

Belarus Wants Foreign Catholic Priests Out

At the end of January, senior Belarusian officials made statements that threatened to undermine Belarus' good relations with the Vatican, severing ties that the country had worked for years to establish.

Aliaksandr Lukashenka and the Commissioner for Religions spoke out against the presence of foreign Catholic priests, most of whom are Polish citizens, in Belarusian parishes, – a tradition has that existed since the USSR's collapse.

Belarus has failed to create its own national church in the course of its history, and the authorities view the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches as foreign elements – one from the East and another from the West, – rather as a part of local religious traditions.

With the war in Ukraine raging near its border and a presidential election coming up in autumn, the Belarusian authorities are seeking to establish tight control over domestic affairs, including religion.

Catholics have a weaker position within Belarusian politics, while the Orthodox Church remains [under Russia's protection](#), and Lukashenka [fears to confront](#) it at a time when relations with Russia are strained.

Foreign Minister Explains Away Lukashenka's Words

At a meeting with the Belarusian Foreign Minister on 30 January, the Apostolic Nuncio Gugerotti expressed his concerns about the “possible interpretation of recent comments about the Roman Catholic Church made by senior officials”. First, the Commissioner for Religions and Nationalities Leanid

Huliaka on 22 January, and then Lukashenka on 29 January, spoke out against the service of foreign Catholic priests in Belarus. The shortage of local clergy has been the result of decades of the USSR's state atheism policy in Belarus.

Belarusian officials called for the meeting, a fact that indicates that the Foreign Ministry is trying to smooth over Lukashenka's most recent comments. Minsk has been expending a lot of effort into fostering good ties with the Vatican for years, as it still holds authority in the West and does not demand political reforms in exchange for working relations. For Belarusian diplomacy, losing these ties would signal a major defeat, something Minister Makej is acutely aware of.

Foreign Priests Should Head Home

On 22 January the Commissioner for Religions and Nationalities Leanid Huliaka, a senior government official responsible for religious issues, criticised Roman Catholic priests at a government meeting on religious affairs. "Some priests from Poland are trying to get involved in politics here. They do not like our country, our laws, or our government. In these kinds of situations we should not allow them to continue serving in Belarus", the official said.

The next attack on foreign clergy came shortly thereafter from none other than Lukashenka himself. The Belarusian leader, during his record-breaking press conference on 29 January, said he is "not quite satisfied with the Polish priests working in Belarus". Lukashenka did not want to specify the reasons for his dissatisfaction, only saying "they are doing the wrong things". He also noted that more local priests should be trained in Belarus.

Currently, Belarus has 430 Roman Catholic Parishes, where a total of 430 priests serve. 113 of them have foreign citizenship, usually Polish, but their number is declining. In 2005, for example, Belarus hosted 202 foreign Catholic

priests. This is a large share when compared to the Moscow-controlled Orthodox Church, where only 15 foreign citizens served in 2013 out of a total of 1,605.

Share of foreign priests in Belarus | Create infographics

Nevertheless, according to Huliaka, the Roman Catholic Church fails to supply the necessary number of local priests to Belarusian parishes. The Hrodna seminary has 27 students and the Pinsk seminary even fewer – only 19. In 2014, these religious schools enrolled 2 and 3 students respectively. “It seems that the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church has no interest in training local priests”, Huliaka said.

Belarusian priest Piotr Rudkoŭski, speaking to Belarus Digest, said that serving God is a calling, not a mere profession, so training new staff in the Church differs from training people for, say, state institutions. “Belarusian bishops, actually would like to have as many local priests as possible. The Church organises a lot of educational events to attract possible candidates, and parishes even have a weekly prayer for new people to become priests. Yet government officials look at the whole issue from a bureaucratic point of view, not a spiritual one”, Rudkoŭski says.

Roman Catholics – An Imaginary Threat?

Belarus over its history has failed to establish a single national church. The Belarusian Orthodox Church is fully subordinate to Moscow, while Roman Catholics maintain close ties with Poland and the West in general. Powerful foreign organisations with influence on the minds of their congregations are an issue of considerable concern for the Belarusian authorities. This is especially true as of late. With the ongoing Ukraine conflict and upcoming presidential elections in November, the authorities need more control over society, and churches in particular.



Although the Catholic Church has been pursuing a policy of Belarusianisation, and today most masses occur in Belarusian, Polish language still retains some influence and most priests from Belarus are educated in Poland.

As Piotr Rudkoŭski shared with Belarus Digest, relations between the Catholic Church and the state maintain a shaky equilibrium. The state allows some autonomy in exchange for political loyalty, for which the church receives criticism from opposition-minded priests.

Lukashenka of course remembers [the patterns of voting](#) of Catholics in Western Belarus, which showed the highest levels of support for the democratic opposition during previous presidential elections. However, the Catholic Church has not displayed any open hostility towards the government.

The only known case [occurred in July 2014,](#) when the priest Uladzimir Lazar was taken to prison on charges of treason against the state. However, after spending half a year under investigation, he was released due to a lack of evidence. No other similar cases or open criticism of the authorities from Catholic priests are known.

Belarus Changes its Strategy towards Vatican?

According to Rudkoŭski, the Kremlin is interested in raising tensions between the Belarusian state and the Catholic Church. It seeks to hamper the trend of Belarusianisation within the Catholic Church and its impact on Belarusian society. Still, it remains unclear what leverage Russia has on this

relationship.

Relations with Russia are already too strained at the moment in both the political and economic realms. Another confrontation on a different topic will make the Belarusian side even more vulnerable. Meanwhile, less radical steps towards state control over religion seem quite acceptable, and especially with the Catholic Church, whose political leverage in Belarus is much weaker than that of Russia's Orthodox Church.

The Belarusian authorities have [tried to use](#) the Roman Catholic Church as an intermediary to normalise Belarus-EU relations, and Lukashenka [has been expressing hopes](#) to meet the Pope in Belarus a number of times. The pressure on foreign priests can bury these hopes for good, something that the authorities are well aware of. Lukashenka, in a fit of populist passion, seems to forget to be careful, leaving diplomats to sort things out.

Pro-Russian Groups Become More Active in Belarus

On 9 November 2014 in Pastavy – a city in the Vitebsk Region of Belarus – members of the *Holy Rus' Movement* distributed flyers with a call for the unification of the 'Russian World'. Many similar events and military camps now taking place for Belarusian youth near Minsk and Vitebsk and exhibit a rather disturbing trend.

At camps organised by organisations such as *Kazachi Spas* or *The Orthodox Brotherhood*, soldiers and veterans instruct Belarusian youth and teenagers about the tactics employed by

sabotage groups and how to handle weapons and survive. The Ukrainian 2014 revolution and subsequent events clearly triggered pro-Russian centres and groups to activate themselves.

Development of Ideological and Religious Centres

Kazachi Spas and *The Orthodox Brotherhood* promote themselves in Belarusian media as anti-globalisation, traditional and orthodox communities. They also pay a great deal of attention to religious and pro-Russian ideological aspects. In order to be able to work effectively, these radical organisations need support from the authorities in Belarus.

Opened in June 2014 *the Centre of Russian Culture and Science* in Brest became the first official regional pro-Russian headquarter in Belarus founded by *Rossotrudnichestvo*. According to the founders of the centre, institutions like theirs launched their projects around the world as a result of a personal order from none other than Vladimir Putin himself.

Trying to maintain Russia's influence in the CIS, Putin increased the budget of *Rossotrudnichestvo* nearly four times in 2014 – up to \$300m. *Rossotrudnichestvo* is a federal agency in charge of maintaining Russia's influence abroad. Besides its new headquarters, *Rossotrudnichestvo* finances *Rus Molodaya* – an ultra-right movement with branch offices in Belarus. Closely linked to the ultra-nationalist paramilitary group *Russian National Unity*, *Rus Molodaya* also aims to establish a “New Russian World”.



Other Russian NGOs have become more visible too. Members of the *Russian Public Movement for the Spiritual Development of the People for the State and Spiritual Revival of Holy Rus' (Holy Rus')* also became active in Belarus in 2014. Registered in Russia, this NGO has basically transformed into a cult of pro-Russian ideology. It works on spiritual development and unity of citizens of all nationalities living in Russia and has several offices in Belarus.

The more recent activity of *Holy Rus'* in Belarus includes several other gatherings including, for example, in Maladzyechna near Minsk or a November 2014 meeting in Vitebsk. According to the *Holy Rus'*'s web site they are also distributing leaflets at holidays in several locales like Homel, Vitebsk and Postavy. According to these leaflets, Belarus and Ukraine should become part of an indivisible Holy Rus' and unite with Russia in the future.

