

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

The most important events of the month. For Belarus May was the month of Uzbekistan. Such a density of bilateral contacts in the field of security between Minsk and Tashkent has never been observed before.

The delegation of the Ministry of Defence and the State Committee for Defence Industry of Uzbekistan visited the international exhibition Milex-2019 in Minsk. Within the framework of the event, they discussed the possibility of repairing Uzbek weapons in our country and training commanders of engineering and technical profile for the army of Uzbekistan in the Military Academy of Belarus with the leadership of the Ministry of Defence and the State Military Industrial Committee of Belarus (SMIC). The Uzbek delegation also held talks with a number of enterprises of the Belarusian military industrial complex: the 558th Aviation Repair Plant, the 140th Repair Plant and OJSC “Agat”.

On May 20-23, 2019, the first joint exercise of the special operations forces of the two countries “Combat Commonwealth – 2019” was held at the Gurumsaray training ground of the Uzbek army. The exercise was anti-terrorism in nature. The following Belarusian-Uzbek exercises will be held in Belarus.

In the same period, on May 21-24, the military delegation of Belarus headed by the Chief of the General Staff Aleh Belakoneu visited Uzbekistan. The parties discussed the implementation of previously reached agreements in the field of military cooperation.

The developments within the month. A delegation led by Chief of the General Staff of the Army of Belarus Aleh Belakoneu visited Azerbaijan on May 5-8. There he met with the leadership of the army and the Ministry of Defence of this country. Traditionally, the great significance of bilateral cooperation in the military and military-technical sphere was stated. According to the Azerbaijani side, “... the parties determined the direction of the implementation of new large-scale projects aimed at increasing the combat capability of the Azerbaijani Army”. The Belarusian side reaffirmed its support for the position of Azerbaijan regarding the Karabakh conflict with Armenia - the formal ally of the official Minsk in the CSTO. Among other things, the parties discussed holding joint military exercises with the participation of army units of the two countries.

On May 11, 2019 it became known that another batch of 4 Russian Yak-130 combat training aircraft was transferred to the Belarusian army. Thus, the plans to create a squadron of these aircraft in the amount of 12 units are implemented.

In Kazakhstan, at the Sary-Shagan training ground, Belarusian rocket engineers conducted exercises (control of special training) with live firing. Unlike last year, only Belarusian troops participated in the event. A specific feature of the exercises in Kazakhstan was the widespread use of subdivisions of two signal brigades, the 927th centre for the preparation and use of unmanned aircraft complexes. Signallers solved the problem of building a communication line in difficult terrain conditions, established telecommunication links with Minsk. The military personnel of the 927th centre carried out additional reconnaissance of targets with the issuance of their coordinates to command posts, and after the strikes by the “Polonaise” and “Tochka” missiles, it assessed the results. On May 15, 2019 there were shootings of the MLRS “Polonaise” for range, as it is reported, “... up to 85 kilometers” and of “Tochka” missiles at a range of 60 and 90 kilometres.

On May 15-18, Minsk hosted the exhibition of weapons and military equipment “Milex-2019”. We have dedicated a special [material](#) to this event. During the exhibition, it was announced that Russia, through Rosoboronexport, supplied Belarus with weapons and military equipment worth USD 1 billion since 2001. In turn, Belarus determines the volume of bilateral military-technical cooperation at USD 500-600 million per year.

A total of about 30 contracts for the supply of military products worth about USD 200 million were concluded during the “Milex-2019” exhibition. 23 agreements and memorandums on military-technical cooperation with a number of countries were concluded as well.

On the sidelines of “Milex-2019” it was also announced that the representative of Belarus, the current Secretary of the Security Council of Belarus Stanislau Zas, will take the post of the CSTO head from January 1, 2020. The candidacy of Mr. Zas was finally agreed by Armenia.

The preparation for the Belarusian-Russian military exercises “Union Shield – 2019” continues. Representatives of the General Staff of Belarus on May 15-16 conducted a reconnaissance of the Russian Mulino landfill, where Belarusian units are to act.

