

POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS IN THE FIELD OF SECURITY: IMPACT OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

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Описываются этапы эволюции политики Беларуси в сфере безопасности. Отмечается, что внешняя политика Беларуси все больше учитывает национальные интересы, геополитические особенности страны. Особое внимание уделяется анализу влияния украинского кризиса на белорусско-российские отношения, вызванные стремлением Беларуси сохранить конструктивные отношения с новым украинским руководством, стать посредником в разрешении конфликтных ситуаций. Сделан вывод, что новые инициативы Беларуси в сфере безопасности не являются отказом или нарушением союзнических отношений с Россией. Они представляют собой лишь маневр белорусской власти в рамках взятых на себя обязательств.

The current publication aims to identify evolution stages of the Belarusian security policy. It has been noted that the foreign policy of Belarus nowadays to a greater extent considers the national interests of Belarus, geopolitical peculiarities of the country. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the Ukrainian crisis impact on the Belarus-Russia relations caused by the Belarusian aspirations to preserve constructive relations with new Ukrainian leadership and to become an intermediary in the resettlement of conflict situations. The conclusion is made that new Belarusian initiatives in the security sphere should not be perceived as a refusal or breach in the allied relations with Russia. It is only a maneuver of the Belarusian authorities within the framework of the freedom of action it possesses.

Ключевые слова: баланс сил в регионе; нейтральный статус; ОДКБ; политика в сфере безопасности; принцип многовекторности; Республика Беларусь.

Keywords: balance of power in the region; CSTO; multi-vector principle; neutral status; Republic of Belarus; security policy.

After the outbreak of the armed conflict in Ukraine (February, 2014) the discussion on military and political security of the country significantly intensified in various circles of the Belarusian society. This discussion does not stop, it is gaining new momentum. The opinions expressed by politicians, experts and *ordinary* Belarusian citizens, can be summarized in the following questions: Which countries are the natural allies of the young state? And why? What security threats and challenges does Belarus face?

The lack of sustainable unity should be noted when Belarusians answer the questions formulated above. The issue of disunity of the Belarusian society, including the defining of geopolitical preferences, was analyzed by the author in previous publications. Depending on the approach to the Belarusian security policy four major distinct social groups were formed: *Belarusian authorities, Belarusians – national consensus and compromise supporters, Belorossy* (proponents of enhanced cooperation with Russia), Eurobelarusians (supporters of rapprochement with the European Union) [25].

Among the above mentioned groups the security policy implemented by the Belarusian government **attracts** the greatest attention and interest. Obviously, during 25 years it was not static, in its evolution this policy underwent significant changes. The *foundation* of state security policy began to be formed even before the international legal establishment of Belarusian independence in the late 1980s. The starting point of the political and legal framework formation of Belarusian foreign and security policy was the Declaration on State Sovereignty, adopted

by the Supreme Council of the BSSR on July 27, 1990, still within the framework of the USSR. The Declaration proclaimed “full state sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus as supremacy, independence and completeness of state power of the Republic within the borders of its territory, the legitimacy of its laws, the independence of the Republic in foreign relations.” Art. 10 of the Declaration formulated the task to convert Belarus into a nuclear-free zone and a neutral state [1].

Particular attention should be paid to the fact that since the adoption of the abovementioned Declaration, the task of “transforming Belarus into a neutral state” was repeated in all the official political and legal documents of the country concerning the foreign policy. This contributed to the fact that some Belarusian researchers and experts began talking about Belarusian neutrality as a real status.

Giving the Declaration on State Sovereignty the status of a Constitutional Act on August 25 in 1991 and the consolidation of an independent status to Belarus in the BSSR Supreme Council “On Ensuring Political and Economic Independence of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic” gave another impetus to the development of foreign policy activity of the young state [19].

On the basis of legislative acts of the Republic of Belarus on its state sovereignty as of October 2, 1991 the Supreme Council adopted a statement “On the Principles of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus”, which confirmed the young state’s commitment to the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and international

treaties. In addition, the document stated that Belarus intended to sign the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and assume its obligations according to the documents within the organization [21].

After the events that led to the final collapse of the USSR in December, 1991, Belarus also adopted other legislative acts that determined the country's foreign policy. The priorities set in those documents were the basis of the Belarusian foreign policy during the period of "parliamentary republic", and some of the provisions did not lose their relevance after the first presidential elections (1994).

