

**Analytical report:**  
**Situation in the field of**  
**national security and defence**  
**of Belarus (December 2020)**

**The most important events of the month.** The budget for 2021 has been adopted in Belarus. It provides for a serious deficit amid rising taxes on income of citizens and on a number of goods, including medicines and baby products. In addition, the introduction of new taxes was initiated. It is clear that the government is preparing for a further drop in revenues.

The growth in spending on national defence and law enforcement will be about 12% in BYN.

A decree on clarifying the indicators of the budget of Belarus for 2020 was published. There are no fundamental amendments regarding the allocations related to law enforcement agencies: their budgets have been changed by 1-2% of the planned ones.

**The developments within the month.** The month began with a large-scale inspection of territorial defence, which took place on December 1 in three districts of the Mahilioú region. The ability of local authorities to form territorial troops on time (three battalions, as far as can be judged, reduced in size, since only 300 people and 25 units of equipment were called up), the readiness of territorial defence headquarters and units of territorial troops to carry out tasks were assessed. The issues of protecting objects, organizing checkpoints, countering sabotage groups were trained. It is reported that the event was planned in several stages, only the first one was held in December.

Also, in early December, on the basis of the Military Academy of Belarus, the chairmen of the district executive committees were trained in the basics of territorial defence as well as the organization of the work of the district defence councils chairmen in the course of territorial defence deployment and conduct.

On December 2, 2020, the summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) via videoconference was held. According to the results of the event, the Plan for the Development of Military Cooperation and a new Anti-Drug Strategy for the same period for 2021-2025 were approved. It was also decided to sign an Agreement on joint material, technical and medical support of the collective forces. The amendments were made to the 2007 Agreement on the CSTO Peacekeeping Activities, which relate to the participation of the CSTO Collective Peacekeeping Forces in UN operations. The decision to improve the training system for the state authorities of the CSTO countries was made and the budget of the Organization for 2021 was approved. The size of the latter has not been announced, but it is insignificant and amounts to several million US dollars (in 2020 it was planned at the level of less than 7 million USD, is 10% of which are the contribution of Belarus).

The Belarusian regime has traditionally tried to use the international platform to strengthen its positions by imparting a geopolitical factors to the internal political crisis in the country. Aliaksandr Lukashenka has once again accused NATO of aggressive aspirations not only against Belarus, but also more broadly, hinting at the CSTO countries. He announced the intentions of the Polish leadership to annex part of the territory of Belarus, using the NATO grouping created for these purposes. All this is allegedly for the sake of forming a sanitary belt between the EU and Russia for subsequent pressure on Moscow and creating threats to other CSTO countries.

On December 6, 2020 Ambassador of Belarus to Egypt Siarhei Tsiarentsyeu held a meeting with Deputy Minister of Defence Industry, Executive Director of the National Organization of the Defence Industry of Egypt Mohamed Salah El-Din. Issues of bilateral

cooperation, including the joint production of various equipment and its promotion to the markets of African countries, were discussed.

On December 10, 2020 Lukashenka approved a plan for the use of a joint Belarusian-Russian group of forces. This top secret document is approved every 5 years. But in this case, there are doubts about the existence of a single Belarusian-Russian plan. Thus, it is stated that the document approved by Lukashenka has been agreed with the Russian side and is almost identical to the corresponding Russian plan. That is, Russian generals have their own plans for interaction with the Belarusian military in case of a war.

On December 17, 2020, the EU introduced another package of sanctions against the Belarusian regime, which includes restrictions against seven economic entities. Of these, four are military-industrial complex enterprises.

On December 18, 2020, a meeting of the Council of CIS Heads of State was held in the format of a videoconference. During the event, among other things, the Concept of military cooperation of the CIS countries until 2025 was adopted. The sides also discussed the military-political situation in the CIS and along its borders, issues of ensuring joint security and priorities for the further development of military cooperation.

On December 18, 2020, it became known that due to the situation with the coronavirus, the conscription campaign in Belarus was extended until January 1, 2021. Allegedly, not all recruits have time to undergo a medical examination due to the fact that many medical institutions have been redesigned to fight COVID-19. Also, some of the conscripts fell ill or ended up in self-isolation and it was not possible to send them to the troops.

The government of Belarus made a decision to close land borders with the EU countries and Ukraine for departure from December 21, 2020 (an exception was made for certain categories of persons). The reason is allegedly Chinese coronavirus. At the same time, the border with Russia on the Belarusian side is open (but since March 2020 it has been tightly closed on the Russian side). There are no restrictions on international air travel.

On December 29, 2020, Lukashenka expanded the powers of his assistants - inspectors in regions and Minsk. Among other things, they received the right to involve state organizations, including law enforcement agencies, in carrying out the orders of the ruler, to control economic activities. In addition, the assistant inspectors are entrusted with the functions of identifying sources and factors in the regions that pose a threat to national security, monitoring, analysing and forecasting socio-political and socio-economic processes, making proposals to ensure internal political stability in the region, including strengthening the rule of law. In fact, we are witnessing the formation of the institutions of military governors in the regions of Belarus.