...and Even More Radical Organisations

Some other radical organisations have sprung up in 2014 as well, including the *Military-Patriotic Orthodox Brotherhood named after the Holy Prince Boris and Gleb Tolochinsky (the Brotherhood)* and paramilitary patriotic Cossack club *Kazachi Spas*. Oleg Plaksitsky, the Leader of the *Brotherhood*, is also an Orthodox priest in Belarusian town Drutsk. Members of the *Brotherhood* like to parade the symbols of the Ukrainian separatists. As Plaksitsky insists, as symbols that denote their anti-fascist principles.

On his web site Plaksitsky justifies young people participating in military training by saying they need to be ready to fight neo-fascism. He also states that Ukraine has become closely linked to fascism, and refers to the Ukrainians' participation in punitive operations on the territory of modern day Belarus during World War II as proof.

Since 2013, Plaksitsky has organised camps in cooperation with military base number 71325 of the Ministry of Defence of Belarus in the village of Zaslónava near Minsk. This year at the patriotic summer camps near Minsk instructors taught youth mountaineering, how to handle an automatic weapon and how to find your way in and survive in a forest. The priest also taught the youth about the values of the Orthodox Church and its role in Russian culture.

Open Passage Provided by the Belarusian Authorities

The much more developed and influential group *Kazachi Spas* has been working in Belarus since February 2010. From the beginning *Kazachi Spas* co-operated with the Belarusian Ministry of Defence, Cossack organisations from all over the former Soviet Union and with the 45th Detached Reconnaissance Regiment located in Russia. Interestingly, the 45th Detached Reconnaissance Regiment took part in the First and the Second Chechen wars, the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.

Cooperation with the Belarusian authorities is a clear indication about the real level of support for pro-Russian paramilitary organisations inside the country. From time to time the Belarusian Ministry of Defence lets *Kazachi Spas* visit and train at Belarusian military bases. The 45th Detached Reconnaissance Regiment, the Russian Union of Veterans of the intelligence and security services provide instructors and training materials.

Teaching About Russia and The Orthodox Church

For its younger participants, *Kazachi Spas* organises trips to various camps in several countries of the former USSR. *Kazachi Spas* presents its work to parents as a kind of recreational summer camp. Similar Cossack organisations also thrive in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Moldova. Military training camps for youth were already functioning in Crimea back in 2004. After the annexation of Crimea, the camp has continued its work but now with Russian instructors.

According to the *Spas* web site nearly 150 youth between 8 and 17 years old participated in its camps in 2014. The youth read about Soviet and Russian history and the role of the Orthodox Church in Belarus. Ideological work in the camps includes making presentations on Belarus and Ukraine as historical parts of the 'Russian World'.

According to the web site of *Kazachi Spas* "youth should actively train and know how to handle weapons in order to defend Belarus and prevent a Ukrainian scenario in the future". Without further details about whom the youth should defend Belarus from, such statements are controversial.

In the past only a few organisations like the ultra-nationalist paramilitary group Russian National Unity carried out any kind of openly pro-Russian activity in Belarus. Nowadays organisations also lean heavily on religious and ideological indoctrination. Cossack movements have proven their efficacy in Ukraine. Their members were among the first separatists in Crimea, Lugansk and Donetsk.

A Real Threat to Belarusian Independence?

The 2015 Presidential Elections in Belarus and the Ukrainian Maidan revolution in 2014 launched a new wave of activity by pro-Russian organisations. And it seems that the Belarusian authorities are not doing much to prevent these groups from carrying out their work. Perhaps the authorities hope that the paramilitary groups inside the country will prove to be an

additional force against the opposition for the Belarusian regime. However, a more important question is whether or not Lukashenka can actually control them.

Lukashenka tries to reduce his dependency on Russia to maintain his post. But he cannot openly confront Russia due to Russia's economic and political support. At the moment, both Belarusian civil society and the authorities are in the same boat and should think about how they might be able to prevent Ukraine-style destabilisation efforts by pro-Russian paramilitary groups in Belarus.

Strengthening Belarusian national and civic identity as well as carrying out information campaigns about the threat of full dependency on Russia can play an important role in preventing a similarly violent scenario from taking place in Belarus.

Raman Kachurka

Raman Kachurka is based in Brest and holds an MA in International Economics from the University of Warsaw.

Belarusian Espionage: Abroad and at Home

On 10 November the General Prosecutor's Office of Lithuania reported that a Vilnius court will try a Lithuanian citizen on espionage charges. The Lithuanian authorities claim that he cooperated with Belarusian security services.

As other cases from recent years prove, Belarusian intelligence is quite interested in its immediate neighbours – Poland and Lithuania. Belarusians usually seek military

intelligence and generally probe opportunities to advance Belarusian economic interest in these countries.

Belarus's EU neighbours regard Belarusian intelligence as being, more or less, on par with its Russian counterpart. However, despite close ties since Soviet times and cooperation agreements, Belarusians may have a separate agenda, as Lukashenka's attempts to pursue a more independent foreign policy.

Inside Belarus, recent public spying cases have involved only local citizens. As either Andrej Hajdukoŭ's or priest Uladzislaŭ Lazar's cases show, the authorities can use espionage charges to intimidate the opposition or independent institutions.

A Spy with Belarusian Roots

A former worker of Oro Navigacija, a Lithuanian air traffic control agency, is suspected of committing espionage against Lithuania for Belarus's security services. He may receive up to 15 years in prison as a result. A Vilnius circuit court will hold his trial in January. At the moment the suspect's name remains unknown.

The investigators claims that the suspect secretly photographed documents in his office, including various objects tied to Lithuania's military and civilian infrastructure, and then proceeded to hand them to the General Staff of the Belarusian armed forces. "He gathered and passed on to Belarus information on the Lithuanian armed forces, its state enterprises, objects of strategic importance for national security in Lithuania", stated a press release from the General Prosecutor's Office.

The Chief of Lithuania's Security Department Gediminas Grina noted that Russia could also use this information, because Belarus and Russia have a military alliance and share

intelligence data.

Having Belarusian roots, the suspect visited Belarus a couple of times a year to see his relatives and friends. His two sons have business partners in Russia, and regularly go there on to tend to their affairs. These facts could easily become rounds for Lithuania's own security services to become interested in him.

However, espionage scandals more often than not arise Belarus's other neighbour – Poland. In recent years several incidents have occurred with Belarus citizens being charged with spying.

Belarus Intelligence: Poland in its Sights

The Polish Agency of Internal Security in its annual 2013 report noted that Russian and Belarusian spies have shown the highest level of activity in Poland. Russians are interested mostly in the energy sector, such as liquid gas and nuclear power, as well as EU and NATO's eastern policy.

For Belarus, the report says, Poland is a priority country for intelligence gathering. Belarusian spies search for markets to sell Belarusian goods, firms that can invest in Belarus, possibilities of becoming beneficiaries for EU assistance programmes and assess the nation's military capacity.

In March 2014 the Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza reported that the Polish Internal Security Agency detained two Belarus citizens with charges of spying for Russia. One of them, a Military Attache of Belarus in Poland Dzmitry Žukaŭ, took pictures of a NATO training centre in Bydgoszcz. Another Polish newspaper, Gazeta Prawna, added that he sought contacts with veteran societies, retired soldiers, and youth scout groups and often visited their gatherings and events.



A few month before this episode, Polish counter-intelligence detained a Hrodna resident named Jury, who also took pictures of military-related objects.

Another Belarus citizen, known as Aliaksandr, remains in Polish custody for already two years now. He apparently cooperated with officers from the shuttered Polish Military Information Service.

They regarded him as a source in the Belarus security services and paid him \$300,000 for his assistance. But a subsequent investigation proved that he was misinforming the Poles and carrying out the orders of his bosses in Minsk.

Spies inside Belarus

In 2011 the Belarusian KGB reported that it had terminated the activity of 23 agents of its foreign security service. However, there was never ever any concrete cases data that appeared in the media. The people whom the authorities publicly charged with espionage or treason were all Belarusian citizens.

In 2012, the Belarusian KGB published information on two Belarus citizens, Aliaksandr Fenzeliaŭ and Jaŭhien Kačura, who were allegedly spying for Lithuania. The KGB detained a Lithuanian intelligence officer and two Belarusians who passed to him secret information about something related to the military. The agency was able to prove their case by gathering information and, later on, the suspects confirmed their guilt during trial. The court found them guilty and imposed a 10 and 8 year sentence on them, respectively.



