

Next presidential elections, the diagnosis of the Belarusian economy- Digest of Belarusian Analytics

TUT.by predicts that six candidates from the opposition will run for the Belarusian presidential elections in 2020. Lukashenka's alliance with China helps to avoid binary confrontation with Russia and the European Union. Russian media have increased blaming Belarus for infidelity amid the introduction of the 30-day visa-free period.

World Bank names three chronic diseases of the Belarusian economic model: the lack of sustainability, imbalance, and inefficiency. Belarusian business recognizes improvement of conditions in 2018 in almost all spheres.

British Professor of Economics, Anthony J. Evans creates Minsk travel guide. Belarus climbs to the 38th position in E-Government Development Index (EDGI).

This and more in the new digest of Belarusian analytics.

Politics

[Who Will Go To Presidency in the Next Election?](#) – Artiom Shraibman, TUT.by, draws up a list of candidates who will probably run for Belarus' presidential election in 2020. The first candidate will be the incumbent president if to exclude force majeure. Roughly six more candidates from the opposition and other forces will be also nominated. The journalist notes that in recent years the leadership of the opposition has been almost completely upgraded because immovable leadership leads to stagnation.

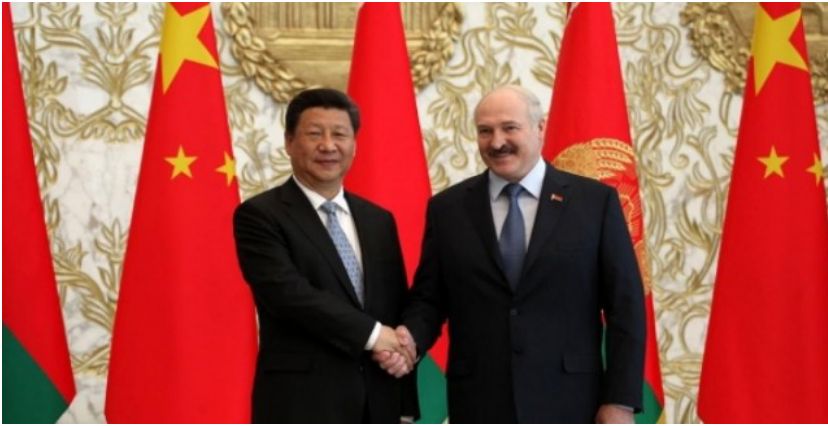
[How did Belarusians react to the Freedom Day?](#) – Thinktanks.by received the results of the research conducted by the Belarusian analytical workshop (Warsaw) on how the Belarusians reacted to the celebration of Freedom Day (25th March). 21% of the respondents believed that March 25 had to be a state holiday, 32.8% disagreed with it, 44.3% did not have their own opinion on this matter.

[Belarus: A Chinese Solution?](#) – Tomasz Kamusella, New Eastern Europe magazine, Lukashenka's skilful navigation in between Russia and the EU suddenly gains another dimension as the Belarusian strongman opens up his country to China. The previously binary choice will become fuzzier with this novel 'triangulation,' making it more difficult for one of the prospective three partners to put Belarus in place.

[Belarus Opening up to the World Amidst Russian Accusations of Disloyalty](#) – Grigory Ioffe stresses that one can hardly point to a more obvious sign of Belarus's desire to open up to the world than the introduction of the 30-day visa-free period. This new step is occurring against the backdrop of Russia's sour relationship with the West. Russian publications ever more frequently accuse Belarus of infidelity.

Economy

[Belarusian Economy was Diagnosed. Will It be Cured?](#) – Naviny.by overviews a comprehensive study of the World Bank that names three chronic diseases of the Belarusian economic model: lack of sustainability, imbalance, and inefficiency. Over the past quarter century, the economic model of Belarus has not changed significantly, characterized by a high state presence, and showed different results.



Alexander Lukashenko meets Xi Jinping.

Source: 5min.by

[Mandatory sale of the currency is abolished](#) in Belarus, according to the presidential decree signed on July 31. The decision was made 'in order to liberalize foreign exchange relations and stimulate business activity'.

[Belarusian business recognizes the improvement of conditions in 2018](#) in almost all spheres. This is a finding of the [study Liberalization of Conditions for Business](#) conducted among 409 small and medium-sized enterprises. The study was commissioned by IPM Research Center and conducted by MIA company. During 2010-2018, the main barriers to business remain high taxes and unstable legislation.

[Reformists in the government strengthen the private sector confidence in the state](#) when it comes to the national currency and economic policy, which manifested in [GDP growth](#). Meanwhile, the Belarusian authorities fear the consequences of comprehensive economic reforms, mainly due to the lack of clear signals from the Belarusian population that it is ready and accepts reforms.

[Low official unemployment level](#) – According to the International Labor Organization, Belarus is on the 4th place in terms of unemployment, which corresponds to one of the lowest levels in the world. However, the rating takes into account the official unemployment in Belarus – 0.5%.

National security

[The situation in the Field of National Security and Defense of Belarus. June 2018](#) – In its monthly monitoring, Belarus Security Blog notes that the special services finally made public the cases of violations in the health sector. The experts believe that the reason is upcoming presidential elections. Belarusians observe a PR campaign to raise the ratings of the government and personally Lukashenka as a fighter against corruption.

[Civic Control Over the Army. Basic Provisions](#) – Belarus Security Blog outlines a model, which proves the need to strengthen civic control over the military forces. This is particularly urgent for nations that recently freed from totalitarianism and need a radical revision of the relationship between civil society and the military towards their democratization. The related situation in Belarus is [considered](#).

[Trump and Putin's Meeting in Helsinki: Issues for World and Eastern Europe, Recommendations for Belarus](#) – In his analytical note, Yauheni Preiherman notes that the Russian-American summit in Helsinki is a missed opportunity for security in Eastern Europe. With any developments, Minsk should continue its own search for possible points of contact and formats for coordinating the interests of global and regional players.