The most significant events in the history of Belarus that had a direct impact on the security policy in the first half of the 1990s were, firstly, the voluntary renunciation from the nuclear weapons arsenal inherited from the USSR that remained on Belarusian territory, and secondly, delaying the decision to sign the Collective Security Treaty (CST) by the Republic of Belarus.

Regarding the first event, it should be emphasized that in contrast to Ukraine Belarus did not put forward preconditions for the nuclear weapons withdrawal (the overall capacity of which was on the sixth position in the world) to Russia. Thus, in 1992 in accordance with the international agreements the tactical nuclear weapons were withdrawn from Belarus, and by November, 1996 the removal of strategic nuclear missiles was finished. By the decisions and actions taken in respect of the weapons placed on its territory Belarus proved to be a peace-loving country and for a while appeared in the world news. On January 15, 1994 the US President Bill Clinton paid a one-day visit to Minsk. Speaking at the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus to the youth audience, he described Belarus as a peaceful country. Evaluating the decision of Minsk to become a nuclear-free country, the US leader mentioned that by this action "you deserve the trust and gratitude of the citizens around the world" [8].

The fact that the US leader highly appreciated the decision of the Belarusian authorities is confirmed in the memoirs of the former Prime Minister Vyacheslav Kebich: "I think that Clinton and the US State Department saw the visit to Belarus as a symbolic act. The voluntary renunciation of a young country from nuclear weapons possession had no precedent, it was necessary to somehow morally encourage its leaders and give them security guarantees. On this basis the program of stay in Minsk was developed" [see: 11].

It should be noted that the second significant fact that attracted the attention of politicians and researchers was the situation around the signing of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) by the Republic of Belarus. The document was signed on May 15, 1992 in Tashkent by the leaders of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Belarus signed it only on December 31, 1993, much later than the other post-Soviet states. The main reason for the delay was the absence of unity among

the Belarusian leaders regarding the security policy approaches, various estimates of perceived and real threats.

The Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus S. Shushkevich explained the refusal to sign the CST by the fact that the document contradicted the Belarusian neutrality policy. It is well known that the Head of Parliament and the formal Head of State supported the autonomy of Minsk in the military decision-making. Taking into account the country's geopolitical position he considered it more logical for Belarus to participate in the creation of the Baltic-Black Sea regional cooperation and defense system that called for the creation of a "belt of neutral states" in Europe or "sanitary cordon" that separated the NATO countries and Russia. As for the military alliance with Moscow, S. Shushkevich believed that it "could only damage the interests of the country and lead even a stronger state to a dead end" [22, p. 28].

The position of S. Shushkevich was notably supported by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus at that time P. Kravchenko, who declared that "Belarus has a very complex and unique position in the CIS – on the one hand, as the coordinator of the Commonwealth it should strengthen it, and on the other hand, there is a risk that it will fall under Russia's dictatorship" [10].

The pro-Soviet members of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus preferred to see the Belarusian army as part of the CIS Collective Security System – partially for a smoother transition from the Soviet to national defense system, as well as due to the lack of necessary financing and maintenance resources for its own armed forces. The major argument of the supporters of the entry into the Post-Soviet System of Collective Security was the opinion that the adherence to the Tashkent Treaty would entail the increase of military orders for the domestic military and industrial industry.

The issue of the Republic's future military policy direction was put on the Belarusian Supreme Council's agenda. On April 9, 1993 the Supreme Council with 188 votes against 32 voted in favor of the accession to the CIS Collective Security Treaty. Did that decision of the legislative power mean the renouncement of neutrality ideas? For instance, Turkmenistan, claiming the neutrality status, decided not to sign the Tashkent Treaty. In December 1995, the neutrality of this Central Asian Republic was confirmed by the UN General Assembly.

The Ukrainian leadership did not sign the CST because since gaining its independence it announced the country's policy direction towards European integration. At the same time, we can not definitely state that Belarus denounced its neutrality after signing the CST. In our view, the signing of the Treaty with general obligations did not mean the final choice of Belarus in favor of participation in political and military blocs.

