



The October issue of the *Bell* concentrates on the event that took place in September but has not yet been analyzed in this publication - military training *Zapad 2009*. Joint military exercise carried out on the whole territory of Belarus has spread tense atmosphere among the neighboring countries. Latvia responded with the statement regarding its intention to hold retaliatory large-scale military exercises next summer, whereas Estonia urged NATO to react accordingly. The contribution by *Aleksandr Alesin* presents the evaluation of the said military training as well as the assessment of realistic technical and financial potential of Russia.

The other article of the present issue analyses the fourlateral relation between Belarus, Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania. Three latter countries are very eager to start a closer political and, most importantly, tighter economic relations with Belarus.

As *Roman Yakovlevsky* claims, Ukraine is one of the most active lobbyists of various projects involving Belarus, especially in the sphere of energy. The recent visit of A. Lukashenka to the Ukraine demonstrates huge interest from Belarusian side as well. One can easily understand it having in mind the allowances that Belarus obtained on Ukrainian electricity. During the meeting it was agreed that they will amount to 50 mln. USD, however, during an uncertain period of time.

Certainly, cooperation with Belarus is not wrong *per se*. However, as *Roman Yakovlevsky* states in his article, while bargaining and negotiating with the official Minsk, one has not to confuse expectations and illusions.

Julija Narkeviciute, Editor

VITALLY IMPORTANT ALLY

Aleksandr Alesin, AC Wider Europe

On September 29th, large-scale military exercises were completed in the west of Russia and Belarus. Military training under the name *Zapad 2009* (*West 2009*) can be described as largest in recent years.

Armed forces of the Republic of Belarus together with military units of Moscow military district, Kaliningrad region as well as coastguard units and the Baltic Fleet, five large landing crafts of Russian Northern and Black Sea Fleets (that specially for the given purpose went around Europe to arrive in Baltijsk) interacted during the training.

The main military exercises were held on practically all the territory of Belarus: from Grodno and Brest regions in the west to Mogiliov and Vitebsk in the east.

During the military exercises Russia was represented basically by the brigade of constant combat readiness of Moscow military district, units of the Ivanovo 98th Airborne Forces and Operative Command of the 20th Army.

On the Belarusian side, structural units of the Ministry of Defence, the General Staff of Armed Forces (AF), together with other bodies (military

command, operative command, communication, escort and servicing, task forces, etc) of the AF military participated in the training.

All in all around 12.5 thousand military servicemen were involved in the exercises: 6.5 thousand of Belarus and 6 thousand of Russia and around thirty Kazakh military personnel. Military hardware used: more than 220 combat tanks, around 470 armoured combat vehicles, 230 self-propelled and towed artillery units, mortars and multi-rocket launchers, 60 planes and 40 helicopters.

The exercise started on 8 October and was carried on under the joint management of the Minister of Defence of Belarus colonel-general Leonid Maltsev and the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia colonel-general Nikolaj Makarov. The final stage of the exercise was observed by the Generals-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of both countries Presidents Dmitriy Medvedev and Alexander Lukashenka.

Talking about the nature of the exercises, high-standing representatives of both armies did not conceal that they were initiated in order to simulate military actions in the conditions of possible future wars. In particular, the training was aimed

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at investigating the transition to the new military command based on the system of network-centric wars. The goal was to analyze how the new command system is able to control the Air Defence and Air Forces as well as appropiate the joint military command system of Belarus and Russia.

It has to be reminded that the concept of a network-centric war has been worked out in Pentagon. Initially it has been approved during military operations in Iraq. Network-centric war presupposes such type of combat actions whereby single electronic satellite and aviation (including the use of un-piloted intelligence aircraft) command systems are used in order to operate different forces and military devices.

The essence of the network-centric wars, however, is not only large-scale use of electronic means of intelligence and targeting but also employment of mobile forces that can promptly move and attack enemy from flanks or rearward.

According to the Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces of Russia, General Vladimir Boldyrev, 85 highly-maneuverable brigades of constant combat readiness were formed. They could be used in practice without delay in such areas of military operations where a likely threat to the national and military security may arise.

There are three such threatening directions: west, east and south. Each of them has its own character and differences with respect to the manner of military action that can be taken. Beginning with June strategic exercises under the joint name *Osen' 2009 (Autumn 2009)* were conducted along the lines of these directions. They included the operative-strategic exercises *Kavkaz 2009, Ladoga 2009* and, finally, *Zapad 2009*.

Military analysts raise a number of questions concerning the given military trainings. First of all, the question is whether the Russian army (not to speak of the Belarusian) possesses adequate resources (satellites, un-piloted planes, computers, etc.) to conduct network-centric wars. The other issue is whether it has at its disposal a sufficient number of special transport vehicles to ensure mobility of troops.

For Russia, the conclusion is far from satisfactory. Enormous resources (they may amount to the hundreds of billions of US dollars) are necessary to reform Russian armed forces according to the network-centric military strategy.