A typical currency exchange station in Belarus. Source: <http://www.belmarket.by>

[Belarus's Second Front: Is Lukashenka Really Afraid of Russia?](#) – Artyom Shraibman, for Carnegie Moscow Center, notes that in the past few years, Minsk has started citing Russia as its main threat. It is an open question whether the Belarusian authorities really believe the Kremlin poses a threat to the country's sovereignty, or whether they are simply attempting to dress up their usual repressive behaviour in pretty packaging for the West.

Other

[Travel Guide to Minsk](#) – British Professor of Economics, Anthony J. Evans describes his impressions upon his visit to Minsk. Military uniform is everywhere, tractors roam the streets. And the absence of a democratic transition casts an intriguing shadow of communist rule. But the city is vibrant, affluent, and spotlessly clean. It feels more like a Baltic city break than an Eastern European industrial wasteland.

[Belarus takes the 80th place in investment attractiveness.](#) According to the [International Business Compass](#) 2018, Belarus

for the year has improved its position by 7 points and bypassed Russia and Ukraine, which take 95th and 131st places respectively.

[Belarus climbs to the 38th position in E-Government Development Index](#) (EDGI). The country has moved 11 positions up to make it to the top 40 countries in the Very-High-EGDI level group for the first time. The [UN E-Government Survey](#) is compiled for 193 countries every two years.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.

Belarusian Independence Day: tanks and “carnivals”

On 3 July Belarus celebrated [its official Independence Day](#). Many Belarusians felt frustrated despite a [military parade](#) and festivities to celebrate the achievements of the national economy. While Alexander Lukashenka branded the parade as “the best” in Belarus’s history, Minsk residents complained of traffic jams and damage to public roads.

In both Minsk and other centres, local authorities have traditionally celebrated Independence Day with displays of what they considered the most important achievements of the Belarusian economy, showing off refrigerators, washing machines, hospital equipment and tractors.

Rocket launchers and T-34 tanks attack Minsk's streets

So, what did Minsk's streets endure on 3 July this year? About 250 military vehicles took part in the parade, including multiple-launch rocket systems (Smerch, Grad, and Polonez) and anti-aircraft missile systems (S-300 PS, Osa-AKM, and [Tor-M2](#)). As well, T-72 B battle tanks, BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, and BTR-70 family vehicles also rolled through the streets. As has become tradition, the legendary WW2 T-34-85 tank led the convoy.

The hundreds of armoured vehicles put colossal pressure on the roads, leaving numerous cracks in the asphalt surfaces. Each year, after military parades, Minsk's residents share pictures of tank tracks and bumps left on the roads.



Source: tut.by

In 2017 more than 9,000 Belarusians signed a petition against military parades in the centre of Minsk. Among major complaints, they listed ecological damage, excessive noise,

traffic jams, and road damage.

To date Belarusian state officials have downplayed public concern about road damage and other inconveniences caused by annual parades. The Ministry of Defence emphasises that military parades take place in accordance with the decision of the President of Belarus and with the full support of the Belarusian people. The Ministry of Defence adds that the potential relocation of any annual military parade would significantly raise its costs.

Dzianis Glinsky, the head of the capital's road administration, rebutted claims about road damage caused by armoured vehicles. According to Glinsky, tank tracks hardly constitute a danger to the capital's asphalt and concrete surfaces.

A risky show funded by taxpayers?

Despite optimistic affirmations from top Belarusian officials about the parades' popularity with the general public, each year Belarussians discuss them in a negative context. First, the use of a large volume of military equipment inevitably leads to incidents. In June 2017, during a parade rehearsal, a tank hit a lamppost on one of Minsk's central streets. The video of the incident has garnered significant attention and collected more than 754,000 views on YouTube.

In June 2018 an infantry fighting vehicle near Hrodna accidentally crashed into a passing car, injuring the car's driver. The incident led to the heated discussion of parades' feasibility across Belarus.

Expenditure on military parades also raises concerns. Since [the Ministry of Defence](#) has not divulged parades' costs,

several analysts have attempted to estimate their budget independently. Naviny.by reported that Belarusian taxpayers paid approximately \$2.37 million for the arrangement of the 2017 parade. Analyst Aliaksandr Alesin provided another figure: in 2009, he claims, the military parade cost taxpayers about \$50 million. Taking into account the reluctance of the Ministry of Defence to disclose the real figure, speculations about parades' budgets will continue.

The scenarios of the annual military parades annoy some Belarusians. The "carnival" part of the parades receives an utmost criticism. For instance, Belarusian internet users mocked the previous year's parade, which featured Belarusian-made refrigerators, washing machines, and TV-sets as a demonstration of national industrial success. Amid criticism, the recent parade avoided showing off refrigerators and stuck to dancers and singers instead.

Consequently, the feasibility of an expensive and sometimes dangerous [display of the nation's military power](#) remains questionable for a number of Belarusians. Two weeks ago a popular newspaper, "Nasha Niva", conducted a survey asking whether the celebration of Independence Day should involve a military parade this year. 85 % of respondents replied that it should not.

Or a patriotic display of national unity?

For Lukashenka, an annual demonstration of the nation's military might serves to unify of the Belarusian people. The president maintains that the nation must see a [battle-ready Belarusian army](#). According to Lukashenka, Independence Day's parades must be "impressive" and their arrangement should "spare no resources". In this way, annual military shows

continue to remain a viable tool of the Belarusian state ideology with [aviation](#), armoured [vehicles](#), and [missile systems](#) as irreplaceable components.

Globally, approaches to military parades vary from “spare no resources” to the utterly pragmatic. While the United States and the United Kingdom constrain themselves to soldiers and horses, the post-Soviet States traditionally engage armoured vehicles in parades. Hundreds of battle tanks and infantry fighting vehicles hit the streets of Moscow and Kazakhstan’s Astana on a yearly basis.

In this way, Lukashenka’s intention to carry on with impressive parades despite the growing national displeasure looks in line with his neighbours’ policies. Armoured vehicles will, therefore, continue to roll through Minsk’s streets next year, resulting in additional cracks and tracks, much to the anger of the capital’s citizens.