The leaders of all the branches of power of the young Belarusian state preferred to keep quite a cautious

policy in the sphere of security. The reasons were the following: the understanding of a weak impact of Minsk on the situation in the region, dependence on stronger players, the need to firstly implement adaptation policy. Another characteristic of the period was the lack of unity in the approaches towards the main directions of domestic and foreign policy, not only in the society but also at the level of state institutions. While in the early years of Belarusian independence, the idea of its indissoluble unity with the other post-Soviet countries, and first of all with Russia, clearly dominated.

Up until July, 1994 the centers of foreign policy decision-making were the Council of Ministers represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Supreme Council of the country, represented by the Commission for Foreign Affairs and External Economic Relations. The rivalry existed around both specific and general foreign policy issues. An active role in the foreign policy debate was played by the Supreme Council's deputies that were part of the opposition faction of the Belarusian Popular Front.

In accordance with the legislation at that time the Supreme Council (Parliament) determined the main foreign policy directions of the Republic of Belarus, it could declare war and make peace. Only the Supreme Council could carry out the ratification and denunciation of international treaties of the Republic of Belarus.

A completely new stage in the conceptual and doctrinal design of domestic and foreign policy, including the field of security started after the election of A. G. Lukashenko President of the Republic of Belarus (July, 1994). Two seemingly distinct approaches were laid as the policy basis: the multi-vector principle, on the one hand, and the policy of active rapprochement with Russia, on the other.

For the first time the multi-vector principle with respect to the Belarusian foreign policy was officially announced in the speech of Alexander Lukashenko at the first All-Belarusian People's Assembly (October 19, 1996). In particular, the Belarusian leader noted: "Taking into account our geopolitical position only multi-vector and balanced foreign policy can be effective. Firstly, it involves maintaining good relations with the neighboring countries" [20, p. 28].

The appeal to the multi-vector principle in the middle-second half of the 1990s, in our opinion, was mainly declarative. Announcing the multi-vector principle as an important foreign policy principle was inherent in almost all the countries.

On the other hand, after the election of the first Belarusian President active rapprochement with Russia as the main foreign policy direction of the Republic of Belarus became apparent. April 2, 1996 when the Treaty establishing the Commonwealth of Belarus and Russia was signed in Moscow, can be determined as the starting point of the integration of the two countries. Exactly one year later it was renamed into the Union, which in the plans of its

creators was to become the Confederation of Belarus and Russia. And finally on December 8, 1999 Boris Yeltsin and Alexander Lukashenko signed a Treaty establishing the Union State and the Program of Actions of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on the implementation of the Treaty provisions. These documents provided for the establishment of the Union State, which brought together two equal states with a common economic space, a common customs territory, a common currency, a common budget and a coordinated policy in the fields of international affairs, defense, security [2].

Although the ambitious plans for the creation of the Union State of Belarus and Russia were not subsequently implemented in full, many initiatives were realized. Significant results were achieved in the military cooperation area between the two states. Thus, in 2001 the Military Doctrine of the Union State was adopted. The defensive nature of the interstate Union was declared, as well as its focus on the maintenance of strategic stability, creation of the conditions for a lasting and fair peace.

The most large-scale results in the interaction of the two states in the field of safety were achieved by the establishment of a joint military group and the formation of the Joint Air Defense System (JADS).

Thus, the Joint Regional Group (JRG) of Belarusian and Russian troops was created in 2000. Its members included the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus and the 20th Army of the Western Military District of the Russian Federation Armed Forces, together with the compounds, military units of the central and district subordination. Protecting the Western borders of the Union State was declared as the JRG's priority. In accordance with the Joint Plan of Actions around 30–40 joint activities of operational and combat training of different levels and character were held annually to ensure the group functioning. Thus, in September, 2015 military exercises the "Union Shield – 2015", which were attended by 8,000 troops from Russia and Belarus with 80 aircraft and helicopters involved using up to 400 units of equipment, took place in the Baltic Sea at the military ranges of Leningrad, Pskov and Kaliningrad regions, as well as offshore landfill scale [4].

Belarusian-Russian military exercises, generally, caused a negative reaction in the neighboring country-members of NATO, as well as among the NATO leadership. Regarding the preparations for the 2017 regular large-scale Belarusian-Russian military exercises "West-2017", there is a heated debate in the Mass Media of Belarus and other countries about the estimated number of Russian troops and arms, which are planned to be transferred to Belarus. A number of publications provide information that up to 4162 wagons with military cargo will arrive from Russia to Belarus for the exercises [26]. The announcement of such an impressive large-scale transfer of military forces causes contradictory, often sensational conclusions and opinions.

