The developments within the month. On August 3, 2017 an expanded meeting in the State Military Industrial Committee (hereinafter SMIC) chaired by Aleh Dvihalyou was held. Among other issues, the results of the work of enterprises subordinated to SMIC in the first half of 2017 were discussed. The growth of industrial production by 17.1% was announced. While exports of goods and services rose by only 2.3%. It is worth noting that not only newly manufactured products refer to industrial products, but also the repair and modernization of old equipment. Profitability of sales in industry is 22,6%. Revenue per average employee is about USD 22.7 thousand. Net profit of SMIC enterprises is over USD 72 million.

On August 9, 2017 President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev received Chairman of the State Border Committee of Belarus Anatoly Lappo. The successful development of relations between our countries in various spheres, including border security, was announced.

On August 22-25, 2017, the heads of the main operational directorates of the general staffs of the armies of Collective Security Treaty Organization (hereinafter referred to as CSTO) member states visited Belarus. The problematic issues of CSTO coalition military development, including material and technical support of CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (hereinafter referred to as CRRF), were discussed. The event was held on the initiative of Belarus.

On August 25, 2017, a representative of the Russian Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation reported on the continuation of negotiations with Belarus on the implementation of the contract for the delivery of 32 armoured personnel carriers BTR-82A to Minsk. Which was signed back in 2015, and the delivery was planned for 2016.

August 8, 2017 Aliaksandr Lukashenka met with one of the most trusted officials (and perhaps the only trusted one) - Viktor Sheiman. The topic for discussion was the development of the Orsha district. President said that in the near future "... all members of the government ... will report" on the situation in the Orsha district. Which should become an example of the development of territories for the whole of Belarus.

The final, but demonstrative, event of the month was Lukashenka's signing Decree No. 314 on August 31, 2017. According to it, the decreasing coefficients of pensions for servicemen and law enforcers are introduced until July 2019. Later, there were informal reports on the planned increase in the monetary allowances in the military and law enforcement agencies. However, the payment system is also changing. As a result, with the growth of salaries of active military personnel and members of the law enforcement agencies, their pensioners may lose a significant part of their earnings.

Throughout August, the official Minsk was under the informational and political pressure associated with the forthcoming Belarusian-Russian exercises “West-2017”. Thus, Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine Oleksandr Turchynov said that Russia is using the exercises to prepare for a big war with the West. In Ukraine, the number of Russian servicemen attracted to the exercises was estimated at 230-240 thousand people, the number of military equipment - more than 10 thousand units. It is about the whole series of events for the combat training of Russian army during August-September in the territory of the Western and Southern military districts of Russia, which are held according to a single plan.

Poland also expressed fear of the possibility of Russian military presence build-up in Belarus.

There were statements by the top military commanders of Poland and Ukraine about possible threats during the “West-2017” exercise. They announce 100,000 Russian military, which will allegedly take part in the “West-2017”.

Strict statements about the “West” were also heard from the US: Western countries should be ready for any development of events.

In turn, the Belarusian authorities sought to neutralize the fears of neighbouring countries associated with the “West-2017” exercise. Belarus tries to be open in this issue, which is quite. Thus, the Ministry of Defence of Belarus launched a special website dedicated to the “West-2017”, more than 270 journalists from dozens of countries are accredited. More than 80 observers representing foreign states and international organizations have been invited.

On August 29, 2017 two briefings of the representatives of the Ministry of Defence of Belarus and Russia on the “West-2017” took place. It should be noted that the Russian side provided more complete information about the event.

During the briefings it was stated that the exercises will be anti-terrorist oriented. The idea of the exercises stipulates that extremist groups penetrated the territory of Belarus and the Kaliningrad region of Russia, aiming at carrying out terrorist acts and destabilizing the situation. Extremists have external support, receiving weapons and military equipment both from the air and from the sea. During the exercise, it is planned to work out several tactical episodes to combat conventional terrorists. The first is the transfer of troops to areas of terrorists’ activities with the isolation of these territories. Then the actions of the Air Force and Air Defence group to support the land forces and block air supply channels for the militants will be worked out. Further there will be a special operation to eliminate illegal armed groups and stabilize the situation. The forces of the Baltic Fleet will hold a naval blockade of the region for conducting a special operation and suppressing the withdrawal of terrorists by sea. The necessity of the exercise is explained by the fact that in the armies of Russia and Belarus there have been changes in the training and in the management of troops. The task is to check the effectiveness of these changes. Preparation for the “West-2017” began in March this year.

Chief of the General Staff of the Belarusian Army Aleh Belakoneu noted that in determining the intention of the exercise “West-2017” events in the countries of the Middle East were taken into account. The main reason for the worsening of the situation, according to the exercises’ scenario, is the desire to destabilize the territory of Belarus

and “... to achieve deterioration of relations in the Union State of Belarus and Russia”. And Russia, in accordance with the existing treaty base, is providing assistance to Belarus in countering the threat.