Local communities continue to be objects of pressure and terror from the regime. The Belarusian authorities see grassroots activism as a challenge and a potential base for the deployment of broader political resistance. Telegram chats that unite residents of a certain territory or an enterprise are a tool for coordinating and organizing activities. The authorities have already counted more than 1,000 of such chats. In Minsk, the audience of such chats varies from 6 to 15% of the total population of the administrative-territorial units of the capital.

As expected, there is more and more evidence that the prosecutor general's office of Belarus is playing a coordinating role in organizing terror against opponents of the regime. In fact, it guarantees impunity when using violence against protesters.

In December, an agreement between the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus and the Federal Service of the National Guard of Russia (Rosgvardia) on cooperation was announced. The signing took place back in November. This aroused suspicions about the preparations for the introduction of Russian troops into Belarus, the possibility of Russian military intervention in events in our country, etc. In fact, this agreement is of a working nature and does not provide for far-reaching steps.

In December, Belarusian regime reported on the attempts of the Polish special services to recruit two Belarusian officers who were on the territory of Poland on duty. Judging by the lack of reaction from the Polish side, these events really took place. The Belarusian side stated the protest to Poland. But the topic wasn't discussed any more by the Belarusian side: there is no mention of this case on official resources.

The prosecutor's office carried out a preventive measure with conscripts in order to prevent illegal behaviour. In this case, the military unit is not named. Apparently, we are talking about the 2nd brigade of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Interior Troops (MIA IT). More than 200 servicemen participated in the event along with the command of the military unit. It is interesting to note that they were wearing masks and the photographs were taken from behind: obviously, the command is equally concerned about the Chinese coronavirus and the prospect of the deanonymizing of their subordinates.

In the 72nd Joint Training Centre of the Army, the report of the Minsk region prosecutor on the elimination of violations of the legislation on the prevention of offenses and the prevention of suicidal incidents was presented. The prosecutor's office and the military have studied new approaches to working with conscripts.

In the North-Western Operational Command, the report of the prosecutor of the Minsk region to eliminate violations in the field of the safety of military property was presented.

According to the prosecutor general's office of Belarus, in 2020 the number of cybercrimes has increased sharply: from just over 10 thousand in 2019 to over 25 thousand in 2020.

Belarus entered 2021 without the Security Council State Secretary: the previous head, General Valery Vakulchyk, was appointed assistant inspector for the Brest region on October 29, 2020. This indirectly confirms that the decision to expand the functions of assistant inspectors was then taken without preliminary study, personally by Lukashenka. In this regard, the figure of the new Secretary of State will be a sing, which will give certain hints on the priorities of the regime in the security sphere.

**Conclusions.** Against the background of a sharp reduction in spending on the social sphere, the national economy and national activities, the actual invariability of spending on law enforcement agencies in 2020 allows them to be considered protected. Which in the current conditions clearly defines the priorities of the Belarusian regime: forceful self-preservation. The redistribution, albeit insignificant, of appropriations for law enforcement agencies (a decrease in defence spending and an increase in the Ministry of

Internal Affairs) clearly indicates that there is currently no external threat to Belarus and this threat is not expected.

Government spending planned for 2021 will help maintain the functioning of the law enforcement system at the current level. Which to a relatively small extent depends on expensive imports. However, the draft budget of Belarus for 2021 does not provide for serious funding for investments in the rearmament of the army.

Taking into account the political situation, if the Belarusian regime manages to find additional funds to finance the security agencies, they will primarily be directed to increasing staff salaries in order to ensure their loyalty and an acceptable level of staffing. This means that purchases of expensive weapons are postponed to an uncertain future.

The actual freezing of defence spending confirms that the Belarusian authorities use threats of external aggression from the West only as a way to intimidate the population in order to consolidate it around the regime. Neither NATO nor Poland is viewed as a real threat. Otherwise, military purchases would become a budget policy priority.

In general, there were many confirmations that the authorities did not see an external military threat in December. Thus, the exercise on territorial defence in the Mahilioú region was extremely poorly covered in the official media. Although it fits perfectly into the narrative of the state propaganda about some external threat to the country's independence.

Further, the unsuccessful recruitment of Belarusian officers by the Polish special services is a good texture for state propaganda, confirmation of the theses about the aggressive aspirations of Warsaw. But the official Minsk did not take advantage of it, which is another evidence of its unwillingness to complicate relations with the West, creating new points of tension.

Also, during the CSTO summit, Lukashenka, as a response to the aggressive military aspirations of the West, suggested that the post-Soviet countries develop precisely economic cooperation, not military one. That disavows his statements on the impending aggression against Belarus by NATO: otherwise, one should turn to their formal allies for military and political assistance.