On February 3, 2009 the Union State Supreme State Council decided to merge the Russian and Belarusian air defense systems. The partners suggested that this decision would improve the efficiency of air defense by 15–20 %.

The joint Belarusian-Russian activities carried out in the military sphere, demonstrate the desire of Belarusian and Russian leadership to take specific measures to strengthen their security and create a real counterbalance to NATO's military capabilities. It is the North Atlantic Alliance that was perceived as the major "opponent" of Belarus in the sphere of security, even if it was not mentioned in the official documents.

The second half of the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium was characterized by fierce anti-NATO rhetoric of the Belarusian authorities. Belarus as well as Russia criticized NATO expansion. NATO bombing of Serbian forces (1999) and Kosovo separation provoked a especially negative reaction in Belarus. Criticism of the Euro-Atlantic alliance on the part of the Belarusian authorities was often even tougher than the Kremlin's statements.

Bilateral cooperation in the military sphere was complemented by the interaction between Minsk and Moscow in a broader multilateral format. Thus, in 2002 six post-Soviet countries (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia) signed an agreement on the establishment of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). According to Art. 3 of the Charter of this Organization, "The purposes of the Organization are to strengthen peace and international and regional security and stability and to ensure the collective defense of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the member States, in the attainment of which the member States shall give priority to political measures" [7].

For decades the official Minsk did not give any reason to doubt its position as the most reliable and consistent Russian ally. However, in the beginning of the 2000s some events that revealed a more attentive and careful comprehension of Belarus in terms of its economic, military and political interests took place. Thus, in 2008 against the will of Moscow Belarus did not officially recognize the self-proclaimed states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This fact immediately attracted attention on the part of Russia and the West. The fact that the official Minsk kept distance from the Russian-Georgian conflict was "appreciated" by the US and EU. Belarus was invited to the EU program "Eastern Partnership", the exchange of official visits was intensified. A similar position on the formal recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence was taken by the rest of the CSTO member states (the independence of the self-proclaimed republics was recognized only by four UN member states (Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Nauru). The interview of the Georgian President Saakashvili to the Belarusian television given in July, 2010 during the ongoing Georgian-Russian confrontation caused certain irritation on the Russian side.

The situation around Abkhazia and South Ossetia was not the only disagreement of Belarusian and Russian leadership.

The above mentioned "bumps" of Belarus-Russia cooperation were reflected in the official debate, at the same time they did not have a major impact on the content of the conceptual documents adopted by the Belarusian leadership. The only difference was that the multi-vector principle was declared more often [24].

Thus, Article 27 of the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On the Main Directions of Domestic and Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus" (November 14, 2005) declared that the foreign policy objectives had to be proportional to the potential of the state, which had to strive to build good-neighborly relations with the neighboring countries and integrate into the global community [17].

Another fundamental document which attempted to provide answers to the emerging internal and external challenges is the National Security Concept of the Republic of Belarus. There were three editions of this documents in the history of the country. The first Concept was adopted in 1995, the second – in 2001. The current concept, approved by the Presidential Decree on November 9, 2010 emphasized, in particular, the need for the country to pursue a consistent and balanced multi-vector foreign policy in order to protect itself from the external threats to national security. In this document the Republic of Belarus is viewed as a European country that does not belong to any world power center. The Concept also states that the Belarusian multi-vector foreign policy is based on a comprehensive cooperation with Russia, former Soviet Union states as well as Western countries, and the EU, in particular. Moreover, the priority is also given to the relations with the countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, namely China, India, Vietnam, Venezuela and Brazil [10].

In contrast to trade and economic relations the disputes between Minsk and Moscow in the political and military spheres were not systematic. When they appeared, they were mainly a reaction to the economic debate between the two states. Hence, in 2009 in response to Russia's economic sanctions against some Belarusian products ("milk war") the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko at the CSTO Summit on June 14, 2009 (Kyrgyzstan) refused to sign the Treaty establishing the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF) and was not present at their exercises. Although in October, 2009 the Belarusian signature was already in the Treaty, however, Minsk's position caused mixed reviews in the Russian Media [6].