Another case to surface was that of Andrej Hajdukoŭ, one that appears to be politically motivated. Opposition activist and leader of the youth organisation “Union of Young Intellectuals”, he was detained in Viciebsk by the KGB in November 2012 and faced charges of treason.

When taking a look at the KGB's official position on Hajdukoŭ, his tactics look rather ridiculous in an era of digital technology. For one, he allegedly hid secret information for foreign agents in a mail drop box. Nevertheless, he was tried and sentenced to 1.5 years in prison on a less serious charge – an attempt to establish contacts with a foreign agency, or in his case, with the US embassy.

In July of this year Lukashenka revealed information that one of the officers serving in Belarusian security agency, “was connected to foreign states via a Catholic Church representative. He not only passed information on to them, but also caused trouble for our people who were working abroad”.

Soon, information appeared that the KGB had arrested the catholic priest [Uladzislau Lazar](#) on charges of state treason. After spending half a year under investigation, he was released due to the prosecutor's inability to prove his case.

As these cases show, the charges mounted against individuals by the Belarusian authorities sometimes appear to be more an issue of exerting political pressure on the opposition or independent institutions (like Catholic Church). Real instances of the apprehension of foreign spies remain unknown to the public, although the KGB continues to boast about its

achievements in this arena.

According to the words of Polish and Lithuanian officials, these countries (and perhaps the whole west) regard Belarusian intelligence as being one and the same as Russian intelligence. They continue to work in close cooperation and are committed to sharing any and all needed information. Indeed, such agreements have legally existed since the early 1990s, and these close ties have continued to exist since soviet times, when they were originally established..

However, as the retired KGB lieutenant-colonel Valer Kostka said in an interview to Charter97.org web site, "if there is a common goal, the special services make a deal over it, no matter if it is CIA, Russian FSB or Belarusian KGB. It is a complicated hidden mechanism. If a certain interest exists, Lukashenka will make an agreement with Putin, so Belarusian intelligence will cooperate with Russians, and vice versa".

This means that Belarusian intelligence and special services may have their own agenda separate from Russia's, with which Lukashenka can attempt to pursue a more independent foreign policy.

Belarusian Authorities Unable to Resist Russian Propaganda

On 24 June Aliaksandr Lukashenka, on a visit to defence industry enterprises in Barysau, said that his personal major priority is maintaining the security of the state.

The Ukrainian crisis demonstrated that a state can preserve military security only if it has effective defence against

informational threats.

However, in this area of national security Belarus seems virtually helpless against the deep penetration of Russian state propaganda into Belarusian media space.

Liberalising the media with an emphasis on promoting its national interests and identity may have at one time been the most feasible path to improve the situation. But the authorities fear the risks of changing the political status quo and avoid any reforms.

Exposed Informational Flank

The informational realm in which most of Belarusians live has never been truly Belarusian. Russian TV channels dominate in Belarus and always have.

All of the Russian central federal channels that provide pro-Kremlin news – 1st Channel, "Russia" Channel, NTV and others – broadcast in Belarus. Belarusian state TV news coverage includes such channels as Belarus-1, Belarus-2, CTV and ONT.

Though the proportion of Belarusian to Russian would at first glance appear almost equal, in fact TV audiences tend to trust Russian news over its domestic counterparts. Russian channels are much more well funded, look more professional and have historically been less biased, or to put it differently, not as straight-forward propagandistic as Belarusian TV. The latter has changed as of late, but public perception remains the same.

Belarusian authorities censor Russian TV when it criticises or mocks Lukashenka personally

Occasionally the Belarusian authorities censor Russian TV when it criticises or mocks Lukashenka personally, but this is indeed a rare event. The risk here being that heavier

censorship would more than likely make Russia resentful.

Of course, the opposition-minded Belarusian channel Belsat does not have any airtime on Belarus cable TV. To watch it one has to purchase a satellite – and the number of satellite TV viewers throughout Belarus remains extremely low.

Regarding alternative sources of information, pro-government newspapers dominate the market of print media and online media has failed to become a serious alternative to TV. Although more than 60% of Belarusians use the Internet, not all of them use it for the news.

As the founder of the most popular web-site in Belarus Tut.by [Jury Ziser](#) put it: "By-net [the Belarusian segment of Internet] has become more pop-like". By this he means that after the rapid spread of Internet access throughout Belarus new users appeared to be more interested in entertainment and not in receiving independent news.

As a result, the Belarusian authorities have managed to limit the freedom of the independent media, but have also generally failed to provide protection for the country's media and informational environment from potential Russian interventions. The information war surrounding the Ukrainian crisis has shown just how dangerous such defencelessness can be.

Blatant Propaganda Works Better

Russian and Belarusian state media coverage of the events in Ukraine have been notably different. Belarusian state TV pursued its typical tactics, attempting to achieve some level of balance between the two conflicting parties. Thus, coverage of Ukraine was usually [bordering on being impartial](#), with special emphasis only being placed on the horrors of Ukrainian destabilisation. These scenes were meant to have Belarusians [appreciate their nation's stability](#) and reject any sentiments of revolution.

At the same time, Russian coverage of the Ukrainian crisis, by many assessments, surpassed even Soviet propaganda with its level of bias, plain lies, its demonisation of its opponents, and even occasional blatant xenophobia towards Ukrainians.

All those who disagree with the Kremlin's policies, including the Ukrainian government, get labelled as being fascists. Opponents of the anti-Ukraine propaganda campaign have launched a special web-site, Stopfake.org, to expose the daily lies emanating out of Russian TV.

In Russia the impact of this propagandistic treatment of the crisis in Ukraine has exceeded all expectations: according to the polls of the leading Russian independent sociological institution Levada Centre, Putin's support rate has mushroomed to 81% at the beginning of June, with 88% supporting the annexation of Crimea. Sociologists have explained the reason for this significant shift in public opinion: 94% of respondents said they got their news about Ukraine from Russian TV.

In Belarus, its impact was not nearly as impressive but the excessively emotional, anti-western message from Russian TV, especially on the basis of its, sacred to a majority of Belarusians, anti-fascist rhetoric, it appeared to be far more effective than the restrained coverage provided by Belarusian state media.

If you were to choose between unification with Russia and entering the EU, what would you prefer? (IISEPS polls)						
Date	December 2011	December 2012	March 2013	June 2013	December 2013	March 2014
Russia	41.4%	37.7%	37.2%	40.8%	36.6%	51.5%
EU	39.1%	43.4%	42.1%	41%	44.6%	32.9%

Difference (positive figure means more pro- Russian respondents)	+2.3%	-5.7%	-4.9%	-0.2%	-8%	+18.6%
---	-------	-------	-------	-------	-----	--------

This table demonstrates that Belarusians' views have immensely shifted towards a pro-Russian geopolitical orientation over the three month period stretching from December 2013 – March 2014 (26.6% growth). The polls pending to come out in June will likely show this trend continuing to gain ground due to fact that the intensity of Russian propagandistic coverage has only increased since March.

How to Ensure Informational Security?

In its conflict with Ukraine, Russia uses its state media as a tool for obtaining its geopolitical goals. Polls show it is working rather effectively. So, what would be the most appropriate defence against such a weapon?

The Ukrainian government went as far as shutting down Russia's federal (state) TV channels and prohibiting them from broadcasting within its borders. The Belarusian authorities cannot, and do not, want to pursue the same path. Russia remains a geopolitical ally and its largest economic supporter, so simply turning off its TV channels in Belarus could be too risky.

Media expert and political observer Aliaksandr Klaskouski believes that the only feasible response can be "the development of an independent national Belarusian media space", as he stated to Belarus Digest.

This means liberalising the whole gamut of media outlets and not interfering in the process of strengthening

Belarus' national identity and patriotism by encouraging independent media to flourish on its own.

Had the government pursued this path earlier, it could have created the first line of an effective defence needed in any informational war that Russia might wage.

reliance on strengthening the Belarusian national identity or a free, dynamic media contradicts the very essence of the Belarusian regime

But at least two problems stand in its way. First of all, the Belarusian authorities are not in the habit of thinking strategically: they are too busy dealing with day-to-day issues, running the economy in through excessive micro-management. It is not at all an exaggeration to say that, generally, they fail to foresee the challenges the country may face in the middle- or long-run.

