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BELARUS SECURITY BLOG

Analytical note: Situation in the field of national security and defense of Belarus (November 2015)

Minsk

The most important events of the month. The most important event of the month was a visit paid by Alexander Lukashenko on 03.11.2015 to State Production Unitary Enterprise "Precise Electro-Mechanics Factory". During the visit the achievements and plans of the national missile program were publicly announced. We dedicated separate materials to the analysis of the event (**text**, **text**).

We should also add that Alexander Lukashenko was shown a stand for testing the engines of anti-aircraft missiles from the existing stocks, being currently upgraded for subsequent export. This stand is a step towards creation of its own production of engines for air defense and tactical missiles. Alexander Lukashenko has guaranteed support for the project. It was also announced about the plans to improve the multiple launch rocket systems (hereinafter referred to as MLRS) "Polonez". Among other things, it envisages an increase of fighting characteristics of the system "... by about one and a half times". I.e. up to 400 km or more. The result of the missile program development will be demonstrated in the foreseeable future.

The second major event of November was the abolition of the Lukashenko's visit to Russia prescheduled for 26.11.2015. It was expected that during the meeting the problematic issues of bilateral relations will be discussed with Vladimir Putin, including the prospects for increasing the Russian military presence in Belarus. However, the trip was postponed for an indefinite period of time "due to the workload of working schedules of the Presidents of Belarus and Russia".

Instead of the meeting of Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin there was a visit to Belarus paid by the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. Judging by the fact that as a result of the Belarusian-Azerbaijanian summit not very important documents were signed, the visit of the Azerbaijan leader was not planned in advance. It is stated that among other issues the two leaders discussed cooperation in the military-technical sphere.

The dynamics of the situation development for the past month. November was a month of important personnel decisions. On 04.11.2015, Alexander Lukashenko dismissed and transferred to reserve the Chairman of the Investigative Committee of Belarus (hereinafter referred to as IC), Major-General of Justice, 51-year-old Valentin Shaev. V. Shaev received the General's shoulder straps in July 2011. The age limit for the state service of generals is 55 years.

On 04.11.2015, Major-General Stanislav Zas was appointed the State Secretary of the Security Council of Belarus. During the past four months after the sudden resignation of his predecessor, General Alexander Mezhuev, he served as the Secretary of State. This is an absolute record for absence of the head of Security Council.

On 05.11.2015, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Bridget Brinkley said that after six months the USA will estimate the situation in Belarus and decide on sanctions against nine Belarusian state-owned enterprises. It was made to understand that to get a positive decision in Washington, the Belarusian authorities need to make some effort. However, the sphere of application of such efforts was left for the discretion of the official Minsk: human rights, freedom of expression, associations and conscience, etc. Thus the Belarusian authorities may choose the less "painful" for itself variant of civil liberties expansion. However, it should be understood that such expansion would not be significant. All the more so as in the West nobody is waiting large-scale social and political liberalization on the part of the Belarusian

authorities. The main thing is to continue showing positive dynamics, even if the progress is not big. The deterioration of the human rights situation may cause restoration of sanctions by the United States in the same volume. Of course, the most important for the Belarusian authorities is the US vote in the IMF on the issue of allocation financial resources to our country. And Washington understands it and may use it as leverage.

On 10.11.2015, Alexander Lukashenko held a meeting on development of the law enforcement agencies of Belarus. In connection with formation of the new Government, each acting supervisor should present his vision of the subordinated structure development. It is required not only to solve the current problems, but also to "... have a deeply thought-out strategy of activities".

It is stated that Belarus may not contain an excess amount of the security forces, but oversimplification is also not a way out. The latter may turn out in the loss of working capacity.

The law enforcement agencies should solve their tasks better and for less money. To achieve this, they should get rid of unnecessary functions, including the supervision. It is necessary to define the ways of development of the Belarusian law enforcement system and correct the tasks for the entire block of law enforcement agencies.

They also discussed the challenges of countering the today's challenges to national security, availability of security services to various scenarios of the situation in the world, their ability to realistically predict and pre-empt the potential negative consequences.

Although Alexander Lukashenko estimated the existing system of national security as an effective one, the goal was set "... to increase mobility of the law enforcement agencies ... to create a more compact system of national security".

The issue of international terrorism became traditional for the last time. On 11.11.2015, the heads the Security Councils of the CIS countries discussed joint measures against the Islamic state, including terrorist recruitment. It also considered the problem of illegal migration and information security in the CIS countries. On 11.20.2015 the KGB representative said that at present in our country "... there are no preconditions and signs of foreign organized terrorist activities". The intelligence agencies of the country do not record the presence of international terrorist organizations in Belarus.