A new stage in the geopolitical history of Eastern Europe is associated with the Ukrainian crisis, when it grew into the phase of hostilities in Donbass in February, 2014. The crisis had an impact on Belarus-Russian relations, as in the fierce confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, the Belarusian government sought to maintain friendly contacts with both sides. A little more than a month after the victory of

“Maidan” supporters A. Lukashenko held talks with the Acting Ukrainian President Alexander Turchinov (April, 2014) in Gomel region, and later took part in the inauguration ceremony of the President of Ukraine Petr Poroshenko [3].

These events led to the fact that in the Russian Media the politicians and analysts of the neighboring side more frequently criticized Belarus for “violating” Minsk and Moscow’s alliance, for “the desire to sit on two chairs” for “trying to turn the country to the West” and etc.

For some time the situation was smoothed by the fact that the conflicting parties chose Minsk as a negotiation platform for the conflict settlement of South-Eastern Ukraine. The talks of the leaders of the so-called “Norman Quartet”, which took place in Minsk in February, 2015 received a worldwide coverage. The agreement that was reached promoted the cessation of large-scale clashes and was called “Minsk 2”. It became not only the hope for the armed conflict settlement, but also gave Belarus a new peacekeeping image.

The Belarusian government valued this positive fact and became more cautious not only in its foreign policy rhetoric, but also in the action planning. Belarus made attempts to mediate in the Russia and Turkey conflict. In particular, in Ashgabat in December, 2015 at the International Conference “Neutrality Policy: International Cooperation for Peace, Security and Development” A. Lukashenko expressed the desire of Belarus to contribute to the restoration of friendly relations between Russia and Turkey [12]. Therefore, in the Belarusian-Russian tandem Belarus began to try on the role of intermediary in the relations between Moscow and its external opponents.

Meanwhile, Belarusian-Russian controversies went to a new level with the beginning of the discussion about placing the Russian military air base in Belarus. As it became known from the open press, on September 7, 2015 the Government of the Russian Federation adopted Decree № 945, which approved the attached Draft Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on establishing a Russian air base on the territory of the Republic of Belarus. The Draft Agreement was submitted by the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation and had previously been worked out with “the Belarusian side”. The above mentioned Decree suggested that the President of the Russian Federation signed the Agreement [9]. As it became known from the official chronicle, the Belarusian side did not support the Russian initiative, considering that the air base placement in Bobruisk made little sense from the military point of view, but in the political area – would cause serious tensions in the region [13]. The position of the parties was widely publicized in the Media and continues to be actively discussed until the present.

In the context of a significant thawing of relations between Belarus, the EU and the US, recent deterioration of relations with the Russian

Federation Belarus adopted a new Military Doctrine of the Republic of Belarus. Belarusian leader signed its approval on July 20, 2016. The Doctrine states that the geopolitical centers of power seek to expand their strategic zones of influence, which leads to the infringement and block of other states’ interests provoking tensions and enhancing interstate conflicts. However, despite the increasing challenges and threats in the region, the Republic of Belarus does not consider any of the States as its enemy. Paragraph 19 of the Doctrine, which states that the Republic of Belarus while maintaining good neighborly and mutually beneficial relations with the European Union, a partnership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is committed to building an equitable dialogue, improving transparency and mutual development through strengthening regional security, aroused particular interest among the experts [18].

The new Doctrine adoption has intensified the debate whether in practice Belarus is really committed to neutrality. Different political orientation experts joined the discussion on this controversial issue. This was the topic of the scientific conference held in Minsk in late June, 2016. The conference debate results are summarized in the publication of the Ostrogorski Center “Elements of Neutrality in Belarusian Foreign Policy and National Security Policy” by Siarhei Bogdan and Gumer Isaev [5]. The research focused on the issues where Belarusian position was different from the Russian one. In my view, on the basis of the analysis the research authors came to an unreasonable conclusion. They argue that the policy pursued by the Belarusian government from the late 2000s led to the emergence of actual neutrality. This course was the result of specific decisions made by the Belarusian leadership on the country’s major foreign policy and national security policy issues.

