

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

Minsk

The most important events of the month. The budget for 2022 provides for the growth of expenses by 12% under the section “Judicial power, law enforcement and security”. According to the current exchange rate, in the section “National Defence” we are talking about the growth of USD of 150 million or 24%. A new point is the possibility of financing an increase in the wages for security officers from the Additional Reserve Fund of the President of Belarus (formed in the amount of USD 350 million under the current exchange rate), as well as from additional reserve funds of local authorities (scheduled in the amount of USD 75 million).

During December, there was a reduction in the number of attempts to break the EU border from the territory of Belarus by the migrants. This fact cannot be explained only by the return of the migrants to their home countries. Obviously, the Belarusian authorities took a pause and this is a political decision. It is unknown whether it is connected with the threat of new Western sanctions or with the Kremlin’s wishes. But there is an issue of the long-term arrangement of migrants in Belarus: Lukashenka recognized that they cause annoyance of Belarusians. Therefore, there is only the option of their extrusion from Belarus: either to their home countries or to the EU.

The developments within the month. The regime continues to tighten the legislation on countering its political opponents. On December 14, Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed changes to the Criminal Code of Belarus. Criminal liability is introduced for calls for the application of sanctions against the Republic of Belarus, its citizens and organizations. The term of punishment is up to 12 years of imprisonment.

On December 16, 2021, during the meeting on countering the sanctions measures, Lukashenka indirectly recognized that his political ill-wishers are among the leaders of enterprises, officials and security officials.

On December 16, 2021, as part of the OSCE event, the representative of the Ministry of Defence of Belarus confirmed the commitment of official Minsk to the strict implementation of international arms control agreements. He voiced regrets in connection with the refusal of a number of states from the working meetings with Belarusian representatives within bilateral agreements on additional confidence and security measures. He called to continue the interaction of defence agencies on arms control issues, despite the developing political and epidemiological situation.

On December 17, 2021, the Ministry of Defence of Belarus reported on the meetings with the military attachés of some NATO countries. It was indicated for the non-constructiveness of the position “... from the individual “belt of good neighbourliness” states (a clear hint of Poland and Lithuania). The Belarusian side has identified readiness for dialogue and organizing arms control measures. Poland was invited to conduct border negotiations on critical issues of bilateral security relations.

On December 17, 2021, the 17th meeting of the Belarus-Chinese Coordination Committee on Cooperation in Arms and Military Technology was held via video-conference. It is reported that the parties “... gave a high assessment of the achieved successes”, while nothing is reported about the content of success. A plan for further cooperation was agreed.

On December 28, 2021, the Belarusian MoD stated that it expects the Western states make the first step to resume dialogue on the security. At the same time, the MoD is ready for the resumption of practical interaction with NATO countries and Ukraine “...

only if it is constructive and will be based on equality and mutual respect”. It is not entirely clear what criteria for constructiveness and equality in this case. And what will Belarusian military command will do, if the countries of the West and Kiev will continue to adhere to the “non-constructive” position.

On December 29, 2021, the negotiations between Lukashenka and Putin took place, which did not bring any result. During the open part of the event, it was stated that the Belarusian side turned to the Russian with a proposal to conduct joint exercises in February-March of 2022 in Belarus. Probably, we are talking about the exercises on the border with Ukraine previously announced by Lukashenka. As far as is known, the Russians have not yet given a response.

In December, Russian official sources reported that Belarus plans to buy a new batch of modernized anti-aircraft missile systems “Tor-M2” from Russia. In this case, the details (deadlines and delivery sizes) are not reported. Earlier, the Belarusian side purchased 5 batteries of this SAM. There were no appeals for the supply of S-400 from Minsk.

In December, the Russian company “Uraltransmash” announced the completion of the delivery of modernized self-propelled howitzers 2S3M “Akatsiya” to the Belarusian MoD under the contract of 2020-2021. At the same time, the number of units modernised is not reported.

On the basis of the 5th SOF brigade, the research tests of the SMAR-100BPM rifle and the SCR-1200M sniper rifle were held.

In December, the government tests of the combat UAVs “Kvadro-1400” and “Barraging pipe” (armed copters with a range of 5 km and 2 km respectively) developed by KB “Display”, which were first presented in 2019, were finished.