On 12.11.2015, the 74th meeting of the Council of Border Troops Commanders of the CIS countries was held. Among other things the participants discussed cooperation in the case of emergence and management of crisis situations at the external borders. It is planned to hold joint command and staff trainings and exercises with a group of CIS designed to deal with such crises. A concern was traditionally expressed over the situation in Afghanistan: about 4,500 militants have concentrated near the borders of the Commonwealth and new groups are arriving. The main objective of the border agencies remains prevention of penetration of extremists across the border.

On 12.11.2015, under the leadership of Chairman of the State Military-Industrial Committee (hereinafter referred to as SMIC) Sergey Gurulev the board meeting was held. The main issue was the development plans for the next year. SMIC intends in 2016 to provide the growth rate of exports of goods and services at the level of 104.1% to the evaluation of 2015, the growth rate of industrial production at the level of 116.8% to the current year.

On 15.11.2015, Defense Minister of Belarus Andrey Ravkov said that increased military activity of NATO near the borders of Belarus is seen as "... a certain danger", but not a military threat. Thus, the official Minsk is distancing itself from militant anti-NATO rhetoric in Moscow and makes it clear he does not intend to participate in the possible responses of Russia to the promotion of infrastructure of NATO to the East. The Belarusian authorities do not wish to be drawn into a confrontation with the West. On the contrary, Minsk hopes to normalize the relations with the Western capitals.

On November 17-18, 2015, upon the invitation of the German side, the visit of the Foreign Minister of Belarus Vladimir Makey to Germany took place. The head of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry has expressed concerns that the current EU problems overshadow the problems of relations with our country. The German side was requested to contribute to the maintenance of interest to Belarus in Europe at the proper level. It is stated that the official Minsk is extremely interested in normalization of relations with the European Union. But first of all in the economic sphere, which "...will help us be even politically stronger". The question on "stronger against whom" remained outside the brackets. For his part, the Foreign Minister of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that the visit of Makey is an important sign. Besides the bilateral relations, the sides discussed the situation in Ukraine and Syria.

On 19.11.2015, a meeting of the Military Council of the Interior Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (hereinafter referred to as the IT MIA). The issues of formation of the battalion for protection of the Belarusian nuclear power plant, for which the selection of servicemen started, were discussed. The new division will also ensure the security of supply of fuel and other special cargo for the NPP. The staffing of this military unit is recognized as one of the priorities of the IT MIA in 2016. The questions were raised about the state of military discipline, the prevention of offenses and crimes among the servicemen of IT MIA. The Military Council has demanded that commanders at all levels will take effective measures to detect and prevent hazing among soldiers.

In November, the information was additionally confirmed about the plans to purchase the new Russian training aircraft Yak-152, intended for initial flight training. The Government has already decided to allocate the necessary funds. It is initially planned to buy five vehicles, which will be operated by DOSAAF. The new Yak-152 should be added to the already purchased Yak-130, used for advanced flight training.

Conclusion. There was extensive coverage of the visit of Alexander Lukashenko to the "Precise Electro-Mechanics Factory". The demonstration of achievements, stories of the large-scale plans had the nature of pronounced advertising or caution. It is obvious that the official Minsk has demonstrated the ability of neighbors, if necessary, to ensure the defense of the country without relying on someone else's support. On the one hand, it should show the independence of Alexander Lukashenko in the matters relating to both national and regional security. On the other hand, it should warn against the temptation to force pressure on Belarus from the outside.

Despite the obvious achievements of domestic armourers it is worth noting that the principle importance is paid to the ability of the authorities to finance the deliveries of the new weapons and the scale of such deliveries.

Obviously, the leaders of Belarus and Azerbaijan could not ignore worsening of the Russian-Turkish relations. Given the special nature of the relations between Minsk and Moscow, and Baku and Ankara, one should expect some Belarusian-Azerbaijanian

peace-building initiatives. It is doubtful that in the current situation they are interesting for the Kremlin.

The reason for resignation of V. Shayev from the position of the IC Chairman could include a wide range of events: family circumstances, disreputable act, the situation within the headed department. In favor of the latter stands the appointment of the prosecutor of the Brest region Ivan Noskevich as Chairman of the IC on 10.11.2015. The fact that the head of IC came from another agency indicates dissatisfaction of Alexander Lukashenko with the state of affairs in the Investigative Committee. It is worth noting that there is tension between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Investigative Committee, associated with the quality of pre-investigation of the information on crimes. The prosecutor's office, in principle, is unhappy that it was deprived of its own investigative unit, which seriously lowered the status of the agency. In this regard, the Investigative Committee felt some pressure on the part of other law enforcement agencies. V. Shaev's resignation was not a spontaneous decision of A. Lukashenko, it was a scheduled event. Appointment of a representative of the prosecutor's office as the head of the IC may be seen as the result of inter-departmental competition within the law enforcement unit.