The Belarusian military leader rejected the assumption that “West-2017” would entail the build-up of a Russian military presence in Belarus.

During the briefing of the Chief of the General Staff Aleh Belakoneu showed a map of the scenario of the West-2017. On it the north-western part of Belarus is allocated to the fictitious state of “Veyshnoriya”, with which Belarus and Russia have an imaginary conflict. “Veyshnoriya” is situated on the territories with the predominance of the Catholic population and a significant percentage of the Polish minority.

During August, preparations for the upcoming exercise “West-2017” were made. The landing on the airfield section of the road by transport and combat aviation was worked out.

On August 21-25, 2017 a joint exercise with the logistics support forces of the armies of Belarus and Russia was held. The event involved more than 2,500 servicemen and about 500 pieces of equipment.

At the end of August, an exercise on tactical and special training of the communications troops of the Armed Forces of Belarus was held. It is planned that during the exercise “West-2017” a communication system will be deployed on new and modernized facilities and complexes of the Belarusian army.

On August 29, 2017 the training camp of the military-obligated territorial troops began in Hlybokae district. It takes place in preparation for the “West-2017”. The event is held in order to work out the issues of formation of territorial defence territorial control bodies and territorial troops. The formed command bodies and territorial troops will take part in the “West-2017”.

The Belarusian defence industry is also preparing for the “West-2017”. It is planned to use the exercises for practical testing of weapons, military and special equipment. In total, more than 20 samples will be sent: plane and helicopter type UAVs of various class and purpose, lightly armoured vehicles with various types of weapons and modifications, communications equipment, radio electronic warfare systems for fighting UAVs, modernized armoured vehicles and artillery fire control systems.

The results of the entrance campaign for the Military Academy of Belarus have been summed up. A total of 558 cadets have been enrolled, of which 82 people will be trained in the interests of other law enforcement agencies. Only 7 people of the enrolled are graduates of Minsk Suvorov School (this year 55 cadets graduated from the school). Only 59 of the more than 500 graduates of other cadet schools wanted and could start a military career. Only 16 servicemen enrolled in the Academy, while every year about 14 thousand conscript soldiers are demobilized from the army. The main contingent of cadets (470 people or 84%) is from the civil youth. From all the cadets 95.7% are Belarusians, 2.4% - Russians, 1.4% - Poles. Minsk residents are only 5.1% of the total enrolled in the Academy, while about 20% of the population is living in the capital. The percentage of cadets from Brest (25.3%) and Vitsebsk (17.1%) regions is disproportionately large. The social structure of the Belarusian army is still workers' and peasants' - 70.5% of cadets. Another 16.9% of cadets are from families of military

servicemen and employees of law enforcement agencies. Only 7.9% of cadets consider their families to be prosperous, 67% attribute themselves to the middle class. While the middle class for the Belarusian province is the family of 4 with the income of USD 400-600 per month with two people working. Which, taking into account the Belarusian cost of living is, in fact, poverty. Psychologically, not everyone is ready to classify themselves as poor people, even though they are. Therefore, the share of middle class among the cadets of the Military Academy seems to be overestimated.

Conclusions. The August argument between Ukrainian and Belarusian diplomats didn't come from scratch. Earlier in Kyiv, tough characteristics of the official Minsk already could be heard in the lobbies. Now they are publicly announced, obviously not for the last time.

The kidnapping of Pavel Grib by the Russian secret services hit not only on the Belarusian-Ukrainian relations. The provocation also undermined attempts by official Minsk to act as an independent actor: in the West, they expect a public and clear reaction of the Belarusian authorities to the fact that the Ukrainian citizen was kidnapped by foreign special services on the territory of our country. As well as the confirmation of the ability of the Belarusian authorities to control the activity of Russian special services in Belarus. That, in turn, means aggravation of the Belarusian-Russian relations. At present, Minsk can't do this.

The inactivity of the Belarusian side in Pavel Grib's case will be perceived by the West and Ukraine as evidence of Belarus' lack of independence and its inability to act as a party in matters of regional security. The Kremlin well calculated the consequences of the provocation, and, it should be admitted, seriously hit the prospects for the development of relations of Minsk with Kyiv and the West.

In addition, the provocation of Russian special services shows that the Belarusian-Russian relations have lost the character of exclusivity and even can hardly be called friendly.

Official Minsk found itself in a difficult situation. Without external assistance it will be extremely difficult to improve relations with the West, Ukraine and prevent further deterioration of relations with Russia.

The total sales volume of SMIC enterprises for the first half of this year may exceed USD 400 million. Of which more than USD 50 million falls on the domestic market. It is worth noting that SMIC is including not all military industry enterprises. Obviously, the total volume of production of defence products can be significantly bigger (by one and a half times or more). Accordingly, the specified amount of supply of defence products to domestic consumers is not final.