Even putting aside the issue of satellites and military electronics, numerous problems exist in other spheres. For example, Russia does not possess a necessary number of transport vehicles in order to re-deploy the troops. First of all, there is a lack of heavy military-transport planes and helicopters. Russia has only 10 planes An-124 *Ruslan*, which can transport tanks and sundry bulky equipment, whereas the number of helicopters is somewhat bigger – it amounts to 35.

A simple example may be adduced. The 4th separate tank brigade of the 20th army of Moscow military

district needed nearly five days to arrive to the operative-strategic exercise *Zapad 2009*. Loading military equipment onto railway echelons (around twenty), unloading, moving forward to the concentration area, camping at a new location, carrying out necessary measures related to the coordination among subunits took a lot of time. The 15th, 21st and 23rd motorized infantry brigades of the 2nd Army of the Privolzhsko-Uralskij military district were traveling from Samara even longer.

And although all of them got through the prescribed standards, even non-professionals perceive that in the conditions of a network-centric war an enemy armed with satellites of the optical and radio-technical intelligence, planes of distant radiolocation detection, let alone un-piloted flying devices, would have detected all those movements at their initial stage. And would have done his best not to allow all those echelons to arrive to their destination.

However, carrying out of the said exercises is important not only from the military point of view but mostly as an indicator of the allied relations between Belarus and the Russia. Allied military relations with Belarus matter for Russia because of its strategic interests (disruption of the military union with Belarus would pose a threat to Russian defence potential), for Minsk military union with Russia is of economic importance.

By no means, neither the separate radio-technical center *Baranovichi* of the Russian missile attack early warning system (MAEWS) in the settlement of *Gancevichi* (Belarus), nor the object *Antej* (43rd communication center of the naval fleet of the RF) in *Vilejka*, nor even the AAD system is the essential military resource for the Russian military and political leadership.

Mostly important is the very geo-political situation of Belarus – Russia's strategic forefield. It is kind of a bulge driven into the depth of NATO, a 'balcony' hanging over the whole European theatre of military operation.

As the analyst of the Internet newspaper *Vzgliad (A Look)* Genadij Nechaev claims, true is a general principle assuming that in case of any conflict between Russia and Europe, a party striving to take the upper hand in it has to ensure control over Belarus. At present it is Russia that has advantage in the given respect.

If due to any reason Minsk refuses to take into account Moscow's strategic interests, Russia will be at great pains in an attempt to defend its western and north-western borders. Most probably it will have to renounce the *Agreement on the medium-range and shorter-range missiles* (MSRM) and create missiles of the new generation ensuring a launch of preventive strikes against the regions wherein NATO troops are concentrated.

It goes without saying that the given development of events is unwelcome for Russia. Thus Russian authorities will do everything to maintain *status quo* and to keep Belarus its strategic partner.

It should be noted that in Warsaw, as in Minsk, there is a common negative attitude towards the project North Stream, which can considerably belittle the transit significance of the two countries in terms of the transportation of energy resources to Europe.

Thus successful carrying out of the military exercises of such a large scale and of such importance for Russia have become a favourable background for the reloading of Belarusian-Russian relations that recently have been considerably damaged. Experience showed that the underlying formula,

on which the relations are being built up (economic preferences in exchange for the regard of strategic interests), was not bad at all. The more so that it might be difficult to exchange it into something else in the foreseeable future.

BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND ILLUSIONS

Roman Yakovlevsky, political analyst

Belarus' activity in external politics in 2009 was called forth by external as well as internal factors. The former was a dialogue between the EU and Belarus commenced as an effort to normalize the mutual relationship and the aspiration of Europeans to involve Belarus into various integration processes. This, in particular, concerns neighbouring Lithuania, Poland and the Ukraine.

As for the internal factors, that made A. Lukashenka's regime become more active in external affairs, first and foremost the global financial-economic crisis should be taken into account since it is an ever-increasing threat for the archaic post-soviet economics of Belarus. In fact, so far Belarus failed to experience all consequences of the given crisis. Belarusian authorities see a panacea against them in unrestrained borrowing from the IMF and other sources rather than in proclaimed economic liberalization. In the opinion of the famous Belarusian economist and the former head of the National Bank of Belarus Stanislav Bogdankevich, so far Belarus basically managed to veil the crisis by means of loans spent on consumption. According to him, the amount of foreign debt alone is approaching an enormous value of 20 billion USD. The debt increased by one third in 2009. Internal debts to the banks amounted to 23 billion USD by the early October of 2009, having increased since the beginning of the year by more than 5 billion USD, or 22.5 %.

Despite the worsening economic situation of Belarus and its dependence on Russia in terms of its credits that usually are rendered in exchange for agreements increasing the presence of Russian business in Belarus, the EU and the West in general tries to use its leverages in order to maintain Belarus on the geopolitical swing.