Most importantly, however, reliance on strengthening the Belarusian national identity or a free, dynamic media contradicts the very essence of the Belarusian regime. When choosing between a gradual, calm slide deeper and deeper into the sphere of Russian influence or developing institutions of an independent state, Lukashenka inevitably chooses the former. It seems safer to him, allowing him to balance (without unexpected hiccups) that may be implied by any liberalisation or upsurge of the Belarusian national spirit.

As a result Belarus is caught in an unenviable trap. Russian information policy has become a significant security threat in the region, but the Belarusian government remains impotent and unable to address this challenge because it is either afraid of Russia's possible reaction or fears to lose its own base of power.

Russian Nuclear Weapons in Belarus, An Anti-Nato Military Bloc – Belarus Security Digest

The Kremlin pulls together an anti-NATO bloc. Minsk is trying to be helpful to the West as a source of information about the Kremlin's plan towards Ukraine insofar as Vladimir Putin allows them to.

The Russian elite is overtaken by chauvinism and are increasingly losing touch with reality.

Belarus and Russia will jointly explore space. The number of those who want to serve in uniform in Belarus is declining steadily. China becomes Belarus' No. 2 military and industrial complex partner.

Moscow is trying to create an anti-NATO bloc of post-Soviet countries

On 8 May, a truncated summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) took place in Moscow without the participation of the President of Kazakhstan.

The parties brought up the topic of the West's sanctions against Russia. It suggests that one of the goals of the meeting was to discuss ways to circumvent them using Moscow's usual clientele in the post-Soviet space (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Belarus).

Interestingly, the leaders of these countries were invited to

visit the Russian National Centre for Defence Management: Moscow may have wanted to impress its guests by demonstrating its power. And to hint at the same time that there were offers on the table that should not be refused. Apparently, the Russian leadership got what they wanted: all of the post-Soviet leaders in attendance once again publicly confirmed Russia's regional leadership and prioritised collective security in the framework of CSTO.

The summit of CSTO member states on 8 May in Moscow may indicate Russian leaders' plan to forge a kind of anti-West bloc of post-Soviet countries, each of which will be backed by Russia.

If this is the case, then Vladimir Putin is playing a dangerous game directed at exacerbating the situation in the region by trying to transform the opposing 'NATO – Russia' forces into 'NATO – CSTO'. As a result, Eastern Europe and possibly Central Asia may face serious challenges to its security and, more concerning, unknown military challenges.

Lukashenka is Riding on the Kremlin's Coattails

The Belarusian leader made an offer to Moscow to help coordinate its policy towards Ukraine. In this case, it means that Moscow would need to inform its formal allies about its plans regarding Kyiv.

Alexander Lukashenka's proposal, voiced during the summit of CSTO member states, about becoming the coordinating force with regards to its policy towards Ukraine should be considered in light of his April conversation with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

Through coordination (i.e. getting information about the Kremlin's plans with Ukraine) Alexander Lukashenka will try and influence Vladimir Putin in order to stabilise the situation in Ukraine and to improve, inter alia, his chances to resume a dialogue with the West for his own sake. It can

include the exchange of information regarding the Ukrainian crisis.

Russian Nukes in Belarus: A Provocation or Warning?

One of the most high-profile events in May was the declaration made by Frants Klintsevich, Deputy Chairman of the Defence Committee of the State Duma, on 7 May 2014. According to the Russian parliamentarian, Russia may start "moving our weapons closer to its borders" including the border between Belarus and the EU in retaliation to the permanent deployment of NATO troops in Eastern Europe.

There was a hint that there is a possibility of deploying Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus to be used against NATO sites. This statement has received no further development. It remains an open question remains who precisely dictated Mr Klintsevich's statements: was it a gaff expressing the mood of a segment of the Russian elite (most likely, it was) or was it a deliberate statement designed to probe public opinion?

The statement of Russian MP Frants Klintsevich sheds some light on the chauvinist hysteria that has seized Russian society and its political elite as of late. This is particularly disconcerting for Belarus. It should be noted that, while it may seem paradoxical, Russia was the main source of 'Westernisation' of Belarus, including through its mass media outlets. Now even this is under jeopardy.

Cooperation Between Belarus and Russia in Space Exploration

Cooperation between Belarus and Russia in space exploration has the potential to expand. The cooperation between the Federal Space Agency of Russia and the National Academy of Science of Belarus marches on. The first meeting of the joint working group on drafting space exploration programmes took place in Minsk. In total, the Russian delegation suggested 12 new areas of cooperation.

The remote sensing of Earth has been, and will remain, one of the key areas of cooperation. Since 2012, there has been a joint space team dedicated to carrying out the remote sensing of Earth that utilises Russian and one Belarusian satellite.

Although Belarus is not among the world's leading forces in space exploration, Russia remains interested in their cooperation. If the West imposes sanctions involving the restriction of exports of goods related to space exploration to Russia, the importance of Belarus for the Russian space industry will increase significantly.

If for no other reason than currently the share of components of Russia's own production in the Russian spacecraft accounts for only 27% of its manufactured goods and they account for about 96% of all of their space programmes' failures.

Cooperation with China Growing

On 13 May, a Chinese military delegation met Siarhiey Huruliou, Chairman of the State Military Industrial Committee. The parties noted that the military and industrial cooperation remained an important factor of the comprehensive strategic relations of our countries. They also discussed several promising areas of cooperation and expressed their interest in further strengthening their cooperation in this field.

The meeting took place in the framework of a 'road map', which defined the main areas of cooperation, including the military and industrial sphere for 2014 – 2018. On the same day, a meeting between the Belarusian Minister of Defence Yuryj Zhadobin and the Chinese delegation took place. According to the press service of the Ministry of Defence, the parties discussed issues related to the development and strengthening of the bilateral military cooperation.

Staff Shortage Escalates in Security Agencies

The authorities acknowledged the fiasco surrounding last

year's admission campaign to the Military Academy. As it was publicly announced only in May, during a meeting on improvement on the system and admission work to universities and colleges held on 11 March and chaired by Alexander Lukashenka, Major General Siarhiej Bobrykau, Head of the Military Academy, noted that admissions had only taken in 65% of the number of students necessary in 2013.

Even in the 1990s competition for admission to the nation's military schools was more than two heads for everyone one available spot, and for some specific fields it was over 15 people for a single place. Last year, the Military Academy had to enrol students from among those applicants who had failed their entry exams. As a result, many among them were later expelled because their poor academic record.

The Belarusian Interior Ministry is still trying to find a long-term solution to the problem of their ongoing shortages and to increase the quality of how it goes about selecting its applicants who enter its schools. They hope to attract only those who seriously intend on dedicating their life to a career in law enforcement. They even plan to create legal studies courses in secondary schools. As envisioned by its initiators, this will raise the number of students who are motivated to choose a path working with the law.

However, it is not so clean-cut in practise. There are already 58 schools that have specific courses in law and they are attended by 3,900 students. The Brest region leads the country with 40 courses in law and 823 students attending them. However, only one third of the students choose the legal profession upon leaving secondary school.

Andrei Parotnikau

Andrei is the head of "Belarus Security Blog" analytical project.

Kremlin's Aggression in Ukraine Frightens Lukashenka – Belarus Security Digest

The Kremlin's aggressive actions in Ukraine have scared Minsk. The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) dreams about its own missile defence system. However, the organisation failed to re-equip even its 20,000-strong rapid reaction force for the past five years already.

Minsk, while criticising Ukraine for having failed to mount a stand against the Russians, has to demonstrate its loyalty towards the Kremlin. New Russian aircraft has arrived in Belarus; nobody can say for how long. Belarusian defence and law-enforcement agencies lack would-be officers. This and more in this issue of Belarus Security Digest.

The Russian invasion in Ukraine clearly frightened the Belarusian authorities

It should be noted that in the last month the Belarusian authorities have built their belligerent rhetoric on the basis negative comparisons with the Ukrainian army. The failure of the latter to offer resistance to Russian aggression in Crimea is irritating to Minsk.

To put it bluntly, the fact that Ukrainian soldiers refrained from fighting Russian soldiers outraged the Belarusian authorities. In fact, such statements confirm the thesis that:

- Minsk perceived Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a direct threat to Belarus;

- the Belarusian authorities are counting on Ukraine to become a second Poland, i.e. a country that remains hostile and a rival to Russia.

It should be noted that both the authorities and the Belarusian opposition have in fact the same negative disposition towards the annexation of Crimea. Only the latter can speak openly about it. Clearly, Russia has lost the information war not only in Ukraine and in the West but also in the eyes of the Belarusian ruling elite.