The intensified confrontation between NATO and Russia brought additional tension to the Belarusian-Russian debate on various controversial issues. Both sides have moved to building up military forces on their borders, including the border with Belarus. This created a serious threat to the security of Belarus, which views regional demilitarization as its vital interest. In this situation the official Minsk tried to take a non-confrontational stance, which in one way or another had to be understood by both conflicting sides. This position was expressed by Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei during his visit to Warsaw on October, 10 in 2016: “We do not perceive what is happening as a direct military threat for Belarus, but we consider it a challenge and we are thinking about the methods to adequately respond to these events” [15].

In contrast to the moderate position of the Russian leadership Minsk’s peacekeeping initiatives and evaluation were welcomed by the EU as a whole and its individual Member States, especially Poland. During 2016 several senior representatives from Warsaw visited Minsk: Polish Foreign Minister

Witold Waszczykowski (March 22–23, 2016), Deputy Prime Minister of Poland, Minister of Economic Development Mateusz Moravetsky (October, 24). And finally, at the end of a politically saturated year on December 4–6, 2016 the Polish Senate Marshal Stanislaw Karchevsky paid a working visit to Belarus. He met with the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko and the leaders of both National Assembly Chambers of the Republic of Belarus Mikhail Myasnikov and Vladimir Andreichenko [14]. In the diplomatic language the visit of the Polish Sejm's leader meant the resumption of official Belarus-Poland contacts at the parliamentary level. As it is known, these contacts were officially frozen by the European Union governing bodies' decision in September, 1997 [23].

As the warming of Belarus – EU, Belarus – US relations was progressing the Russian media intensified the information campaign about “Belarus repeating the Ukrainian scenario.” Some Internet portals were especially zealous in these actions. The propaganda campaign that does not reflect the real situation, in practice can cause serious damage to Belarus-Russia cooperation and strengthen the forces that oppose equal and mutually beneficial cooperation between Belarus and Russia in both countries.

Thus, on the basis of the information presented above a brief summary can be made.

Conclusions:

1. The evolution of the security policy of the Republic of Belarus becomes more visible as we move along the path of its independent existence. In our view, it is becoming more pragmatic and focused on the state interests. To a greater extent the Belarusian authorities consider the geopolitical features of the country in the political decision-making. However, there are no reasons to talk not only about the neutrality status, but also about a clear movement towards neutrality of this average in size and potential Eastern European country.

The attempt of some political forces in Belarus to make it a neutral state ended up with the signing of the Tashkent Pact (1993). The creation of the Union State of Belarus and Russia (1999) led to the deepening of military cooperation between the two countries (unified military troops, joint missile defense system). However, in the framework of the alliance commitments Belarus has every right to declare and implement its national interests, to defend

its position in the relations with the neighboring and other countries.

While formulating the security policy the Belarusian authorities take into account the position of several major social groups that support different, sometimes conflicting, geopolitical views.

Obviously, there is no reason to talk about some neutral status of Belarus and even an intention to obtain this status, the rejection of Minsk from its military and allied relations with Russia and its obligations under the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

2. The differences that exist between Belarus and Russia, in essence, are not systematic. Belarusian actions can only be assessed as a maneuver within the freedom of actions provided by the obligations undertaken in the official documents. To a large extent, they were a response to the crisis escalation in and around Ukraine. This maneuver unreasonably regarded by some Russian experts and politicians as a “betrayal of allied commitments.”

The campaign unfolded in the Russian Media against certain aspects of the Belarusian foreign policy poses a serious threat because it uses information warfare methods. The ungrounded conclusions and opinions, published materials infringe upon the national dignity of the Belarusian citizens, and can mislead many Russians.

3. Belarus can not and does not go beyond the existing scope of integration for many reasons, including because of its strong economic dependence on Russia. The European Union is not ready and can not replace Russia as a major partner in the economic or security sectors.

It should be emphasized that in the current environment Belarus is not able to go beyond the allotted freedom of maneuver. It is likely that the actions beyond the “red line” can cause a tough reaction from Russia. Under the present circumstances there is a clear contradiction between how Russia wants to see Belarus how the Belarusian people want to see it. How do these expectations correspond with each other?

The situation in Eastern Europe creates uncertainty in the regional security system. For Belarus located between the geopolitical centers of power it presents a serious challenge. The question of geopolitical “surprises” that may occur both in the short and in the long run is still open.

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