Military parades in Belarus: displaying military might and annoying locals

Belarus's tradition of military parades

In Belarus, military parades usually take place twice a year: on 9 May, or [Victory Day](#), when post-Soviet countries celebrate victory in the Great Patriotic War with Nazi Germany, and on 3

July, the [official Independence Day](#).

Thousands of members of the armed forces gather to exhibit the country's military equipment. Tanks, soldiers, and the military orchestra have become prominent symbols of the parade. Top-level officials, including president Alexander Lukashenka, also participate in the parades.



Every year, the parades involve helicopters, planes, missile systems, demonstration of tanks and military vehicles, and marches accompanied by the military orchestra. Additionally, in 2011-2016, Belarus invited Russian paratroopers to join.

Military parades usually involve mobilising a spectators. Organisations such as BRSM and other pro-governmental associations [forcefully ensure that their members attend](#). Many ordinary citizens also come to the parades to look at the military equipment and large fireworks displays.

The Independence Day parade, which is accompanied by patriotic songs and slogans, highlights Belarus's Soviet past. This emphasis on the [Great Patriotic War](#), which started when Nazi Germany invaded the USSR in 1941, to a large degree overshadows Belarus's independence.

The precision and scope of the parades, which is achieved at a very high cost and involves numerous rehearsals, make the phenomenon look like a scene from a movie. This year, on 3 July, more than 6,000 soldiers, hundreds of units of military equipment, and thousands of spectators took part.

Logistical hassles aside, which involve diverting traffic, changing public transport schedules, and damaging roads with tank tracks, many Belarusians disagree with the very nature of the parades.

The link between the [official Independence Day](#) and the parade on 3 July itself remains dubious. On 3 July, Minsk was indeed liberated from the Nazis, but the rest of Belarus remained under occupation.

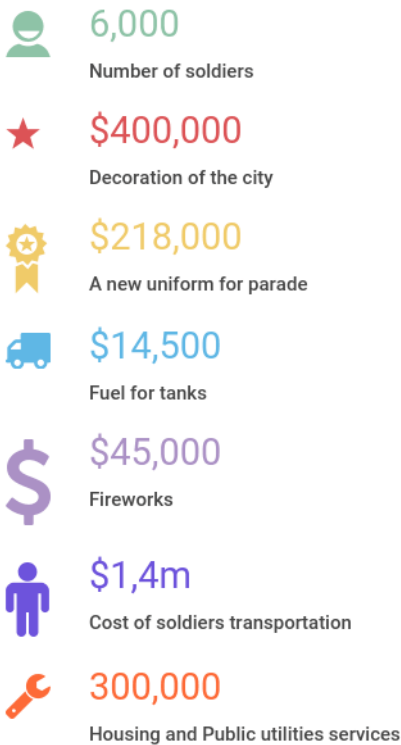
Earlier, Independence Day was celebrated on July 27, when Belarus became a sovereign state.

Tanks and toilets: the 2017 Independence Day parade

Even before the military parade took place, many Belarusians were heatedly discussing it. On 24 June, during a rehearsal, a large tank bumped into a lamppost and a tree. Nobody suffered from the incident, but it garnered much attention. Belarusians then started a petition to move the parade outside Minsk.

The parade is intended to demonstrate not only Belarus's military might, but also the successes of the Belarusian economic model. Therefore, along with tanks, guns, and other military equipment, the parade exhibited some of the country's non-military products. The event's organisers decided to showcase Belarusian furniture brands (Pinskdrev and Maladzechna Mebel), tractors, and even Belarusian toilets.

This decision was supposed to prove that Belarus is able to produce everything it needs – from toilets to military equipment. In turn, this was intended to encourage Belarusians to buy Belarusian products. However, the presence of the toilets caused wide-spread ridicule among Belarusians on the Internet.



Thus, in May, Lukashenka stated: 'There is no need to be stingy with this [parade], especially because they are not so expensive. It should be a real parade, an impressive one. This is why it is being done. This is a demonstration, we show people that we are eating the bread of war for a reason'.

According to Lukashenka's demands, the parade was indeed massive and expensive. The Ministry of Defence, however, refused to divulge its expenditures. In contrast, Russia reported the costs of its parades, despite the closed nature of its military entities.

Although ascertaining the real cost Belarus's military parades remains difficult, analysts have attempted to estimate the budget of this demonstration of power. Thus, *Naviny.by* reports that Belarusians probably paid around \$2.37m in taxes for transportation of equipment and soldiers, decorations, and fuel for tanks.

Speaking with *TUT.by*, Belarus's most popular news portal, analyst Andrei Alesin concluded that the parade in 2009 cost \$50m. However, in 2009 the parade featured 4,000 soldiers – 2,000 less than in 2017. Moreover, in 2009 there were only about 200 units of military equipment, while in 2017 there were over 500. However, given the differences between these two figures and the lack of access to concrete figures about the parades, it remains impossible to estimate the parades' true cost.

Why conduct military parades?

Historically, the aim of military parades has been to demonstrate the country's ability to protect itself during war. After the Ukrainian conflict, which led to worries of a possible Russian intervention in Belarus, military parades possibly even reassured citizens.

What's more, many believe that showing off military equipment is proof that the country has the resources to resist aggression from any side. Thus, the parade creates an [illusion of military capability](#).

The military parade of 3 July is also proof that the Belarusian government continues to demonstrate its support for Soviet traditions and symbols and sees them as a key element to nation building.



These parades also involve different forms of entertainment, such as fireworks, concerts, and competitions. As Leanid Spatakaj, an analyst at Belarus Security Blog, told Belsat: 'People need not only bread but also a spectacle: if there was no demand there would be no offer'.

The Ministry of Defence is unlikely to announce the true cost of these parades in the near future. However, given the amount of military equipment, city decorations, and entertainment, this sum is nothing to sneeze at. Instead of conducting expensive military parades, Belarus could focus on updating equipment and repairing army facilities.

Russia Reviews Military Doctrine: Can Belarus Remain a Buffer State?