Towards a Unified Air Defence and Missile Defence System

On 5 March 2014, a meeting of the Military Committee at the Council of Ministers of Defence of the CSTO member states took place in Moscow on the basis of the Joint Staff of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. Among other things, the participants discussed prospects for setting up the Joint (Unified) CSTO Air Defence and Missile Defence System.

The initiative to establish the joint CSTO air defence and missile defence system is another attempt by Moscow to place the defence potential of post-Soviet CIS countries under its full control. In return, Moscow will provide some assistance in equipping and developing the defence infrastructure of the member states.

However, Russia will invest only in those projects which it itself needs in the first place. The traditional flakiness in implementing its agreements and the habitual lack of consistency of the leadership of post-Soviet countries means that these plans will remain precisely that – just plans.

Difficulties with Re-equipping the CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Force

On 13 March 2014, CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha said that the issue of discharging Russia of its obligations

with regards to equipping of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF) with modern weaponry and military equipment on the basis of the programme adopted in 2011 remained acute. But in general, the history of re-equipping of the Collective Force began back in 2009.

Obviously, the CSTO member states place full responsibility for re-equipment of the CRRF on Russia seeing it as the party most concerned with the alliance's existence. Currently, the Russian budget does not make provisions for extensive resources to arm its allies.

The need to incur costs can seem even more doubtful to Russia as none of its "allies" in CSTO has supported it unambiguously in the conflict with Ukraine. This is yet further proof of the thesis that alliances between post-Soviet countries are, to a greater or lesser degree, of a strictly formal nature.

Moscow's coffers are shrinking. And it is clear that this is a long-term trend. In connection with this the probability remains high that re-equipping of CSTO's rapid force units will drag on indefinitely and may become irrelevant at some point. This does not preclude Russia's continued support to CIS countries through the supply of weapons and military equipment, but it may be on a bilateral basis.

Additional Russian Aircraft Deployed in Belarus

On 12 March 2014, the Security Council of Belarus met. At the meeting, Lukashenka demanded a guarantee of the transfer of additional Russian fighters to Belarus following the build-up of NATO's military presence near Belarus' borders. Measures to strengthen air defence were announced. And the very next day, the redeployment of six fighters Su-27CM3 and three military airlift aircraft with staff to the airfield in Babrujsk took place.

On 15 March 2014, a Russian airborne early warning plane A-50 arrived at the airfield in Baranavichy. The Belarusian

authorities linked further parameters of Russian air presence to NATO's actions. However, they decreased sharply the level of anti-NATO rhetoric later.

Alexander Lukashenka on Prospects of National Defence

On 23 March 2014, Alexander Lukashenka made a number of statements about the current self-defence situation.

The Belarusian leader clarified the issue of the delivery of four battalions of the S-300 air defence missile system, which Russia promised to Belarus back in April 2011. Allegedly, "...Russia said that it could not give us S-300 for next to nothing."

At the same time, Russia supplied a larger quantity of S-300s to Kazakhstan free of charge. It should be recalled that initially there were plans to transfer additional weapons to Belarus free of charge. Minsk was supposed to pay only the shipping costs, cost of repairs as well as pay the price tag for their modernisation.

The Belarusian leader also said that there was no need for a deployment of Russian aircraft to Belarus though he, Lukashenka, was personally not against it and would even be happy to have them on Belarusian soil. Translated into normal language this means that Minsk was not enthusiastic about the prospects of an increased Russian military presence, but if Russia exerts pressure it would not be able to do anything but to depict joy.

At the same time, while Russian fighters, which are already on duty in Belarus, remain at the disposal of the Belarusian command, Minsk would like [to get its hands on aircraft without Russian pilots](#).

When answering a question about how long the Russian aircraft would remain on Belarusian soil, Alexander Lukashenka said that the duration of stay of the Russian fighters would depend

on Belarus alone, i.e. on Alexander Lukashenka personally.

Alexander Lukashenka confirmed once again that the special operations forces and the air defence remained the main priority of the developing the nation's military strength. This is a long-held position. It is dictated by the inability to maintain and develop their national armed forces in a balanced manner, including a build-up of the capacity of its mechanised troops.

However, if the decline of the general-purpose forces continues, it is not totally clear who will protect the air defence forces against attacks on terrestrial enemy forces in circumstances where its own air force is degraded and its numerical strength is insufficient.

He also announced plans to modernise 10 Belarusian Su-27 and MiG-29 planes by the end of this year. According to Alexander Lukashenka, the Belarusian authority hopes to continue to exploit its Soviet aviation heritage until 2025 by maintaining the combat readiness of the equipment left over after the collapse of the USSR.

Staff Shortage in Belarusian Defence and Law-Enforcement Agencies

Belarus plans to change the procedure for admissions to institutions of higher education for its defence and law-enforcement agencies by giving priority in enrolment to motivated applicants (graduates of military and cadet schools; military servicemen).

There appears to be only two reasons for this – the unsatisfactory "quality" of its applicants and an insufficient number of applicants who pass the exams successfully.

The students who have experience in military service or have studied in paramilitary schools adapt better to life "by the

book" than civilian youth. They are also more motivated to build their career in defence and law-enforcement agencies.

Additional measures to improve the situation with staffing the higher education institutions of defence and law-enforcement agencies could include levelling down requirements for the health requirements and school grades of applicants.

Andrei Parotnikau

Andrei is the head of "Belarus Security Blog" analytical project.

New Chief of General Staff, Modernisation of Air Force, S-300 – Belarus Security Digest

Aliaksandr Lukashenka made a good personnel decision by appointing a new Chief of General Staff.

Security agencies suffer from underfunding. It forces them to adopt austerity measures and negatively impacts the number of those who want to choose to serve in the military.

Unable to procure new combat aircraft, the Belarusian authorities have decided to modernise their existing fleet.

The delivery of new armaments from Russia has been postponed once again. The Kremlin may use its military and technical assistance to Belarus as leverage against Minsk.

A New Chief of General Staff Appointed

On 11 January 2014, Major General Alieh Bielakonieu, previously in command of the Special Operations Forces, was appointed the Chief of General Staff. He belongs to a group of operational commanders. He is considered to be aware of the real situation in the Belarusian Army and he has necessary business skills to run it: energetic, prone to innovation and not afflicted with Soviet dogmatism.

He is not afraid of assuming responsibility, which is unusual today for the Belarusian leadership. He has demonstrated the qualities of an efficient lobbyist, which helped to meet the needs of the Special Operations Forces in financial and material resources even under the conditions of budget cuts. He has also devoted a great deal of time to the welfare of his subordinates, spending a lot of time among troops.

The Army Has to Cut Down Expenses

The practise of minimum spending being spent on the needs of the Army will continue in the coming years. For this reason the Ministry of Defence seeks to find money internally to maintain its capabilities and ration its costs. The most sophisticated systems are available to the Air Force and the Air Defence Forces of Belarus, which have been the main priority for more than ten years already.

So, all the repairs and modernisation of weapons and equipment will be performed by Belarusian enterprises. Repair units have been set up for anti-aircraft missiles and radar, with troops performing routine maintenance and repairs. These measures will help to save money by not employing specialists from the manufacturers of combat weapon systems.

No Money, Shortage of Staff

Performance in staffing the Armed Forces in 2013 was analysed and its goals for 2014 were readjusted. The past year was

marked with better staffing of the officer corps in comparison to 2012. It was achieved by implementing a set of measures. First, this was done by enlisting new graduates of military colleges. Second, by retraining warrant officers with their promotion to a military officer with the rank of lieutenant. Also, officer ranks were given to female military staff who were already serving in officer positions.

the Ministry of Emergency Situations this agency allowed its employees to hold second jobs in their spare time

In the state budget for 2014 the clothing allowance of the Army is only financed at 40% of assessed need. In other security agencies the overall situation is similar. At the end of January, it became known that the Ministry of Emergency Situations suspended payments of bonuses to its rank-and-file and junior command personnel, bonuses that which amounted to between 250,000 – 270,000 Belarusian roubles. To take cool the situation down a little, due to the low wages of servicemen, the Ministry of Emergency Situations this agency allowed its employees to hold second jobs in their spare time.

The Novelty of the Belarusian Defence Industry on Combat Duty

The new domestic radar station "Vostok-D" went was launched for combat duty for air defence in the 49th Radar Brigade. The station was created in accordance with the State Armament Programme and is of an original design. The manufacturer of the station is the company "Radar Systems." The main activities of the company's branches are design and industrial-scale manufacturing of air defence systems, radars, radio navigation systems and means of electronic warfare and their modernisation.