The fact of the President's of Azerbaijan meeting the head of the State Border Committee of Belarus confirms the high level of cooperation between the leaders of the two countries. For a long period Azerbaijan is a strategic partner of Belarus in the South Caucasus, including in the sphere of security.

Official Minsk would like to re-equip the Belarusian component of CRRF at the expense of Russia. However, Moscow offered to buy Russian arms and equipment on preferential terms. There is still no one willing to invest in the common cause (collective security) among the CSTO countries and the process of equipping the CRRF with

uniform weapons and equipment has stopped. The meeting of heads of the main operational directorates of CSTO armies' general staffs can be seen as an attempt to push Russia toward greater generosity towards its formal allies.

Speaking about the prospects for the delivery of Russian BTR-82A to Belarus, it is necessary to note that on October 30, 2015 President Lukashenka, speaking at the operational gathering of the command staff of the Armed Forces, demanded the military to focus on domestic equipment, repair and modernization services. He criticized the planned deliveries of UAVs and armored vehicles from abroad. Thus, a positive decision on this issue depends only on him. The Belarusian leader changes his decisions reluctantly.

The fact of Viktor Sheiman's appointment of Orsha district "curator" and the intention to work out the schemes for the development of the regions of Belarus show that the central authorities are aware of the failure of their policy towards the territories. As a result, many regions of Belarus have turned into zones of social and economic disaster. An attempt to create a general scheme for their development is doomed to failure. The Belarusian regions are very different in terms of management and potential. The creation of a regional development agency as an investment agent of the Government could be an adequate response in the situation. As well as the expansion of the powers of local authorities with the simultaneous improvement of the system of controlling them.

Obviously, the reason for introducing lowering coefficients for pensions of the military and law enforcement agencies is the inability to ensure their growth. It is doubtful that the savings on pensions will exceed USD 7.5 million per month. This attempt to be penny-wise is the evidence of problems (existing or forecasted) with budget revenues.

Our forecast that the Belarusian-Russian exercise "West-2017" will "dissolve" in the large-scale military exercises of the Russian army with the similar name, which will be held in September, comes true. As a result, both Belarusian and Russian exercises will be perceived by external forces as a single event. This means that political responsibility for any incidents that may occur as a result of Russia's actions will be imposed on Belarus as well.

In the meantime, we can state that the Belarusian side could not use "West-2017" to confirm its status as an independent actor in matters of regional security. Belarus is still viewed as dependent on Russia by the West and Ukraine.

During the information support of "West-2017" Belarus made a number of mistakes. Thus, the Belarusian leadership hoped to use the factor of transparency of conducting the exercise for political bargaining with the West. Moscow, in spite of confrontation with NATO, provided much more information than Minsk did. Thereby confirming the thesis that regional security should be discussed with Russia, not with Belarus.

The format of the briefing of the Chief of the General Staff of the Belarusian Army Aleh Belakoneu was also unsuccessful, because it didn't provide an opportunity for the audience to ask questions. This was regarded as a sign of lack of self-confidence. Although, the Belarusian generals wanted to avoid questions of a political nature as well as the need to comment on the combat training of the Russian army, which will take

place in the western regions of the neighbouring country during the Belarusian-Russian exercise “West-2017”.

It is an important question, where exactly the concept of “Veyshnoriya” was invented: in Minsk or in Moscow. The geographical location of the fictional country was expected to provoke a political scandal. Which, however, very quickly grew into a stream of jokes and mockery. Moreover, the Belarusian generals turned out to be the objects of jokes and were considered guilty in such a situation. Mockery at the generals in fact undermines the authority of the army as the most important social institution and one of the pillars of the state. It is not clear whether this situation is an accident, or the mythical “Veyshnoriya” was originally invented as a political provocation. The latter seems more likely.

Working out the blockade of the coast of the Kaliningrad region during the exercise “West-2017” is also a politically provocative point. It can be perceived as a threat of blockade of the coast of neighbouring Baltic countries.

The national military-industrial complex traditionally uses multinational exercises that take place on the territory of Belarus both for research purposes and as an advertising platform for promoting its own products.

As in previous years, the service in the military and law enforcement agencies remains an attractive social lift for people from not rich or frankly poor families. We have to state a social gap between the officer corps and even the middle class, not mentioning well-off classes of the population. Which is a serious problem. In fact, there is another split of the Belarusian society. In addition, it should be noted that the average person from the lower social groups is usually vulnerable to the impact of propaganda and psychological manipulation due to the lower quality of education and uncritical perception of information.

The existing system of cadet schools doesn't prove value, and a small percentage of pupils choose a military and law enforcement career.