On 2 September, Russia vowed to revise and update its national Military Doctrine by the end of 2014. The decision was a direct reaction to NATO's plans for deploying a rapid-reaction force in Eastern Europe, a move to be finalised at the summit in Wales this week.

In a speech in Tallinn on 3 September U.S. President Barack Obama announced plans for additional U.S. Air Force units to be based in Estonia.

NATO's increased presence in Eastern Europe may inject new energy into Russia-Belarus military cooperation. Pivotal for defending Russia's western borders in the event of conflict, Belarus could soon turn from a buffer state into the Russian military's most forward post.

For nearly two decades, Belarus has successfully [balanced](#) Russian interests against the West's. While closer military cooperation could strengthen Minsk's bargaining position with Moscow in the short run, it could eventually undermine Belarus' multi-vector balancing strategy and restrict its freedom to act alone.

Friends and Foes According to Russian Military Doctrine

The revisions to the Russian doctrine would reflect "changing military dangers and military threats," according to Mikhail Popov, senior official at Russia's Security Council. In a

recent interview with the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti, Popov called NATO's expansion "one of the leading military dangers for the Russian Federation." Indeed, all of Russia's military doctrines – passed in 1993, 2000, and 2010 – recognised NATO as a threat.

Yet the priority accorded to NATO as an enemy has increased over time. While the 1993 and the 2000 doctrines mentioned "the expansion of military blocs and alliances to the detriment of the interests of Russian Federation" among external dangers, they did not name NATO explicitly.

In contrast, the 2010 document moved the threat of NATO to the top of the list of external threats. It explicitly mentioned NATO's goal "to arrogate to itself the assumption of global functions in violation of international law, and to expand the military infrastructure of NATO nations to Russia's borders including through expansion of the bloc."

The 2014 revisions could also amplify the importance of the Russia-Belarus military alliance. This indeed has happened with each subsequent edition of the Russian doctrine. The 1993 doctrine did not contain any references to Belarus or other CIS states. The 2000 document briefly acknowledged that

countries in the region in

	1993 Military Doctrine	2000 Military Doctrine	2010 Military Doctrine
NATO	The expansion of military blocs and alliances to the detriment of the interests of Russian Federation military security named as a threat		First on the list of threats is "the goal of NATO to arrogate to itself the assumption of global functions in violation of international law, and to expand the military infrastructure of NATO nations to Russia's borders"
NUKES	Envisions the possible escalatory use of nuclear weapons.	Nuclear weapons can be used in nuclear wars and military conflicts with the use of conventional weapons (large-scale war, regional war)	
BELARUS		Russia "implements a joint defense policy together with the Republic of Belarus, coordinates with it activities in the sphere of military organizational development, the development of the armed forces of the Union State's member states, and the utilization of military infrastructure, and takes other measures to maintain the Union State's defense capability;"	<p>Russia will respond to an armed attack on / use of military force against the Union State</p> <p>Priorities: (1) to coordinate activities in the sphere of the development of the national Armed Forces and the use of the military infrastructure; (2) to formulate and agree on measures to maintain the defence capability of the Union State [of Russia and Belarus] in accordance with the Military Doctrine of the Union State;</p> <p>Main CSTO priorities: to consolidate efforts and create collective forces in the interests of ensuring collective security and joint defence;</p>

The [2010 doctrine](#), on the other hand, contains an explicit commitment to respond to an armed attack against the Union State of Belarus and Russia.

It lists the development of the armed forces and the maintenance of the defence capabilities of the Union State as top priorities for Moscow.

It also contains an additional clause regarding military cooperation within CSTO, which applies to Belarus and the four other CSTO members (Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan).

Were NATO to increase its presence in the Eastern European states along Belarus' border, Belarus' role in Russia's military planning would quickly grow in importance.

Belarus' Role in Russia's Security

To date, Belarus has fulfilled primarily a symbolic role in Russia's security. Its [armed forces](#) have remained small and military capabilities limited. Belarus's defence budget (about \$ 745 million) is more than 100 times less than Russia's. In 2013, Belarus proved incapable of protecting the union-state

airspace as it failed to register an amateur plane entering Belarus from Lithuania to distribute [800 teddy bears](#) with human rights messages.

The military alliance may gain ground in its actual substance, however, as Russia-NATO tensions intensify. Russia may need Belarus to defend its Western borders. Belarusian territory is particularly useful for stationing Russian military posts and missile divisions, including the S-300 and S-400 anti-aircraft systems.

Russia has mulled the idea of establishing its [first military airbase](#) in Belarus. It would be located at Lida, close to the Lithuanian (35 km) and Polish (130 km) borders. So far, the terms of the base agreement remain up in the air. But the ongoing crisis in Ukraine could hasten the process of securing the base on Belarus' border with the EU. If so, Belarus could extract concessions in return for Russia's right to maintain a base on its territory.

An airbase in Lida would be Russia's third military installation in Belarus. Moscow already operates an early-warning radar system near Baranavichy and a radio-electronic centre near Vileyka, which can be used for communications spying against NATO.

Russia's Role in Belarus' Military Planning

Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, Belarus has published only two [military doctrines](#). The 1992 doctrine, passed under the leadership of Stanislau Shushkevich, emphasised the nation's neutrality and envisioned the creation of a "nuclear-free belt" from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

Neutrality was absent from the 2002 doctrine, which prioritised the formation of "a single defence space with the Russian Federation." Among the threats mentioned in the doctrine is the "enlargement of military blocs and alliances at the expense of military security of the Republic of Belarus

and the counteraction of collective security systems pertaining to the Republic of Belarus." This exact threat is also mentioned in the corresponding Russian doctrine.

Russia and Belarus have concluded over 30 binding [cooperation agreements](#) in the military-technical field, including the Treaty on Military Cooperation, the Agreement on Joint Efforts to Provide Security in the Battlefield, the Concept of Belarus-Russia Joint Defence Policies, the Concept of Security of the Belarus-Russia Union, and the Military Doctrine of the Union State.