The technical specifications of the station allow it to replace several obsolete medium and long range radar stations at once. The station has a high detection range (up to 360 kilometres) and mobility; it is capable of efficiently

tracking small targets and objects manufactured with stealth technology.

Operational Readiness of Troops Tested

Operational readiness test of the Armed Forces that was promised by Aliaksandr Lukashenka started in January. The main burden was placed on the Air Force and the Air Defence Force as well as the Special Operations Forces. Aircraft were dispersed with their relocation to alternate airfields in Luniniets and Babrujsk. The units that were protecting the airfields had to operate under attacks from saboteurs and reconnaissance groups of the enemy.

Plans to modernise the Air Force

On 30 January 2014, Deputy Minister of Defence for armaments Major General Ihar Latsienkou announced the decision to carry out the overhaul and modernisation of MiG-29 and Su-25 aircraft, was set to begin in early 2014. The first 10 aircraft are already in the 558th Aircraft Repair Plant in Baranavichy. It is still unclear if all aircraft will be modernised or only some of them.

Besides, in the nearest future the military and industrial complex of Belarus may carry out the comprehensive modernisation of Su-27 fighters. Their fate was extremely confusing. On 28 August, Minister of Defence Jury Zhadobin said that the Su-27 fighters were not decommissioned but their operation was discontinued.

Jury Zhadobin said that the Su-27 fighters were not decommissioned but their operation was discontinued

On 14 November 2013, Commander of the Air Force and Air Defence Force of Belarus Alieh Dzvihaliou said that the Su-27 had been removed from operational use because their operation was expensive. And he added immediately that the Su-30, which are an upgraded

version of the Su-27, were considered as potential replacement fighters for the national Air Force. And on 18 November 2013, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, while visiting the air base in Baranavichy, said that withdrawal of the Su-27 aircraft from the Air Force of Belarus was premature.

It all looks like an attempt to patch a hole that appeared after the decommissioning of two dozens heavy Su fighters. The only thing is that the aircraft have not been operational since 2011. And the Belarusian authorities became especially concerned with this problem only after facing the prospects of receiving a Russian air base on their own territory.

Delivery of S-300 Postponed Again

The Ministry of Defence is pinning its main hope on 2015, when they expect (and for now that is all they do – expect) the delivery of four battalions of air defence missile systems S-300 as well as radar equipment and trainer aircraft Yak-130 from Russia that they were promised three years ago. Belarus should then focus on their plans to get four battalions of air defence missile systems S-300 from Russia; they are seen as a kind of bonus for the planned deployment of a Russian air base in Belarus.

If in the past, the transfer of these weapon systems was planned for this year, now the question is whether or not they will arrive in 2015. It should be emphasised that these four battalions have been scheduled for delivery since 2011 already. In July 2012, it was announced that the delivery would take place in the near future. Now, this 'near future' appears to be 2015. With this in mind, the outlook for rearming of the 377th air defence missile regiment and changing over from the S-200 to S-300 air defence system looks rather dim.

Andrei Parotnikau

Andrei is the head of “Belarus Security Blog” analytical project.

Belarusian Police Image, Bargaining for a Russian Air Force Base – Belarus Security Digest

On 5 December 2013, after a month of waiting, Aliaksandr Miazhujeu was appointed the State Secretary of the Security Council.

Top police officials continue to work on improving the police's image among the population and fight against negative incidents from occurring within the agency. In the context of budget constraints, the main emphasis in this struggle is being made through ideological appeals and various organisational levers.

Practical steps towards establishing a Russian air force base in Belarus have been made. However, this does not mean that the bargaining regarding this site is over. Official Minsk has yet to achieve its goals.

Russia is becoming more and more interested in Belarus' military and industrial complex. The reason for this is both the technologies Belarus has and the decline of Russia's own culture of industrial manufacturing.

The Security Council of Belarus has a new boss

When speaking about the appointment of Major-General Aliaksandr Miazhujeu to the position of the State Secretary of the Security Council, we should focus on a number of key points.

First, the position of the Head of the Security Council was vacant for over a month. This is evidence of an unscheduled transfer of the former State Secretary Leanid Maltsau to the position of Chief of the Border Guards. It also points to the fact that Aliaksandr Lukashenka has a small substitutes' bench.

Secondly, over the last year [Aliaksandr Miazhujeu](#) was a member of the Chamber of Representatives and the head of the Commission on Defence. Traditionally, MP status has been a pre-retirement sinecure for the Belarusian nomenklatura.

This is already the second case when the Chamber of Representatives has "shared" its staff with the executive branch. On 14 November 2013, Aliaksandr Lukashenka appointed Uladzimir Krautsou, previously the Chairman of the Commission on the Economy, as Chairman of the Hrodna Region Executive Committee.

Apparently, the delay with the appointment was caused by the need to find a person who was not previously among the top nomenklatura. It was made in order to disavow allegations of a personnel crisis as well as to replenish the top management with new staff.

The position of Head of the Security Council is a technical one, rather than a political one. Under conditions where the State Secretary has to coordinate the work of several agencies with often conflicting interests, and taking into account the specifics of the decision-making process in our country, the position can be like running through a minefield. Especially when the demands of the political leadership to the security agencies are backed within only sparse monetary support.

In general, one should not expect any significant change in the work of the security agencies.

Ministry of Internal Affairs seeks to improve its image among the population

In 2013, 33.9% of population trusted the police (according to information put out by the Ministry of Internal Affairs itself). This figure remained stable over a rather long period of time. It means that working with the population to improve the police's image has yet to bring about the desired results.

Particular focus is being put on discipline and the rule of law among police officers and servicemen from the Internal Ministry troops. However, the agency prefers to maintain their silence about any results they may have, or may not have, achieved. Up to this point, publicly officials have only emphasised that the measures which have been taken have helped to reduce "some negative incidents" from occurring in their police work.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs recently issued order No. 424 which aimed at maintaining a healthy lifestyle among police officers and the servicemen from the Ministry's troops and members of their families. The documents set guidelines for minimising one's smoking and eradicating other bad habits, preventing any kind of deviant behaviour or addictions. They have also declared 2014 as the Year of a Healthy Lifestyle in the police agency.

At the same time, the agency's top management became concerned again with the state of corporate ethics. First of all, the question is of preventing information leaks about specific facts and incidents which show the negative side of the situation in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Disclosure of negative information about the actions of the police force's leadership is considered to be especially unacceptable.

On the other hand, the Ministry's top officials asked the heads of field offices to halt the usage of verbal insults and abusive language towards their subordinates which has long been one of the main ways of managing rank-and-file police

officers and exert influence on them. This struggle to improve morale and the general situation within the police force has already been going on for many years now, and judging by the fact that the same points have remained relevant all this time, the programme can be deemed inefficient.

The Ministry's top management sees strengthening the ideological foundations of its employees as crucial in shaping a culture of high professional standards, improving the moral and psychological climate, and promoting discipline and the rule of law in its police and military units as the main means by which they can overcome poor conduct in their ranks.

The top brass is particularly concerned with an increased in the number of incidences of defiance and even resistance on the part of the population to police on duty. Currently, society is dominated by generations of people which grew up during the post-Soviet era, an integral part of which was "romanticism" for the underworld and its associated morality and behaviour, nihilism for the law and penchant for violence. Obviously, the declining social status of a law-enforcement officer in the eyes of ordinary people will continue to drop in the future. Accordingly, one can expect more frequent cases of violent acts towards the police.

Bargaining around the Russian Air Force Base in Belarus continues

On 10 December 2013, the Belarusian authorities officially recognised the presence of an detachment (4 aircraft) of Russian fighters Su-27P in Belarus which are deployed at the air force base in Baranavichy (the 61th Belarusian Fighter Air Force and Aerial Defence Base). It is worth noting that it was announced only after the news had already been reported by independent media.

Russian Air Force crews will now be staying one month each on a rotational basis in Belarus to carry out joint combat duty

flights in protecting Belurasian airspace. The Russian fighters are under Belarusian command and it is likely to stay this way until the agreement on the air force base is signed.

Instead of the Su-27SM3 fighters which were initially announced to be arriving, fighters of the "P" class were sent to Belarus. The Su-27P is a defence aircraft and, according to open sources, is not able to use air-to-surface weapons.

The Russian air force base was originally a tool of the Belarusian authorities for achieving three goals:

- guaranteeing political support from Moscow on the eve of the 2015 elections;
- getting larger financial support from Russia;
- taking issues tied to privatisation off the table.

