

Analytical report:
National security and defence
of Belarus (July 2021)

The most important events of the month. In July, the anonymous group “Cyber-Partisans” announced the successful hacking of the servers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus. As a result, they obtained databases for registration of vehicles (including law enforcement agencies), passport service (including passports of Belarusian security officials, including operational personnel of special services), as well as internal information from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (including personnel service data and wiretapping files). The presented part of the downloaded databases seems to be reliable. But it is impossible to determine how relevant these databases are. If the assurances of “Cyber-Partisan” are true, we are talking about the largest breach of the information system in the history of Belarus and the seizure of data. The fact that the situation is serious is indirectly evidenced by the absence of any official comments on this matter. It is interesting to note that the break-in most likely occurred as a result of physical access to a workplace connected to the internal bases of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The traditional military parade did not take place on July 3. Although some observers suspected that Lukashenka feared a repetition of the fate of Anwar Saddat (who was killed during the parade), this version seems not serious. Most likely, the military parade did not take place for the same reason that also cancelled Lukashenka’s annual message to the people. Both events (the message and parade) are united by the fact that during them Lukashenka needs to stand all the time (about 1.5 hours or more). In this regard, the physical condition of the Belarusian ruler seems to be the most likely reason for the cancellation of traditional events that are very significant in the regime’s calendar.

The developments within the month. Throughout the month, Lukashenka regime continued to unwind the spiral of repression within the country. One of the justifications was the alleged disclosure of a terrorist/extremist network, which, among other things, is responsible for the attack on one of the Russian military facilities in Belarus (communication centre in Viliejka): foreign citizens and governments were involved in its operation. Lukashenka stated this on July 2, 2021. The deterioration of the situation on the Belarusian-Lithuanian border also continued. We devoted separate materials to these events ([the first one](#), [the second one](#)).

On July 8, 2021 Lukashenka, meeting graduates of higher military educational institutions, outlined the main tasks for them:

- for the Ministry of Internal Affairs – the readiness to perform tasks in special conditions. But the Belarusian ruler did not specify what exactly characterises this feature and what it is connected with;
- The Ministry of Emergency Situations must be ready to deal with emergencies that may arise “as a result of destructive actions and extremist manifestations”;
- the special services must promptly identify the preparation of “acts of terrorism, extremism, mass riots”.

On July 26, 2021, Prosecutor General of Belarus Andrei Shved said that more than 4,200 criminal cases related to “extremism and terrorism” have been initiated. 803 criminal cases against 1116 people have already been sent to the courts.

On July 27-28, the Ministry of Internal Affairs held exercises in various regions of the country on the issues of “... ensuring the protection of public order during mass events and suppression of mass riots”.

On July 28, 2021, Russia invited the member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to participate in the “West-2021” exercise.

On July 30, 2021, Lukashenka held a meeting with regional officials. Among other things, security issues were also touched upon. The Belarusian ruler reiterated that the issue of expanding the Russian military presence in Belarus is not being discussed: if necessary, Russian troops can be transferred to Belarus in a short time.

Apart from Lukashenka, other officials also spoke at the event. In particular, Defence Minister Viktor Khrenin stated that:

- NATO continues reconnaissance activities against Belarus and carrying out measures for the operational training of troops of the Alliance member states on the territory of neighbouring states;

- military activities carried out by neighbouring countries can be the preparation of provocative actions in border areas in order to create new informational reasons for discrediting Belarus in the international arena;

- there is a possibility of provocation on the part of Ukraine on the border with Belarus “... to obtain material for accusing Belarus and Russia”.

In July, several events took place on the subject of territorial defence (hereinafter referred to as TD). Thus, in the Hrodna region, a planned comprehensive inspection of the maintenance management bodies was carried out. In the Mastouski district, a TD headquarters and a battalion of territorial troops with the call-up of about 200 conscripts were formed. Among other things, TD troops trained interaction with the internal affairs bodies, tasks for the protection and defence of objects, conducting reconnaissance and search operations, combating sabotage and reconnaissance groups of the enemy, ensuring law and order. It is interesting to note that countering armed groups operating under cover and with the support of the civilian population in transport communications was practiced as well (by analogy with Donbass in 2014, where local residents blocked the advance of Ukrainian troops and served as a shield for militants). It is planned that the second stage of the readiness check will take place in October this year and will cover nine districts of the Hrodna region. On July 22, 2021, as part of the readiness check, a meeting with regional officials on the TD organization and command was held.

Also, scheduled TD exercises were held in the Minsk region. Regional officials were trained in the formation and use of TD troops: maintaining martial law, rules for the use of military equipment, operations with weapons.