Unsurprisingly, Belarus' perception of security threats in the region has increasingly reflected those of Russia.

The End of the Buffer State?

Lukashenka has succeeded in extracting significant [economic benefits](#) by arguing that Russia's military security depends on Minsk's economic wellbeing. Even as the President has been [careful not to side](#) with Russia as the conflict in Ukraine has unfolded, he has continued to emphasise that, as Russia's military ally, Belarus would have to react to an increase in NATO's military capabilities on its borders.

On 3 September, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin tweeted a veiled threat, "The Government of Ukraine approved the abolition of the country's non-block status. NATO is now screwed [Rus. '*Hana teper*' *NATO*]."

Should Russia-NATO tensions continue to escalate, Belarus' buffer zone status would erode and its territory would be at Russia's disposal.

The old, long-standing rumours that Russia may deploy Iskander missiles in Belarus could become reality if NATO establishes a greater presence on Russian borders following the summit in Wales on 3-4 September.

If the need should arise, Russia could also take direct control over components of Belarus' national defence system, as it has always sought to do.

Even if the Russia-NATO tensions are defused, Belarus' dependence on the Russian economy and its membership in the Eurasian Economic Union leave it exposed to Western sanctions.

Russia Plays War in Belarus

On 12 March, Minsk and Moscow agreed that Russia will deploy 15 fighters jets in Belarus in reaction to NATO's drills on the border between Poland and Belarus.

However, Belarus remains reluctant to support Russia in the Crimean conflict either politically or militarily. Lukashenka's regime wants to simply show its loyalty and get its hands on some new equipment.

Belarusian military dependence on Russia remains critical. Belarus conducts only small drills on its own, and many Belarusian officers have received their training in Russia.

Purchases of Russian-made arms at discounted rates remains almost the only opportunity for Belarus to update its own arm supplies, though the country's military industry maintains strong ties with Russian companies.

Belarus' military dependence on Russia is the result of a deliberate policy continuously implemented by Lukashenka. Belarusian authorities are well aware of the fact that the Kremlin will always financially support Belarus, because it views Belarus as a buffer zone for Russia.

Belarusian Army Will not be a Party to the Crimean Conflict

Although Belarus remains officially a neutral country the Kremlin likes to play war with the West within its borders. The decision to have 15 fighters jets relocated shows that Lukashenka has made a concession to the Kremlin, but this does not mean that Belarus is going to fight for Russia.

It seems that regime wants to testify to its loyalty to the Kremlin after its recent refusal to support Russia in the Crimean conflict. Belarus, it cannot be forgotten, has a strong desire to acquire new military equipment as well.

On 13 March, six Russian Su-27s and three military transport planes landed in Belarus. The same day, Lukashenka said that the redeployment took place at Russia's request. Also on 13 March, the Ukrainian MFA expressed its concern about Russia's attempts to involve Belarus in Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

For many outsiders, [Lukashenka](#) looks like the Kremlin's vassal and the Belarusian army like a division of Russia's armed forces. However, the Belarusian authorities have [refused to support](#) the actions of Russia in the Crimea and Belarusian troops continue to remain within the country's borders.

As a member country of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, Belarus can refuse to support any Russian offensive. According to the Charter of the CSTO, Belarus should support other members only during defensive actions. Furthermore, Putin has so far failed to publicly admit that Russian troops have entered Ukraine. Belarus cannot support these troops so long as they remain officially unrecognised.

Belarusian obligations to Russia within the framework of the [Union State](#) remain limited to real warfare. Military expert Alexander Alesin explains that "the only way that Belarus will participate in Crimea is to go there with a peacekeeping mission with a UN mandate and at the consent of Ukraine."

Belarusian Military Dependence on Russia

Although Belarus has neither politically nor militarily supported Russia in the Crimean conflict, the Belarusian army remains deeply dependent on Russia.

After the creation of the [United Regional System of Air Defense](#), Russia has effectively gained full control over the Belarusian air force. In the near future, the first Russian military [air base](#) in Belarus will begin to operate. This facility is the first of its kind that was personally authorised by Lukashenka. The Belarusian authorities have inherited two other Russian military sites from their predecessors.

Belarusian troops effectively subordinate to Russia. Belarus lacks even its own ground force command.

Military cooperation has always been the sacred cow of the Union State of Belarus and Russia. Even during periods of crises between the countries, military collaboration has continued unphased. The existence of a regional army group for the Union State make Belarusian troops effectively subordinate to Russia. Belarus lacks even its own ground force command.

Belarus conducts only small-scale training exercises on its own and [operational drills](#) with Russia every two years. The so-called [“West” drills](#) have repeatedly made Belarus' relations with Lithuania and Poland very tense. However, some experts argue that Warsaw and Minsk have found that by speculating on an imaginary threat emanating from each other, Poland and Belarus can get money from their own allies in Moscow and Washington, respectively.

Belarus lacks the opportunity to acquire new weapons at market prices and is therefore condemned to begging for them from Russia. In 2012, the Belarusian ruler caused outrage by [asking](#)

[Russia to finance](#) his country's military. Russia gives great discounts on their wares, but regularly delays the delivery of military supplies. Belarus [is still waiting](#) for four Yak-130s and several S-300s to replace their old S-200s.

On 19 February, the Belarusian Ambassador to Russia announced that Belarus will receive Yak-130s in 2015. Previously, Lukashenka said that Russia would support and deliver several military aircraft, but none of this has come into fruition. Russia requires real money from its western partner, not just loyalty.

Many of Belarus men-in-arms continue to receive their military education in Russia.

Many of Belarus men-in-arms continue to receive their military education in Russia. The Secretary of the Security Council [Aliaksandr Miazhueu](#), the Chairman of the State Military-Industrial Committee [Siarhei Huruliou](#), the Chairman of the State Border Committee [Leanid Maltsau](#) and the Minister of Defence [Iuryi Zhadobin](#), all studied in Russia.