However, judging by recent events (the maintaining of a remittance on export duties for petrol products in the Russian budget, the unclear prospects of achieving an optimal oil balance in 2014, continued demands for privatisation of some industrial assets by Russia), the last two points remain unfulfilled. This can explain the absence of any explicit enthusiasm from the Belarusian propaganda machine towards this event.

It is evident that the bargaining for the creation of a truly Russian air force base in Belarus continues and the overall situation remains uncertain. After having deployed the first element, Moscow, for image reasons, will be interested in pushing the air force base issue through and achieving its practical implementation. For Minsk this gives them a potential opportunity to ask for the highest possible price.

Russia tries to buy companies from Belarus' military and industrial complex

In December, the government of Belarus announced that

preparatory work for the de facto sale to Russian investors of four enterprises (Integral, MZKT, MAZ and Peleng) which manufacture military and dual-use products would continue.

Admitting the Russians to the positions of management in these companies is the price which Belarus has to pay for lifting the existing restrictions on access for Belarusian companies from the military and industrial complex to Russian public procurement tenders (including those available within the framework of the State defence procurement). Moscow promised Lukashenka that they would lift these restrictions back in September 2012, right after his meeting with Vladimir Putin in Sochi.

According to the Belarusian leader, the countries' leadership has agreed that all Belarusian enterprises would be able to participate in tenders for the procurement of products for the Russian State defence sector on equal terms with Russian companies. However, some restrictions still remain, especially if a Russian manufacturer of similar products exists, even if the products are of lesser quality or more expensive.

The continued interest from Russia in picking up Belarusian companies in this sector may reflect at least two trends things.

First, Russia seeks to bring under its control the maximum number of components needed for the manufacturing of military-related items in order to minimise any potential political risks in future bilateral relations and to prevent Belarusian technology from being leaked to other countries, which primarily means China.

Second, despite all their best efforts and significant budget restrictions, Russia is technologically unable to create its own complete closed system of defence manufacturing that could completely replace Belarus' own defence and weapons manufacturing industry.

Another issue is the very real cultural decline of production in the Russian military and industrial complex. Fatal accidents such as the launch of the Proton vehicles, the crash of the Kazakh MiG-31 fighter jet which was repaired in Russia, and complaints with the quality of the Su-34 and Su-35 from the Russian military are facts too serious to ignore.

Andrei Parotnikau

Andrei is the head of the "Belarus Security Blog" analytical project.

Celebrating the New Year's Eve in Belarus: The Russians are Coming

Traditionally, Belarusians celebrated Christmas as a part of Kaliady – a two week long pagan holiday of winter solstice. However, today most Belarusians celebrate New Year's Eve as their main winter holiday. If you want to spend time with your family at here during your this holiday and also have some fun playing golf, check the options from [golf holidays direct](#) by clicking the link.

This tradition comes from Soviet times, when communists rejected the sacred sense of Christmas time. New Year's eve celebrations in post-Soviet lands remains closely linked to feasts of food, consumption of alcohol and fireworks.

Belarusian authorities organise most celebrations that take place in public places and enforce tough security measures. Many people are adverse to these conditions and prefer to stay

at home, while others go abroad to celebrate the New Year, western style.

Meanwhile, thousands of foreign tourists come to Belarus for the holiday, most of them being Russian. Here, they escape from Moscow's hustle and bustle and enjoy lower prices, organic food and plenty of Soviet nostalgia.

Traditional Kaliady vs. the Soviet New Year

In Belarus, Orthodox believers celebrate Christmas on 7 January in accordance with the Julian calendar, whereas Catholics and Protestants celebrate Christmas on 25 December, using the Gregorian calendar. Traditionally, Belarusians celebrated Christmas over a two week stretch, a period traditionally called Kaliady, it is a fusion of the Christian holiday of Christmas and the pagan holiday of winter solstice.

The day before Christmas is called Kućcia, from the name of the ritual barley dish. That evening, a family would have a certain number of other dishes on the table, all of them Lenten in character – in other words, dishes without meat. When sitting at the table, the family's eldest member called upon the spirits of their family ancestors as well as the god of frost to join their celebration and give good favour to their household.



The most joyous aspect of Kaliady for kids was them taking to the streets for a loud, ruckus stroll around their town or village, wearing handmade costumes and masks, singing ritual songs, wishing the families health and a good harvest in the

coming year. In return, they would ask for a gift of food, drink and/or money.

While the traditional Kaliady celebration exists in some villages even now and enthusiasts are trying to revive it in nation's cities, the Soviet tradition has made long inroads and its winter celebration is much more widespread. The Soviet atheist empire rejected any kind of sacred religious holidays and firmly entrenched New Year's Day at the centre of the year's festivities. As a result, today throughout the former Soviet Union New Year's Day plays the same role as Christmas in the west.

Happy residents and nervous authorities

As perhaps anywhere else during Christmas time, in Belarus people hurry to buy presents for their friends and relatives. Christmas tree markets pop up everywhere, and Belarusians often are greeted in public transportation, various shops and other organisations with well wishes from local authorities in the form of posters.

For Belarusians, an abundant, overflowing New Year's Eve table is a must. People tend to eat and drink a great deal, even excessively, and are prone to cooking a great number of dishes for the night's festivities. Among them one will find the omnipresent champagne, tangerines and Olivier salad which is made out of potatoes, eggs, mayonnaise and ham.

Before midnight, people watch the president's New Year's address to the country and at midnight people drink champagne and set off fireworks. Most people start drinking long before midnight, and by midnight are already in quite a fine state. Others, who drink less actively, set off fireworks, give and receive presents and often go out on the town.



The local authorities usually set a large New Year's tree, which resembles a Christmas tree in many regards, in every district of the city for people to gather around after midnight. In Minsk alone there were 27 sites designated for the masses to celebrate the end of 2012.

There, state-organised performances usually take place, with Father Frost, a type of Soviet Santa Claus, and singers and dancers. However, it has become more difficult for people to celebrate outdoors, as security measures and police control has become rather burdensome in recent years.

After the [terrorist act of 2011](#) the authorities became very nervous of any kind of event where a large group of people would be gathered. At all of the main sites, the police will place a turnstile in order enable them to check people one-by-one. Many of the more drunk citizens were prevented from joining the public celebrations and turned back by the police. For security reasons, only half-litre bottles of liquid are allowed. Animals are also prohibited from being brought in to the officially designated celebratory space.

Even during Christmas celebrations at churches, policemen have become a fixture. They control people's movement and even try to spread them throughout the interior of a church in order to prevent a stampede.

These measures persuaded many that it is better to stay at home, as soberly walking through the turnstiles does not look like all that much fun on New Year's Eve. For many

Belarusians, celebrating at home seems to be rather boring and after a large feast, they want to go out to meet their compatriots in welcoming in the new year.

It becomes increasingly popular among Belarusians to celebrate the New Year abroad, especially in their own neighbourhood: Poland, Ukraine, the Czech Republic or Lithuania. Here people find a different, more Western style of celebrating the New Year. Meanwhile, people from other countries, especially from Russia, prefer to celebrate the holiday in Belarus.

Russians Celebrate New Year in Belarus

This year, Minsk offers New Year's Day tours for foreigners for \$440, with around a hundred different excursions made available. According to official information, ten thousand tourists will come to Minsk for organised tours, most of them Russians.

However, it is impossible to estimate the precise number of Russians that come to Belarus to celebrate New Year since border control and monitoring do not exist. However, as tourist agencies claim, all hotels, hostels and flats for short-term rental were full in Minsk at the end of December.

Meanwhile, the Russian ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Surikov stated in an interview that over a million Russians would come to Belarus for this New Year's Eve. It remains unclear where Surikov got his hands on these numbers, but Belarus seems really attractive for Russians as a New Year's Eve destination, and not only its hotels but also vacation houses and even agro-tourism farms were flooded with Russians tourists.

Unlike tourists from the European Union and North America that need visas, Russian visitors benefit from visa-free travel to Belarus.

They come to Belarus to try to escape from the New Year's Eve

fuss of Russian megalopolises, and find low prices, better quality food, and a type of Soviet oasis with other more authentic traditions as well. “The Russians are astonished that we are not afraid to let our children out to play alone outside, everything is clean and groomed and the people are nice”, the owner of one agro-tourism farmhouse explains.

Cycling As a Threat to the Belarusian Regime

On 17 August, Minsk cycling fans gathered to make an unusual ride – they agreed via social network to dress in 1950s style clothes. Around 50 people participated in the event, and it even drew the attention of Belarusian media.

