

Analytical report:
Situation in the field of
national security and defence
of Belarus (June 2019)

Minsk

The most important events of the month. On July 12-13, a delegation of the Ministry of Public Security of Vietnam headed by Minister General of the Army To Lam visited Minsk. The Minister met with the leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Committee of Judicial Expertise and the State Security Committee (SSC) of Belarus. During the meetings in the first two institutions, the prospects for cooperation in law enforcement, scientific and educational fields were discussed. Particular attention was paid to combating organized crime.

Belarusian chose not to specify the subject of negotiations between the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security and the SSC. Vietnamese sources reported that one of the main topics was the protection of the political regime in two countries (the so-called defence of the constitutional order).

The developments within the month. On July 9, 2019 State Secretary of the Belarusian-Russian Union Grigory Rapota said that the draft agreement between Minsk and Moscow on the mutual recognition of visas has not yet been agreed upon by Belarus for political reasons. The reasons were not specified. But the political atmosphere between the two countries so far clearly does not contribute to the coherence of Belarus.

On the same day, negotiations between the Director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Sergey Naryshkin and the Chairman of the State Security Committee of Belarus Valery Vakulchik regarding the results and prospects of interaction between the special services were held. Traditionally, countering international terrorism, religious and political extremism, and spreading the influence of radical organizations has been called priorities for cooperation. At the same time, Mr. Naryshkin announced aggressive attempts by Western countries to intervene in the internal affairs of Russia and Belarus, which Russian Foreign Intelligence Service and Belarusian SSC confront. Obviously, by saying “extremism” Naryshkin more likely meant the activities of political opponents of the Belarusian and Russian regimes, and “aggressive intervention” – Western institutions’ supporting the basic democratic values.

On July 9, 2019, the Head of the General Staff of the Army of Belarus Aleh Belakoneu paid a visit to Ukraine. During a meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart Ruslan Khomchak, he discussed regional security and the development of bilateral relations in the military sphere. The parties expressed their intention to continue the dialogue in this area.

On July 9-11, a meeting of representatives of the armed forces of Belarus and Kazakhstan on the development of the military communications system was held in Minsk. On July 11, 2019 Kazakhstani guests were shown the capabilities of communication equipment produced in Belarus.

On July 21-26, the 2nd meeting of the Joint Belarusian-Uzbek Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation took place in Minsk and Brest. The representatives of interested authorities and enterprises of the two countries took part in the event. The parties discussed current cooperation in the military-technical sphere and prospects for bilateral cooperation. The Uzbek representatives visited a number of enterprises of the military-industrial complex of Belarus, where they got acquainted with the capabilities of these enterprises. The duration of the event (6 days), obviously, is precisely connected with the desire to familiarize the Uzbeks with the potential of the Belarusian military industry in detail.

On July 25, 2019, the representative of the Ministry of Defence announced that after changing the legislation regarding the provision of deferrals from military service for receiving education, the army expects additionally to recruit up to 3 thousand people this year, and in the spring of 2020 - up to 1.5 thousand.

From July 29 to August 1 in Tula, Russia, the 20th meeting of the Belarus-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation took place. It was stated that the volume of Russian exports of defence products to Belarus in 2019 will be about USD 60 million. Over the past 10 years, the volume of such deliveries has exceeded USD 1 billion. The current order portfolio of Belarus is USD 373 million.

In July, a plan for the Belarusian-Russian exercises “Shield of the Union – 2019”, which should be held in September in Russia, was approved. The extent and format of the participation of Belarus in the event was published as well. Based on the published data, the “Shield of the Union” itself is a division-level exercise, and Belarusian participation in them involves sending almost two brigades.

It is stated that the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) will conduct six exercises in 2019, which are planned to involve about 12 thousand people.

In July, a number of army training events were held:

- At the faculty of the General Staff of the Military Academy of Belarus, a command-staff game for controlling a mechanized brigade during a combined arms battle (maneuver defence and subsequent attack) was held. Among other things, issues of interaction with the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA IT), territorial troops, aviation and air defence have been trained.

- The training of the communications troops of the Belarusian army on the organization of a stable communications system in the face of active opposition by the enemy was held. The event became part of the preparation for the Belarusian-Russian exercise “Union Shield-2019”. Liaison officers of the Western Military District of the Russian Army took part in it to exchange experience. In total, more than 1.5 thousand people and more than 350 units of communication equipment were involved. The communication system was deployed only on new and modernized facilities and complexes.

- The paratrooper battalion of the 103rd brigade of the Special Operations Forces trained forcing the water barrier on armored vehicles, searching and blocking the enemy in the village, and city battle.

- There was a special training of EW troops, during which the conduct of electronic reconnaissance and suppression of enemy electronic equipment, as well as the fight against illegal armed groups were trained. As far as one can judge, the event was of a research nature: the capabilities of new automated radio jamming stations were tested.

- The combat readiness check of the missile forces of the Belarusian army was held. Units carried out marches at a distance of over 400 km, counteracted enemy sabotage and reconnaissance groups and trained missile strikes (including massive ones).

In Minsk a training with control groups for the formation of territorial troops was held. The main goal of the event was to improve the practical skills of officials in managing the formation of territorial defence headquarters and territorial troops.

In July, prosecutors continued to work on crime prevention among military personnel:

- The prosecutors held a meeting in the Brest border group with military servicemen.

- The 2nd brigade of the MIA IT summed up the work to strengthen discipline and the rule of law in the first half of 2019. The event was attended by representatives of the Minsk Oblast Prosecutor's Office, the SSC military counterintelligence, and more than 250 military personnel. In addition to the rule of law in the military units of the region, issues of crime prevention, the interaction of unit commanders with relatives of military servicemen were discussed. The representative of the prosecutor's office held a preventive conversation with the military about criminal liability for military crimes.