According to the Polish Centre for Eastern Studies, “in 2012, fewer than 800 people began officer training in Belarus, while as many as 600 individuals attended courses in Russian military schools.” However, it is noteworthy, that Belarusian officers study in Belarus also in civilian universities. It seems that Centre for Eastern Studies missed this data.

The Belarusian [military-industrial complex](#) continues to work primarily with Russia. Even when Belarus fulfils arms contracts with other countries, it still requires components that are produced in Russia. Moreover, Russia [keeps pushing](#) for the sale of the MZKT, a Belarusian manufacturer that produces a chassis of world-renowned quality, something that some have speculated could even happen this year.

Conscious Policy of the Regime

The military dependence of Belarus on Russia is the result not only of the Kremlin's efforts, but also the policy of Lukashenka's regime. Belarus remains reluctant to pay for its own army. The authorities have never afforded the nation's armed more than 2% of the GDP. In the 2000s, the spending was regularly at a level of approximately 1.5% of the nation's GDP.

At the moment, it seems that Russia has also become reluctant to pay – because Belarus is losing its role as the main military ally of Russia. In 2014, Russia is set to start supplying five battalions with the air defence missile system S-300PS to Kazakhstan – free of charge.

In the case of Belarus, Russia requires payment for weapons, albeit with discounts. While there are only three Russian military sites in Belarus, Kazakhstan hosts eleven Russian military sites. The total space they occupy is about the half of Belarus.

However, Belarus will remain an important Russian ally, since it is situated to the west of Russia's heart. Given this, Russia will have to continue to dole out funding, although it will do so in a more and more humiliating manner. The Kremlin will continue to increase its influence, but this does not necessarily mean that the Belarusian army will be a tool of Russian foreign policy.

Belarus and Russia Prepare for the West – 2013 Military

Drill

The planned Belarusian-Russian joint military drill, “West 2013”, has stirred up NATO member countries. The armed forces of both countries will hold the drill in the autumn, while some Polish and Lithuanian politicians have already discussed the threat of war.

Alexander Lukashenka said on 21 February that “Belarus and Russia are not going to threaten anyone”. This time he is telling the truth. A war in the centre of Europe remains beyond contemporary perception of reality, while the mentioned military drills seem to be an attempt to satisfy Russia’s imperial complex. The Belarusian regime uses intensive military cooperation as a pretext for getting more financial aid from the Kremlin.

Most likely, West 2013 will be similar to the previous drill that took place in 2009. That one was grand from the point of view of the size of the manpower employed and technical equipment involved.

The systems of defence of Belarus and Russia remain tightly interconnected. Specifically, the Kremlin is trying to make Belarusian defence an integral part of the Russian one. Today, Russia has great influence over Belarus' air defence system and has two military bases on the territory of Belarus: the Volga radar station near Baranavichy and the Antey long-range radar centre near Vilejka.

War Rehearsal in the West

Last month, the former Minister of National Defence of Poland Romuald Szeremietiew made a statement that Belarus and Russia were preparing for a future war with Poland, in connection with the upcoming drill.

In his opinion, West 2013 will resemble the previous military drills, held back in 2009, in its scope. West 2009 became the greatest military drill to happen on the territory of the former Soviet Union since its downfall. 12,500 people took part, with both the Belarusian and the Russian sides providing an approximately equal number of soldiers.

The armed forces involved 63 planes and 40 helicopters, 470 armoured vehicles, 228 tanks, 234 artillery cannons, mortars and multiple artillery rocket systems. Naturally, [NATO was alarmed](#) by the drill. Neighbouring Lithuania does not have a single tank.

This autumn, Belarus plans to broadly use its territorial defence troops, while the Collective Forces of Operative Reaction of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation will take part in the military drill in Belarus for the first time. The Kremlin created this organisation as a follower-up to the Warsaw Pact and is essentially the contemporary anti-NATO organisation of Russia.

In 2009, Dmitri Medvedev and Alexander Lukashenka watched the drill, while state propaganda used the mutual Russian-Belarusian preparations to show the might of the Belarusian military. This differed quite drastically from the [teddy bear stunt](#) that happened several years later.

Unity, or Russian Control over the Belarusian Army?

Despite the declarations of the military unity of the allies, Belarus and Russia have contradictory interests. On the one hand, Russia wants to obtain total control over the Belarusian army. On the other hand, Belarus is slowing down this process in order to preserve its independence in the military sphere and use it [to obtain Russian energy resources](#) at low prices.

The Russians have achieved their goal: by creating the [United Regional System of Air Defence](#) they have gained full control over the Belarusian air force. After the breakdown of the

Soviet Union, Russia failed to create an effective air defence system at its Western border so Belarus became a very important asset.

Unofficially, Belarus has been under strong Russian influence in this sphere for quite a long time already, and has earned rent from the scheme. In 2006, the Belarusian regime got four long range surface-to-air missile systems (the S-300) for \$13,000,000 each. The market price of such a rocket division is about 14 times more expensive in reality – or approximately \$180,000,000.

The importance of Russian military bases on the territory of Belarus deteriorates as the Russian authorities are building up their radars in the Leningrad and Kaliningrad regions. However, the Russians will never leave their bases in Belarus voluntarily, even if only for ideological reasons.

Belarus and Russia conduct common military drills and joint sessions at military headquarters, and Belarusian military men often get their education in Russia. Over quite a long period of time Belarus has been re-exporting Russian weapons to Africa and the Middle East. Belarus remains an outpost of defence for the Russian generals and they will hold on to it.

Contradictions in the Allies' Camp

Vladimir Putin outlined the development of the Russian army as one of the priorities of his third presidential term. The military-industrial complex will benefit the most from such a policy. The Belarusian weapons manufacturers would have been happy about this decision by the Kremlin if the Russian armed forces had not chosen the path of independence from Belarusian importers.

Starting in 2014, Russia will not order or receive Belarusian military trucks. The Volat truck transports the Jars and Avangard mobile strategic rocket systems today. Besides, the Russians, have no analogues to the Volat, and this means that

the case appears to be entirely politically motivated. This seems a strong blow to the Belarusian military-industrial complex. The Russian authorities will strive to obtain further control over the Belarusian army and its industrial complex.