The myths about the Western threat are also used by the official Minsk to get support from Moscow. First of all – financial and economic support. The Belarusian regime is looking for ways to guarantee itself stable external support, avoiding, if possible, counter-obligations. Traditionally, the Kremlin provided it, fearing that pro-Western political forces would come to power in Belarus. Since the beginning of the popular uprising in Belarus in August 2020, Lukashenka seeks to give it a geopolitical dimension, denying the endogenous nature of what is happening and presenting it as part of the confrontation between the West and Russia.

It should be noted that by the end of December the accusations of the West in preparing aggression against Belarus by Lukashenka disappeared. He again returned to the stories that without him (Lukashenka), some powerful external forces, which he does not name, will turn Belarus into an arena of battle among themselves.

Minsk seeks to develop relations with Egypt, considering it as an entry point to the markets of the countries of Africa and the Arab East. This cooperation from the Belarusian side is directed at the highest political level. But so far the achievements are

more than modest. There is no clarity about the economic efficiency of joint ventures created by the countries. It is unlikely that Egypt will be able to replace traditional sales markets for the Belarusian industry in the foreseeable future. In addition, Cairo itself has a relatively developed industry. It is more interested in technologies and investments, and not in the screwdriver assembly of Belarusian products.

If the hypothesis about the refusal of Minsk and Moscow from the practice of joint combat planning is correct, then only the Kremlin can be the initiator of this. Minsk simply would not have dared to make such a demarche. On the Russian side, this is a serious political gesture towards Lukashenka and a sign to the Belarusian military elite that the Belarusian ruler has lost the status of the only guarantor of Belarusian-Russian cooperation. Nothing is known about the fate of the new military doctrine of the so-called “Union state”, which was approved by Moscow more than two years ago, but is still ignored by Minsk. Although Lukashenka has repeatedly stated that Belarusian-Russian security cooperation does not depend on problems in bilateral political relations, the practice demonstrates the opposite.

It is unlikely that the December package of EU sanctions will seriously affect the economic activities of the blacklisted companies in the Belarusian military-industrial complex: their main clients are outside the EU. But certain difficulties may arise with the purchase of the necessary production equipment and components. Of course, there are workarounds, but in relation to production equipment, in this case, the problems with warranty and service arise.

Despite the problems with the coronavirus, the reaction of the law enforcement agencies to it varies. So, the adoption of the military oath by the young replenishment of the State Border Committee was carried out without the admission of outsiders and in compliance with the mask regime by the military. In the army, relatives and friends of the military were allowed to the oath ceremony, while the mask regime was practically not observed by civilians, and was not observed at all by the military. We have devoted a [special article](#) to the reaction of the law enforcement agencies to the second wave of the Chinese coronavirus epidemic.

The decision to close the border has nothing to do with Covid-19. There is no more reason to talk about the possibility of importing the disease: all infections are internal, not imported. It seems that in this case, in one combination or another, the authorities have three considerations:

- The national air carrier Belavia suffers serious losses, the state has limited opportunities to support the airline. The closure of borders contributes to an increase in passenger traffic and revenue for Belavia.

- The regime needs to somehow react to Western sanctions, demonstrating its decisiveness. Minsk has no opportunity to “hit” the EU and the US. Therefore, we decided to act on the principle of “beat your own people in order the others to be afraid”.

- The outflow of medical personnel abroad is a serious problem. The closure of the land border with the EU and Ukraine is a reaction to this problem as well.

The closure of the border will cause a new wave of discontent and irritation among the population of the border regions of Belarus. The protest part of society took the news

calmly and without panic, as an additional incentive for a new mobilization in the fight against the regime.

Local telegram chats in Minsk reach from 120 to 300 thousand citizens. That is 13-30 times more than the number of the Minsk police garrison. Attacks on administrators of telegram channels are one of the most important areas of efforts of the regime's repressive apparatus. Opponents of the regime, being under constant pressure, are forced to "professionalize" to some extent: to practice cybersecurity and media literacy skills, and to look for new ways to ensure the security of events. The paradox is that by fighting the revolution, the regime is helping to form the professional infrastructure of this very revolution. If the authorities had initially abandoned terror against citizens, the fabrication of the presidential election would have long been overwhelmed by other pressing issues and problems. And, perhaps, it would have lost its relevance to society. But constant terror, which is designed to generate fear and apathy, actually helps to maintain political mobilization and excitement. It stimulates the manifestation of this excitement in all new formats.

The issues of the involvement of Russian troops outside the national territory are decided at the highest political level (the president and the Federation Council), and not at the level of ministries. A significant part of the Belarusian-Russian agreements in the field of security are classified "top secret". It is quite possible that the procedure for the involvement of Russian troops in Belarus, their status, subordination and other legal issues have already been settled within the framework of these closed agreements. As Putin and Lukashenka reported earlier, in August Moscow created a reserve of security officials to support the Belarusian regime. This was decided following a telephone conversation between them without any additional documentary registration at the interstate level.