On May 21, 2019 in Minsk, a memorandum of cooperation between the State Border Committee of Belarus and the Drug Enforcement Agency of the US Department of Justice was signed. The American delegation signed similar documents with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Customs and Investigative Committees of Belarus.

On May 22, 2019 SMIC considered the results of the implementation of business plans by its organizations in the first quarter of 2019. It is reported that “... in general, the planned development parameters are met”. Exports of goods and services by 9.1% exceeded the planned figures.

The volume of industrial production in SMIC exceeded the planned level by 14.1%. The profitability of sales in industry organizations amounted to 23.6% with the planned level of 11%, and in the whole in the SMIC system - 20.1% against the planned 10%. The amount of net profit received by the SMIC organizations was 2.4 times higher than the planned level. The volume of investments by the SMIC organizations is 1.8 times higher than the planned figure.

In general, in the SMIC organizations nominal accrued average wages for January-March exceeded USD 700.

SMIC announced, that in 2019 “... it will achieve a positive trend in socio-economic development in comparison with the previous year”. Thus, the dynamics of development of SMIC in 2018 is indirectly recognized as problematic.

On May 28-31, Colonel-General Li Jocheng, Chief of the Joint Staff of the Central Military Council of the PRC, visited Belarus. Negotiations with the military leadership of Belarus were held. Li Jocheng visited military units and the Military Academy, where he met with Chinese students. The sides discussed issues of bilateral military cooperation and the prospects for its development in joint combat training, military education, and cooperation within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization through the defence departments.

On May 31, 2019 a meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Interior of the CIS countries was held in Tashkent. The Concept of Cooperation of the Ministries of the Interior (Police) of the CIS States until 2030 was adopted. The document describes modern criminal challenges, defines the principles, goals, objectives, main directions and forms of interaction, the mechanisms of its material, technical, financial, resource support and the mechanism for implementing the Concept itself.

In May, the Interior Ministry reported some results of the fight against the illegal circulation of alcohol. During the four months of this year, more than 11 thousand liters of counterfeit alcoholic beverages and almost 56.5 thousand liters of alcohol were withdrawn from illicit trafficking. Illegal alcohol is mainly imported into Belarus from Russia for the purpose of resale in rural areas and small towns.

The State Border Committee reported that more than this year 3.3 thousand people were brought to responsibility for violation of border legislation, among whom 71 people are illegal migrants. Another 1409 potential illegal migrants were not let through the border. 8 channels of organized illegal migration were suppressed, 10 of their organizers and supporters were detained. The border guards seized more than 445 kg of various drugs. Another 164 kg of drugs were seized together with the customs authorities. In total, in 2019 more than 749 kg of drugs were seized by law enforcement agencies at the state border.

In May, it became known that on the basis of the military faculties of the three higher educational institutions, reserve officers in the specialty “Organization of Public Relations” will be trained.

The prosecution authorities continued in May to strengthen law and order in the army:

- in the 740th anti-aircraft missile regiment, preventive measures were taken to prevent offenses among military personnel and to exclude the cases of their death;
- together with the Office of the Investigative Committee for the Minsk region, a preventive session with officers of the military commissariats of the region was held, during which the provisions of the anti-corruption legislation were explained;
- employees of the prosecutor’s office of the Hrodna region held a seminar with graduates of the military department of the Hrodna State University on the abovementioned topic.

Conclusions. Belarusian authorities consider Uzbekistan as a promising partner in the field of trade and economic cooperation, first of all – for the export of Belarusian goods. In addition, building “peripheral alliances” in the post-Soviet space is a long-standing practice of the official Minsk. In this regard, the development of cooperation with Tashkent in the field of security is one of the tools to promote the political and economic interests of Belarus in this country.

Baku remains one of the main military-political partners of the official Minsk. Despite the presence of formal allied obligations to Armenia, there is no doubt that Belarus will not take any actions to the detriment of Azerbaijan’s security within the framework of the CSTO. At the same time, Minsk seeks to maintain constructive relations with Armenia including in the field of security. Belarus proceeds from the fact that in the foreseeable future a large-scale Armenian-Azerbaijani clash is unlikely.