In December, the combat aviation of Belarus and Russia three times carried out joint patrol of the borders of Belarus. Once with the participation of Russian long-range bombers Tu-22.

Among the noticeable measures for the preparation of state defence, we have to highlight the following ones:

- Training the actions during the alarm of the 38th Brest ardent assault brigade units and the brigade as a whole with getting a complete combat readiness. Simultaneously a staff training with the brigade and individual battalions command was conducted.

- Territorial defence trainings with the chairmen of the district executive committers held at the Military Academy.

Conclusions. The growth of budget expenditures under the sections “Judicial power, law enforcement and security” and “National defence” in 2022 may be explained by:

- the plans for the growth of wages to compensate for the level of inflation, which in 2021 amounted to about 10%;

- the purchase of aircraft, previously declared plans to receive in 2021 the Mi-35 helicopters and the aircraft Su-30SM (4 units), which did not happen. A part of the order could be transferred to the current year;

- the desire of the Ministry of Defence to form several new brigade level compounds (obviously, in significantly cut numbers), which will require serious capital investments and resources for the maintenance of additional personnel.

Probably there is a combination of three of these factors at once.

Obviously, Lukashenka regime seeks to use the current exacerbation of relations between Russia and NATO/Ukraine in order to achieve political dialogue with the West at the terms acceptable for official Minsk. One of the reasons for this desire is the concern of the formation of new spheres of influence in the region and the fact that the fate of Belarus West and the Kremlin could be decided without taking into account Belarusian interests. Therefore, there is a need to build communication with neighbouring NATO countries at least in order to understand the development of the situation on the “West-Russia” track. The subject of regional confidence measures in the military sphere is only a pretext. The resumption of such a dialogue is a necessary condition for the expansion of the foreign policy autonomy of Minsk from Moscow and will allow return to the favourite tactic of Lukashenka regime on the external arena – “trading security”.

The problem for Lukashenka regime is the lack of prerequisites for the resumption of “trading security” with the West. Counting on the fact that the change of rhetoric will restore confidence from neighbouring NATO countries and Ukraine is at least naive. Even to start a dialogue on regional security, Minsk will have to do serious political steps, which goes beyond the MoD’s competence.

Lukashenka would like to get Russian troops to use them as a restraining factor in the referendum period: the ruler considers the threat of the resumption of protests and the intervention of the West as real. Moscow understands his intentions and has not yet given an unequivocal response to the term of the exercise. But it is possible to confidently assert that such exercises will take place, and highly probable is that they will be dynamic and large-scale.

Obviously, the prospects for the acquisition of the S-400 by Belarus depend on the Russian financial support. Earlier, at the highest level, the parties discussed the possibility of using part of the remainder of the Russian loan for the construction of Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant for the purchase of arms in Russia. Apparently, the Kremlin did not support this idea.

Speaking about the modernization of the “Akatsiya” howitzers, it is worth noting that in June 2021 it was reported that a contract for the repair of the howitzers had been concluded. According to it, the equipment had to be transferred to the customer in 2022. Nothing is known about the contract and supplies of the howitzers from 2020. At the same time, in August 2021, it was already reported on the execution of the contract. Obviously, such speed of “Uraltransmash” can be explained by either small number of units for modernisation, or by the fact that the Belarus got the howitzers from the stocks of the Russian army with the condition of its repair and modernization at own expense. A similar scheme was previously applied when the S-300 were transferred to Belarus from the stocks of the Russian army.

Already on October 5, 2018, Lukashenka set the task for the national military-industrial complex to develop a 1-ton payload combat UAV. Obviously, Belarusian military industry wasn’t able to perform this task for technical reasons, while Belarusian budget – for financial ones.

UAVs “Kvadro-1400” and “Barraging Pipe” may have limited use mainly in the arsenal of special operations units. It is unlikely that they get significant commercial success.

For a while, joint Belarusian-Russian air patrols are becoming the norm. But it is worth paying attention to the following point: Russian aviators are present in Belarus as part of a joint training and combat centre. Two similar centres must have been created in Russia, but so far this haven't been done. There is no information when these centres are planning to start operating. The refusal of the Russian side from their creation may be regarded as a violation of the relevant agreement. Which can bring the response steps to cut the Russian military presence in Belarus. Of course, when there will be a favourable political situation.