The long absence of a full-scale head in the Security Council indicated the unplanned nature of resignation of General Mezhuev. And on the other hand this highlighted not the most central role of the Security Council in the system of national security of Belarus. It is worth noting that A. Mezhuev attended the inauguration of Alexander Lukashenko on 06.11.2015. Obviously, the reason for the resignation was not the fault of the General and improper actions of the persons close to him. It is likely that in the nearest future the former head of the Security Council will return to the high state positions.

In recent months, the possibility of appointment of the Chairman of the KGB Valery Vakulchik as the head of the Security Council was discussed. And his position was allegedly to be replaced by the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Igor Shunevich. It is worth noting that this is not the first time that the informal information on appointments in the security services circulates for a long time, is supported, and later is not confirmed. This suggests that such "leaks" are organized purposefully.

The willingness of the Belarusian authorities to change its course is doubtful. Thus, the Lukashenko's assistant Kirill Rudy said in November that the deterrent factor for reforms is the lack of personnel, ready to implement them. The state apparatus itself is overloaded with the current affairs that leave no time for strategic planning. In addition, a part of the security forces and the heads of state-owned enterprises are against the change of course. Although K. Rudy talked about economic transformations, we may confidently assert that there are even less supporters of the socio-political changes in the environment in the state apparatus. Many of them fear that under the new conditions they will become uncompetitive, lose their privileges and social status.

The system of the law enforcement agencies has a reserve to reduce costs by decertification (transfer to the category of replaceable by civil specialists) of a number of supportive positions, reduction of internal control structures, various kinds of research, educational, cultural and agitprop and other units, which are often just useless, but serve as a place of employment for the relatives, friends and family members of the civil

officials and the officials in uniform. The free (material and human) resources should be focused on implementation of direct functions to ensure social and national security.

Currently, on the territory of the former Soviet Union there is an attempt to establish a mechanism of control over the informational space to prevent the spread of the information unwanted for the authorities, which happens under the pretext of combating terrorism. In the CIS countries it is quite common to view the international terrorism as a tool in the hands of foreign governments and intelligence services, with the help of which there is a struggle held with the unwanted regimes. The factors of economic, social and political inequalities are recognized, but are regarded as minor conditions of terrorism.

If we talk about the international terrorism in relation to Belarus, earlier our country was used as a transit territory and a hiding place for the militants. There have also been single attempts to recruit the students from Arab countries to the ranks of terrorist and extremist organizations.

Council of Commanders of the Border Troops of the CIS countries declares of its readiness to adequately respond to the threats originating from Afghanistan. However, the history of provision of emergency assistance to Tajikistan, which lasted for two years, leaves no doubt in the readiness of the Commonwealth to act quickly and decisively in a critical situation. The procedure of mechanisms of the CSTO does not provide for the prompt response. In case of armed conflict on the Tajik-Afghan border we may be guaranteed to rely only on the Russian troops stationed in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

It is evident that the excess of output growth of the domestic defense industry over the growth of exports means considerable, according to Belarusian standards, (by USD 40-50 million) increase in purchases for internal needs. First of all, we may talk about the supply of MLRS “Polonez” and the light armored vehicles. In addition it is worth recalling that in 2016 at the facilities of Orsha Aircraft Repair Plant it is scheduled to begin production of engines developed by the Ukrainian company “Motor Sich”, designed for cruise missiles.

The fact, that the subject of talks between the Heads of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and the Federal Republic of Germany was the situation in Syria, is unexpected: Belarus is not a country, involved in the Syrian crisis. It seems that the West is considering to use the factor of special relations between Minsk and Moscow to enhance their awareness of the plans of Russia in the Syrian war. Though the events of the last two years show that the Kremlin is not willing to let their formal allies in the post-Soviet space into their plans.

Hazing among soldiers, prevention of crimes and offenses in the ranks of IT MIA is not for the first time in focus of the Military Council. However, the issue has not yet been resolved until the year end. Service in the Interior Troops of MIA is traditionally considered prestigious, where the best candidates are selected. But at the moment none of the law enforcement agencies may be regarded a reference one in terms of discipline and order. Simply not all of them show the availability of all the problematic issues. Violation of the law and discipline, bullying between the military are the result of a more serious problem – unhealthy moral and psychological atmosphere among the officers, quality of officers staff. Increasing of the level of discipline and order in the military requires a fundamental decision on empowerment of the military counterintelligence bodies, and its closest approach of the operational staff of the military groups.

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