Last month, another package of amendments to legislation on the issues of “... protection of sovereignty and the constitutional order” came into force in Belarus:

- The definition of riots, which are the basis for the introduction of a state of emergency, was clarified. Among other things, these include interethnic and inter-confessional conflicts, the prerequisites for which are currently not visible in Belarus. Also, the new version of the law “On the state of emergency” legalizes the suspension of the release and distribution of media products (including foreign ones), a special procedure for accrediting journalists, restricting access to Internet resources and online publications. Local authorities are charged with developing plans in advance for the introduction of a state of emergency and ensuring its regime in the relevant territories.

- The range of law enforcement agencies involved in ensuring the state of emergency has been expanded by including the paramilitary organizations (Ministry of Emergency Situations, the Investigative Committee, the State Committee for Forensic Expertise and the Department of Financial Investigations), which are additionally assigned responsibilities for preventing and suppressing riots, providing security of public order and public safety. Those functions were previously performed mainly by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and, to a lesser extent, by the State Security Committee (SSC).

- The army is responsible for combating terrorism, protecting public safety, suppressing mass riots, ensuring the safety of protected persons and objects.

It is interesting to note that the preparations for the “West-2021” exercise are poorly covered. Here we speak primarily about preparatory exercises. So, in July, an exercise on tactical and special training of signal troops was held. During it the organization of the communication system, the issues of security, defence and camouflage of the deployment sites of communication centres were trained. The units that had previously received new models of equipment passed the readiness test.

Meanwhile, Russian units, which will take part in the “West-2021”, began to arrive in Belarus earlier than usual. We have devoted a [special article](#) to this topic.

In July, the admission campaign to the universities of the law enforcement agencies and military faculties ended. In general, the situation is alarming, for the first time in many years the Military Academy (including the prestigious faculty of the Internal Troops) and the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were short of cadets. Also, the entrance scores of applicants have significantly decreased, especially in the technical specialities.

Conclusions. It can be stated that the regime (or its elite) is acting in the logic of the civil war against the Belarusian people. The task of suppressing public discontent remains central to the entire power system. The regime made only one conclusion from the events of the past year: it was necessary to “tighten the screws” more strongly.

Obviously, by “extremist-terrorist” criminal cases Mr. Shved meant political ones related to protest activity, pressure on representatives of the regime, etc. It is interesting to note that not so long ago it was asserted that there is no ground for terrorism in Belarus, and its sources are external. And here Shved speaks about over 1,100 extremist terrorists.

The July exercises of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were a demonstration before August 9 and were part of conditionally “preventive” measures, during which arrests of Belarusians, who actively participated in last year’s protests, were carried out on far-fetched grounds. The second goal could be preparation for the upcoming electoral campaign, which may include both a constitutional referendum and a new presidential election.

“West-2021” is a bilateral Belarusian-Russian exercise, the main part of which takes place on Belarusian territory. In this regard, it is interesting that Belarusian authorities did not publicly react in any way to the invitation of the servicemen of the SCO countries to participate in the event. The explanation may be that third countries will participate in that part of the “West-2021”, which will take place on Russian

territory. In any case, this step by Moscow seriously devalues the exclusivity of the status of Belarusian-Russian relations in the field of military security, relegating Minsk to the category of one of Moscow's many partners. To a large extent, this decision was dictated by the intransigence of the Lukashenka regime on those issues in the field of military security that are interesting to the Kremlin. We are talking about the position taken by the official Minsk after the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the refusal to expand the Russian military presence in Belarus, and the blocking of the signing of some bilateral documents.

Regarding the prospects for expanding the Russian military presence Lukashenka said nothing new on July 30, 2021. Nothing was also said about the legal basis for the functioning of two Russian military facilities in Belarus. The rhetoric about the possibility of some incidents on the border with Belarus, organized by Ukraine, is alarming: taking into account what Defence Minister Khrenin voiced this, it is understood that such incidents will be of an armed nature.

Speaking about changes in legislation in the field of "... protection of sovereignty and constitutional order", the following should be noted. By themselves, these innovations are quite logical and justified from the point of view of confronting hybrid aggression of the type that Ukraine faced in 2014. However, by public safety and suppression of riots, the regime means protest activity. So these changes are dictated by fears of internal destabilization of the situation, not external aggression.

Further, the total staffing of the departments, which from now on are charged with fighting the protests, is twice the staffing of the police (excluding the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs). Why was it necessary to multiply the potential of the forces to suppress public discontent? There can be two reasons:

- the political dynamics allows the regime to anticipate a new wave of mass protests and to fear its consequences (for example, due to Western sanctions);
- it is necessary to prevent the possibility of individual law enforcement agencies, relying on the norms of the legislation, to declare their neutrality in the course of a possible confrontation between the regime and the people.

In general, low scores and a shortage of the universities, connected with the law enforcement agencies and the military are not only a consequence of the low prestige of military and special service among young people, but also an indicator of the general degradation of the school system in Belarus.