Therefore, Belarus's supply of military products to Azerbaijan will not lead to an escalation in the South Caucasus.

Belarus, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan demonstrate readiness to expand cooperation in the field of defence. Following the results of 2018, Baku became the largest client of the Belarusian military industrial complex, equaling the volume of purchases with Russia, or even beating it. Earlier, the Kazakh side announced plans for a large-scale purchase of Belarusian defence products for the needs of the national army. The presence of the potential and political will of the parties makes it possible to count on the onward development of Belarus's cooperation with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan in the field of security.

The Belarusian Air Forces consider the Yak-130 as a kind of ersatz of specialized vehicles (fighters and attack aircraft). The machine has a certain potential for creating combat versions. Previously, the manufacturer declared its intention to create the appropriate combat modifications of the Yak-130, but nothing is known about the specific results.

Note that nothing is reported on the number and volume of contracts concluded at "Milex-2019" in the interests of the Belarusian law enforcement agencies. A large number of Belarusian products (including the 9M318 anti-aircraft missile and the tactical missile for MLRS "Polonaise"), presented at "Milex-2019", exist in the form of exhibition samples (some for many years) or in general - models. Belarus spends the smallest share of its GDP to the needs of the national security and defence sector among all post-Soviet European countries. The long-term low solvency of domestic consumers restrains the development of the Belarusian military industrial complex.

The situation around the figure of the CSTO Secretary General, despite the symbolism of the position, showed a lack of a spirit of alliance and the inability of the CSTO to act jointly. At the same time, Russia did not take any effective steps to resolve the dispute between Minsk and Yerevan over the question, whose representative should take the position of the head of the organization. This indicates a low value of the CSTO as a security tool for Russia. The Kremlin gives priority to unilateral actions and is not inclined to limit its freedom to formal allied obligations to other post-Soviet countries.

So far, we know only one training ground in the territory of Russia, where the Belarusian military is to act within the framework of the exercises "Union Shield-2019". It is likely that Belarus does not plan to send a significant contingent to Russian territory. The format and scale of participation of the parties in the "Union Shield" will make it possible to conclude how the political turmoil in the Belarusian-Russian relations influences the cooperation of the two countries in the field of security.

Official Minsk demonstrates readiness to establish cooperation with the United States in a number of areas, including in the field of security. Belarusian authorities are interested in demonstrating their ability to pursue an independent policy in this area, which may differ from the Russian one. But at the same time, they will not cross the conditional red lines delineated by the Kremlin for post-Soviet countries.

It should be noted that the public SMIC reports allow us to understand the dynamics of the department's development, but not the scale of its activities. The Belarusian

military industrial complex as a whole remains closed and reluctant to publicize the indicators of its economic activity.

It is interesting to note that Aliaksandr Lukashenka did not meet with Colonel General Li Jocheng. Given that the Belarusian ruler has always strongly emphasized the importance of the Belarusian-Chinese relations, accepting visitors from the PRC even of lower rank. It is not yet clear whether this is a consequence of the intense work schedule of the Belarusian ruler or the manifestation of displeasure of Belarus with concrete results of the Belarusian-Chinese cooperation. Recall that in April 2019 for an unclear reason and in violation of the protocol, Lukashenka left the “Belt and Path” Forum, held in Beijing, ahead of schedule. At the round table of heads of states Belarus was represented by Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration of Belarus Mikalai Snapkou.

The fact of the beginning of the training of specialists in public relations for the needs of the army is ambiguous. This is essentially a recognition of the failure of work in the field of PR by the relevant structures of the Ministry of Defence. This raises the question: who will teach and what will be taught to future officers in public relations? How much will the teaching staff and curriculum correspond to the modern realities? Will we not end up with a “fresh” batch of Soviet “political officers” from the late Brezhnev period? Due to the underdevelopment of the media market in Belarus, there is a serious shortage of highly professional specialists in the field of PR. Which are unlikely to be interested in the penny salary of teachers of public universities.

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