For a long time, military cooperation remained the “sacred cow” of the Belarusian-Russian relationship. Despite the conflicts of political or economic character, military cooperation looked stable. However, now Russia is trying to show Belarus its proper place.

The Kremlin binds Belarus with organisational and legal instruments in order to take away its sovereignty in the military arena. Nevertheless, Lukashenka's regime will never give up independence entirely. Sovereignty remains its only good as well as its only guarantee before Russia. Ironically, Lukashenka is not only a danger to Belarusian independence, but also its main defender.

Ryhor Astapenia

Military Cooperation for Sale

According to Tacciana Manionak, an independent energy expert, the Lukashenka regime will get \$2.2bn in subsidies from Russia thanks to discounted natural gas prices in 2012 and at least \$700m thanks to the refinement of Russian crude oil. Independent economic expert Leanid Zaika estimates the volume of Russian oil and gas subsidies in 2012 at about \$ 4bn.

Russia was guided by political motives when it paid generously for Beltransgaz. Then more loans were received from Russia. This permitted raising of the volume of gold and foreign currencies reserves of Belarus to \$ 79bn.

The level of Russian subsidies is impressive. But Lukashenka stated repeatedly that the discounted prices for gas and crude oil and all the advantages of the economic cooperation with Russia were the price Russia paid for the union and for the great service Belarus renders to Russia. According to him, if one calculates what Belarus does for Russia, it turns out that Russia owes more to Belarus than Belarus owes to Russia.

Military Cooperation as Justification of Economic Subsidies

In all cases when Lukashenka calculated what Russia should pay Belarus for, he puts the military component of cooperation first. He often emphasises the role of the Belarusian army as a shield for the central part of Russia from NATO and the importance of the Belarusian air defence and Russian military bases.

Only afterwards does he speak about cheap transit, ten millions of Russians employed at businesses linked by technology to Belarusian companies, and communication between Russia and its Kaliningrad enclave and its supply. In extreme cases, during his most bitter disputes with Russian leaders, he lays out his other trumps on the table: he speaks about participation of Belarus in Russia's strategic integration projects and dependence of the Russian ally from the stable functioning of high-technology enterprises of the military and industrial complex in Belarus.

In late April 2010, commenting on the agreement concluded between Russia and Ukraine extending the stay of the Russian Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol, Lukashenka said that Russia had paid about \$40bn to Ukraine for the sites which had less importance for Russia than the missile attack warning centre near Hantsavichy (Brest region) and the nuclear submarines communication centre near Vilejka (Minsk region).

The talks between the United States and Russia about conditions of deployment of joint missile defence facilities

in the territory of eastern members of NATO failed. In late November 2011, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said in a special television address that they were not able to come to an agreement with the United States and NATO. Russia cannot accept weakening of the Russian deterrent capability and has to take special measures.

Deployment of Iskander Missile Systems

Also in November, the Russian news agency Interfax reported, citing a source in the Kremlin, that if the talks with the United States on missile defence failed, Russia could deploy missile systems Iskander in the territory of Belarus as well.

In the first week of February 2012, several web sites, citing a source in the Presidential Administration of Belarus, published information that the issue of deployment of missile systems Iskander in the territory of Belarus had been discussed during the visit of Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigoriy Karasin to Minsk on 30-31 January 2012.

On 8 February, answering questions from journalists regarding the topics of conversation between Head of the Presidential Administration Uladzimir Makiej and Foreign Minister Siarhiey Martynau and the Russian envoy, Head of the Foreign Policy Directorate of the Presidential Administration Maksim Ryzhankou said that the outcome of the talks between Russia and the United States on missile defence had been discussed among other matters for which "it was important for Russia to enlist support of its like-minded friends".

On 6 February, Lukashenka met with State Secretary of the Security Council Leanid Maltsau and Minister of Defence Jury Zhadobin. Lukashenka said: "I sent a letter to Medvedev about the necessity to look for additional funds for the Belarusian military... The two countries have basically a single army and similar tasks that they are facing".

On 9 February the mass media spread around Zhadobin's

explanations of Lukashenka's opinion: "Actually, it was underscored that military cooperation between our countries could become one of arguments for getting preferences in economic matters, e.g., regarding oil and gas supplies, which could be used to increase the national budget funds and augment our military men's money allowances."

It is hardly probable that Russia will dare deploy the Iskander missile systems in Belarus. Lukashenka will not agree to deploy Russian military detachments on the territory of Belarus, except for the military bases near Hantsavichy and Vileyka. Also, Russia will not entrust Lukashenka with efficient offensive weapons, let alone the missile systems. Some Russian generals believe that Lukashenka is not consistent enough as an ally. They do not have any guarantees that the supplied Iskanders be turned to the East.

Anti-Western Rhetoric in Common Interest

However, Russia and Lukashenka's regime share common interests of convincing the West in the reality of deploying the offensive armaments, including Iskander missiles systems on the territory of Belarus. It is a constituent part of Russia's plan of reaction to deployment of the US Anti-missile defence system in Europe.

Lukashenka treats the mere update of the Iskander deployment talks, as a counteraction to the United States and NATO, as a sufficient means of putting pressure on Russia's policy. He will urge Russia to pay for the mere statements about the targeting of NATO military facilities, located close to the Belarusian border.

According to Zhadobin's statement, which was clearly authorised by Lukashenka, the Belarusian government intends to coerce Russia into introducing more beneficial conditions of economic cooperation for their Belarusian ally. Particularly, it concerns the issue of energy carrier supplies.

In the least, the Belarusian government would like to force Russia to restructure the Belarus' foreign debt to its eastern neighbour, including the country's [financial obligations](#) to the Anti-crisis Fund of the Eurasian Economic Community.