Conclusions. Speaking about the visit of the delegation of the Ministry of Public Security of Vietnam to Belarus, we should note the following. Vietnamese organized crime is actively trying to expand its presence in the EU. Belarus periodically acts as a transit country for illegal activity. There is a serious basis for cooperation between law enforcement agencies of the two countries in countering cross-border crime. A problem may be the fact that, according to European law enforcement experts, Vietnamese criminal groups in EU countries have high patrons in Hanoi. Including from among law enforcement agencies of this country. Therefore, the real, and not declared, readiness of the Vietnamese to counteract international crime in a number of areas (illegal traffic of people and goods, counterfeit products) remains questionable. Further, the system of government in Vietnam and Belarus, the political culture in the two countries, the state of public relations and the external environment are unlikely to make the experience of Belarus in protecting the political regime significant for the Vietnamese. And vice versa. We can confidently assume that an important area of interest for the two sides is cooperation in the field of foreign intelligence in terms of exchanging information and analysing the situation in their regions (Eastern Europe, post-Soviet countries, Indochina, and China, which is especially interesting for Minsk,).

The text of the Belarusian-Russian agreement on the mutual recognition of visas was not made public, despite the fact that it was planned to sign the document in December 2018. Obviously, one of the reasons for not signing the agreement is the lack of resolution of issues important for Minsk. It is necessary to recall that the most painful moment for the Belarus is Russia's blocking the crossing of the Belarusian-Russian land border by third-country nationals: Russia refers to the absence of international checkpoints on the border of the two countries through which foreigners could enter Russia from Belarus.

Sergey Naryshkin is one of the last among the Russian top officials, who support the Belarusian-Russian union in the form, which is preferable for Minsk. We note that previously the FSB of Russia was the main partner of the SSC of Belarus. However, for a long time there is no information about the communication of the leadership of the two special services in a bilateral format. Of course, there remain multilateral platforms of the CIS countries. But in general, taking into account a number of external signs (including

provocative actions on the territory of Belarus of formally non-governmental Russian organizations and the actions of the Russian special service to kidnap a citizen of Ukraine Pavel Grib in our country), it can be stated that the cooling of the SSC-FSB relations is sustainable. It is caused by a change in the political atmosphere between the two countries at the highest level.

The Belarusian-Ukrainian dialogue in the military sphere is a positive factor, but it is still not worth overestimating it. In conditions of hybrid aggression, the army is not the main policymaker. The position of the special services and the foreign affairs agency is more important. In this part the Belarusian-Ukrainian cooperation is not so close. Without a comprehensive development of the dialogue between Minsk and Kyiv in all areas, it is difficult to count on effective cooperation between the military of the two countries. Moreover, the Ukrainian military elites have a different opinion on the ability of official Minsk to pursue an autonomous policy in the field of military security and military diplomacy from Moscow.

It is interesting to note that shortly after the meeting of Aleh Belakoneu with Ruslan Khomchak, in the Ukrainian segment of the Internet appeared unverified information about the deployment of Russian military units in southeastern Belarus. Although such actions have traditionally been perceived as a Russian provocation against Belarusian-Ukrainian relations, in this case there in Minsk they think that the initiators of this information provocation are situated in Kyiv: not all representatives of the Ukrainian elites are interested in the positive dynamics of bilateral security relations. The motives for this behaviour are not completely clear.

Communication systems have long been one of the priorities for the development of Belarusian national military capabilities. The military industry of Belarus has developed a number of solutions in this field that may be interesting to Kazakhstan. In particular, we are talking about satellite communications systems, including using the Belintersat-1 domestic satellite. In recent years, due to high competition, the satellite communications market has experienced a drop in prices for services. Using the resource of the Belarusian satellite is an important commercial task.

Belarus is interested in developing cooperation with Uzbekistan through the military-industrial complex, both in connection with the fact that Tashkent has the largest army in the region, and because of its ties with Afghanistan, which is one of the largest operators of the Mi-8/Mi-17 helicopters. The Belarusian defence industry previously offered its services to Afghanistan regarding the repair of this aircraft. After the nationalization of the Orsha Aircraft Repair Plant, there is an issue of its work to the break-even level: it is necessary to increase the package of orders by 50% for the enterprise to develop stably.

It is stated that the reason for changing the legislation regarding conscription for military service is the demographic situation and the mass exodus of young men outside the country. It seems that this is only part of the problem. The need for draftees increased due to the increase in the staffing of the army and the upcoming increase in the staffing of the State Border Committee. Given the budgetary constraints, the choice was made in favour of staffing additional posts with military servicemen who cost the budget at least half the cost of a professional soldier.

It is worth recalling that the requirements on the health status of draftees were previously relaxed to recognize them as fit for military service.

Speaking about the Belarusian-Russian military-technical cooperation, we note the following. Obviously, the payment for Russia's military exports to Belarus is carried out in US dollars. This follows from the statements about the volume of such supplies over the past decade, when the exchange rate of the RUB has changed significantly. At the same time, Kazakhstan pays for Russian weapons in RUB at prices fixed for the time of the conclusion of the contract. This conclusion can be drawn from the known data on the cost of Russian Su-30SM fighters delivered to the Kazakh Air Force. Thus, there is no need to talk about a certain exclusivity of Belarusian-Russian relations in the military-technical sphere.

The order portfolio in the interests of Minsk announced by Russia leaves open the question of the prospects for the supply of a Su-30SM squadron to Belarus (worth about USD 600 million).

Regarding the upcoming Belarusian-Russian exercise "Shield of the Union-2019", it is interesting whether it once again "by chance" coincides with large-scale combat training activities of the Russian army of an offensive nature. This can lead to the situation, when "Shield of the Union" for external observers will be a part of these Russian exercise.