As concerns the EU, its expectations regarding Belarus are mostly associated with the implementation of programmes and projects in the frames of the Polish-Swedish Eastern Partnership initiative promoted by the Presidents of Poland and Lithuania. As is known, the given initiative was accepted with great suspicion in Moscow since it was perceived as a threat to its influence in the post-soviet space,

especially in the field of energy security. Last news regarding the given issue show that the Russian authorities have no intention of staying passive observers. As is known, the project of the energy bridge via Belarus to supply electricity from the Ukraine to Lithuania is still in the air. The information concerning the agreement with Belarus on energy price that has been finally reached fails to alter the essence of the problem. De-monopolized energy system is simply non-existent neither in Lithuania, nor in Belarus. So nobody should have any illusions regarding the obstacle to the above mentioned energy bridge - the Russian *Inter RAO UES*.

Not only in Minsk, but in Moscow as well market relations are perceived rather peculiarly – they usually have a considerable political aftertaste. The same applies to the importance of Belarusian export to the Lithuanian seaport Klaipėda. Today Belarus ascribes greater importance to the Latvian Ventspils. It has to be admitted that A. Lukashenka plays the given card expertly by making Lithuanian business exercise pressure on its authorities to be exceptionally pragmatic in their cooperation with A. Lukashenka's regime. The question to what extent the given approach is in line with national interests of Lithuania remains open.

After the series of meetings of the Presidents of Belarus and the Ukraine, secretaries of the Security Councils of Belarus, the Ukraine and Poland, optimism related to the participation of Belarus in the project of the oil pipeline *Odessa-Brody-Plock* could be observed among the politicians and experts. The situation today, however, is that the concern *Belneftekhim* refuses to comment the perspectives of the Belarusian participation in the development of the oil pipeline *Odessa-Brody*, which might become an alternative to the supply of the Russian crude oil. Press service of the concern declared that *Belneftekhim* considers any information related to the given issue to mass media as premature.

The most active lobbyist of the participation of Belarus in the given project is the Ukraine. On 19 October in Minsk the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Ukraine Piotr Poroshenko once again confirmed the interest of his country in the involvement of Belarus in the given project.

Not less complex will be for the neighbouring countries of Belarus to overcome the fatigue resulting from the present dialogue with A. Lukashenka.

So far, successful were only the attempts to involve Minsk into the *Kiev Initiative*, which aims to coordinate and develop regional cooperation between the Ukraine, Belarus and Poland in such spheres as illegal migration, combating drug trafficking and issues of energy security. Heads of the Security Councils of the given three countries are considered to be able to find common grounds more easily than, for example, the heads of the foreign policy institutions of the Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. Nonetheless, the forthcoming meeting in Kiev of the heads of MFA of the Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania, cancelled earlier, remains vitally important. As has been stated, they have to discuss the issues related to the implementation of the programmes, projects in the frames of the Eastern Partnership as well as issues of the trilateral cooperation. It should be noted that in Warsaw, as in Minsk, there is a common negative attitude towards the project North Stream, which can considerably belittle the transit significance of the two countries in terms of the transportation of energy resources to Europe. Nevertheless, for Lukashenka it is the level of the presidential relationship with Warsaw that, however, has not matured yet.

The ongoing dialogue of Minsk with the European Union, that enabled the head of the MFA of Belarus Sergej Martinov to pay regular visits to Brussels and other European capitals, is far from making him abstain from such public statements as, for example, "we don't even discuss the possibility of becoming member of the EU". Even greater anxiety arose in Europe, not in all its parts though, when S. Martinov and A. Lukashenka himself started claiming that Belarus would itself decide concern-

ing the participation of Belarus in the initiative's programmes wherein the regime would find it advantageous to participate. No need to discuss here the principles of common values that should form the basis of mutual cooperation.

Thereby the statements of A. Lukashenka made during his meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia Urmas Paet in Minsk regarding the Ukraine and Belarus forming a big part of Europe "that we would not let anybody push out" may be interpreted as a sign of aggression that is alien to Europe.

There are reasons to assume that in case of further extension of the suspension of sanctions of the European Union for Belarus and its participation in the EU organized Eastern Partnership Initiative additional difficulties might ensue. It is not clear to what extent the initiative might influence the whole eastern strategy of the EU. However, since Minsk overtly ignores the value component of the given partnership, it becomes increasingly difficult for Brussels to proceed further, even having in mind its tolerance. Not less complex will be for the neighbouring countries of Belarus to overcome the fatigue resulting from the present dialogue with A. Lukashenka. Nevertheless, Vilnius, Warsaw and Kiev continue to expect positive changes in Minsk as well as hope for the possibilities to coordinate and develop cooperation in the bilateral relations (within the nascent format of quadro-group of Lithuania, Poland, the Ukraine and Belarus) and within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. The most important thing, certainly, is not to confuse expectations and illusions.



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