Andrei Liakhovich

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Belarus Needs an Enemy

If one listens to the Belarusian and Russian leadership, a war with the West is imminent. This weekend, the Belarusian internet was filled with stories about Moscow being ready to defend Belarus from Warsaw's claims to the Grodno and Minsk regions in Poland. In November 2011, Head of the Russian General Staff General Nikolai Makarov presented an alarmist [map](#) that showed Russia and Belarus surrounded by hostile nations plotting to occupy them.

Since the 1990s the Kremlin has used Belarus as an ally who is ready to spout radical statements about NATO – something Russia, as a more internationally respected state, cannot do to the same extent. In return, Russia arms Belarus with its weapons at a discount. Putin's vision of the Eurasian Union, one step closer after the countries formed a common economic space on January 1 2012, is intended to take military cooperation to a new level.

Although Alyaksandr Lukashenka's outbursts have increased his country's isolation, they perform a useful function for Russia by reminding NATO of Russia's sphere of influence. Belarus

also makes Russia's rhetoric look more moderate. Geographic proximity to the West of Russia allows a weak Belarus to keep its neighbors alert and to secure generous subsidies from Moscow. If the external threat is indeed growing, as claimed by the Belarusian Ministry of Defense at a December 27 conference, Belarus's prominence will increase.

Fighting Enemies as an Image Statement

With Russia equipping and training the Belarusian military, Minsk need not worry about developing a grand strategy and conducting responsible foreign policy. But if Moscow becomes serious about improving ties with the West, Belarus' leader would have to be reined in. Right now, Lukashenka enjoys reminding Russia about Belarus' role in defending the Union State and Russia. In 2010, he complained about having to buy weapons at market prices and said that for Belarus defending the "brotherly state" was "profitable, even an issue of image". This is music to the ears of some Russian policymakers paranoid about Ukraine's flirtations with NATO.

Russia's military [doctrine](#), approved in February 2010, indeed names NATO expansion as the main external threat. Similar to NATO's article 5 it considers "an armed attack on the state-participant in the Union State" to be "an act of aggression against the Union State" (aka Russia). Russia's commitment does not allay Belarus' threat perceptions. Even so, in 2009, Belarus' military budget amounted to 4.18% of government expenditure, according to a 2010 World Bank report.

A small country in such a close military alliance with nuclear-armed Russia could economize on defense, but Belarus spent slightly more than Lithuania (3.85%) or Latvia (4%). Of course, this could be because Belarus' military doctrine is based on its own threat list, which includes "interference into internal affairs", "expansion of military blocks and alliances which are detrimental to military security" of Belarus, and even "information (psychological) influence which

is directed against the interests of the Republic of Belarus and its allies".

How Belarus Became Russia's Shield

How did the country that once sought neutrality and gave up nuclear weapons become a zealous Cold Warrior? After all, even Kazakhstan, also closely allied with Russia, has been moderate in its rhetoric and became a key NATO ally in the Afghan war. After a brief attempt at diversifying foreign policy by joining NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1995 (after Russia), Minsk pursued full-scale political and military integration with Moscow. The two countries' air defense forces have served together since 1995. That year, Belarus also extended Russia's right to keep early warning radar and communication bases on its territory – rent-free for 25 years. A common arms procurement program was launched in 2000.

In the 1990s the young Belarusian state had to choose. One way of generating income was by initiating reform and enhancing economic and trade cooperation with Europe. However, the price – democratization and economic reform – seemed too high for the new Belarusian leadership. Another way of generating income was courting Russia. In 1996, Minsk signed a treaty on the Russia-Belarus Community; in 1997 the Community became Union and in 1999, the Union state. Inviting Kazakhstan, introducing a common economic space and adding "Eurasian" this year is simply the next step in strengthening Belarus' dependence on Russia and foregoing its freedom to conduct independent foreign policy.

But doing business with Russia has had its perks for the regime insiders, insulating them from political competition and allowing the shadow economy to flourish. In the 1990s, Belarus [earned huge profits](#) from [selling weapons](#) to unsavory regimes, appearing on the list of the world's ten largest arms exporters. Once Belarus disposed of its own rusting Soviet arsenal, it was rumored to have helped sell Moscow's,

providing Russia with political cover for trade with pariah states.

The High Price of Confrontational Policy

Playing up its role as the first line of defense against NATO and exploiting Moscow's old phobias have been Belarus' tactics for over a decade. For example, the rent-free use of Belarusian "bases", criticized by the Belarusian opposition as politically and economically unwise, has paid off for the regime if not also for the population. The military bases were used in several gas wars with Russia. In 2003, Lukashenka even warned about turning off electricity to Russia's Volga radar station. In contrast, after Russia's Central Election Commission approved the outcome of Belarus' 2010 presidential election, Minsk said the rent-free use of the bases would continue.

Over the years Belarus' has lost its ability to bargain with Russia, however. As was bluntly stated in a US cable from November 2009, published by WikiLeaks, "Belarus is bankrupt, and therefore vulnerable to Russian exploitation". Everybody knows that despite Belarus' anti-NATO bluster, it is Russia which calls the shots on both military and economic integration. Alone, Belarus has neither a strong military nor a strong economy. The December 2010 elections contributed to Minsk's loss of external support in dealings with Moscow and the economic crisis of 2011 delivered another heavy blow with Gazprom buying Beltransgaz.

At this point, the Belarusian leader has squandered his opportunities for dialogue with the West and undermined his own "multi-vectored" foreign policy. Playing Europe against the Kremlin to get economic benefits worked in the past. However, in the end Belarus' irrational behavior made some European states welcome rather than fear Minsk's loss of independence to Moscow. Many in the West are [no longer concerned](#) to see Russian influence in Belarus grow, preferring

to border a more predictable and responsible eastern neighbor. This is good news neither for the Belarusian people nor its current leadership.

In its 21st year as a sovereign state, it is high time for Minsk (and indeed Moscow) to develop non-confrontational foreign policy goals. As a small state, Belarus has to adjust to the greater powers around it, and the best solution is to spread the risk among several international actors rather than surrender its sovereignty to one of them. This means balancing ties with both EU and Moscow, diversifying trade and reforming the economy, and avoiding entanglement.