Yet on 2 September police summoned Iryna Bijnik, the organiser of the ride. The police composed a record of evidence and the same day the trial occurred – Iryna received a fine for organising it.

It came as a surprise to her and her friends when they learned that she had violated the law on mass actions, amended after 2011 silent protests. According to it, any public announcement of collective action (including the Internet) should receive the authorities’ permission. Now, a company of friends that agreed to have a drink on Facebook can theoretically be accused of breaking the law.

Events with similar outcomes happened in Vitsebsk and Brest earlier in the summer. They indicate that the regime still perceives organised citizens, even apolitical, as a threat to its stability.

The Limits of Absurd in Regime Security

The [2011 summer](#) appeared to be a quite nervous time for the Belarusian regime. With the Arab Spring in the background, it experienced the one of its most serious economic collapses and the widespread dissatisfaction of the public with state policy. This led to mass protests, which took place in many cities of Belarus and received the name “silent protests”, because people clapped hands instead of shouting slogans, which authorities could qualify as a violation of mass political actions and therefore initiate legal proceedings.

The authorities quickly realised this loophole in the law and in early autumn of 2011 the notorious Minister of Internal Affairs Anatol Kuliašoŭ presented amendments to the law before the Belarusian pocket parliament. The parliament announced that its sessions were closed for media and adopted the amendments in one day, as hardly any discussions are possible when it comes to the regime’s security.

According to the amendments, organisers of an event cannot publicly invite people to participate in it before they receive permission of local authorities. Importantly, this concerns any mass gatherings regardless of their aims – political, entertainment, or any other. The law also extended the list of places where mass actions cannot take place, and stipulates how those places, where organisers who have received permission, must have surveillance devices, fences and checkpoints.

Civil society took the amendments as a further restriction on civil liberties of Belarusian citizens, although the authorities rarely apply it since its adoption. However, in the summer and autumn of 2013 several cases of its ridiculous application finally took place.

Collective Cycling Prohibited

On 17 August, Minsk cycling fans gathered to make an unusual

ride – they agreed to dress in 1950s style via social network. The event drew the attention of Belarusian media, which reported around 50 participants. Iryna Bijnik, who organised the ride in social networks, said they did not plan any particular number of participants. All interested people could join the ride.

After two weeks, Iryna unexpectedly had to visit the police. The same day the court imposed on Iryna a fine of BYR 2m (\$220).



The police initiated the case because one policeman noticed the information for the gathering on the web after it had already happened. No policeman witnessed or made a report of the live event on the day it happened.

The head of Minsk cycling society Jaŭhien Charužy considers this fine a dangerous precedent. “Collective cycling takes places almost every day in Minsk, and up to 250 people take part in it. It is often spontaneously organised and it is hard to define the organiser”, he says. Now, as such cases are starting to happen, the police can interpret any gathering of people as an unauthorised action and therefore declare it as illegal.

No Candy Showers Too

It turned out that not only the Minsk authorities see collective cycling as a potentially dangerous action. A similar case took place in Vitsebsk on 5 September. Uladzimir Bulaŭski had already organised two cycling tours around Vitsebsk for all interested people and was going to hold

another one. He arranged the meeting on a social network and provided his contact information, but the authorities did not contact him on.

Instead, on the day of the tour the cyclers found a number of policemen in the place of meeting. The police fined people right on the spot and even those who had no intention to participate received fines. Some people were detained for "absence of rear-view mirrors, bell and flashing lights". Bulaŭski says the cyclers will definitely fix all necessary technical issues if the problem lies indeed there. But it seems not to be the case.



Earlier in July, another curious happening related to the law on mass actions occurred in Brest. During the opening of a new mall, the company decided to surprise the people and organise a candy shower. It announced that at the opening ceremony they will throw a ton of candy from the roof of the building.

The organisers requested an action of 500 participants at local authorities for this occasion. Instead, 5,000 people came while only 6 policemen were sent to keep order. The police ordered not to throw the candy to avoid a stampede, but the organisers ignored their orders. As a result, the police initiated a case against them for breaking the law on mass actions.

The Fear of Organisation

Authorities try to explain that a public announcement in social networks can be dangerous, because it can gather an inestimable number of people and the situation can get out of control. Some officials understand that permits for daily

collective actions of citizens like cycling seems ridiculous, but they have to obey the law and recommend to cooperate with authorities on these matters. For instance, they suggest that people hold their actions under the aegis of local authorities or security services, which do not need permission for such actions.

But the reason behind the actions of authorities appears not to be their concern for the safety of the participants. They simply demonstrate that citizens in Belarus have no right to associate with one another without the state's approval and control. Such irrational fear of harmless actions like cycling looks like nonsense, but it precisely shows the logic of the regime-society's current coexistence.

The people in power regard organised citizens not as partners in the resolution of public problems, but as a potential danger to regime stability. Therefore maintaining an atomised society remains a priority of internal security in Belarus.

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

Alternative Civilian Service in Belarus: Possible, but Only in Theory

Belarus has mandatory legal conscription, but Alexander Lukashenka has ordered the preparation of a law on alternative civilian service in 2013.

For a long time the absence of this law has been putting many young people in a legal trap of having such a right and but having no possibility to exercise it.

But rather than solve the problem, the law is much more likely to become another one. The Belarusian government has rejected a public and open discussion of the draft law. And according to the views of experts, the law may be rigid and may serve the interests of the military officials.

Compulsory conscription in Belarus means that the army is not staffed with professional soldiers, but rather it is formed with the understanding that all healthy men aged between 18 and 27 have a constitutional duty to protect their fatherland and serve in the army.

The Gap between Law and Reality

At the same time, Article 57 of the constitution guarantees Belarusian citizens a right to choose to serve in an alternative civil service. In other states this means serving not in a military barracks but working at some socially-orientated institutions: hospitals, retirement homes, hospices, post-offices etc. The usual reason for this is so-called "conscientious objection", which means refusing to serve in the army because of religious, political and other beliefs.

But in Belarus no one has used their right to alternative service. And the reason is a simple absence of legislation clarifying such a right. Since 1994, when the constitution was adopted, such a law has been absent.

In 2000, even the Constitutional Court of Belarus ruled for the need to prepare legislation in this area. In 2003, several members of the parliament raised this issue. At the beginning of 2010 Alexander Lukashenka himself ordered the preparation of such a law. Yet nothing has changed.

In the meantime, several Belarusians have acted upon their rights and refused to enter the army. Their legal cases were rather strong – they had a constitutional right to alternative civilian service, but the courts rejected their claims invoking the absence of any corresponding legislation. Instead, they were convicted of "evading conscription" which is a criminal offence in Belarus punishable by imprisonment

Take the case of Ivan Mikhailau, a member of a Jewish-messianic religious community from Homel, the second largest city in Belarus. After he had refused to go to the army and had applied for alternative civilian service, on 15 December 2009 he was arrested.

The court found him guilty of "evading conscription" and sentenced him to three months in custody. Amnesty

International recognised the young man as a prisoner of conscience. Only on 10 March 2010, after Lukashenka ordered drafting of a law on alternative civilian service, was Ivan's sentence revised and he was found not guilty in the appeal trial.

Main Opponents are Top Military Officials

A very long delay in adopting such an important law can be explained only by powerful forces inside the ruling elite. And in Belarus' case it is the Ministry of Defence and related agencies.

"A real man must smell gunpowder", – Alexander Lukashenka once proclaimed. It is a perfect reflection of the position of Belarusian military officials, successors of the Soviet military tradition, who believe in the shamefulness of any type of alternative service.

Another reason is their fear to compete. If the young Belarusians have a right to choose the kind of state service they prefer, the traditional army will have to start attracting recruits instead of simply forcing them to serve. Like any monopoly they are afraid of competition.

The sad irony here is that the Belarusian ruler in 2010 appointed the Security Council of Belarus as the body responsible for drafting this law. This council consists of top military, KGB, police and other related officials. In other words, the military were made responsible for drafting something that they had always opposed.

In the best of KGB traditions, the drafting of the new law was done in secret. From there, any interested civil society groups could not openly access the materials concerning the future law. As a result, only rumours are available concerning its content.

Small Chances of Getting a Proper Law

Alternative civil service should not be a punishment for a person's unwillingness to serve in the army. In Russia, the term of alternative service is almost twice the length of the term of usual military service. Moreover, "the objector" cannot change their workplace, which is always remote from his home. His salary is extremely low and the working conditions are often horrible. In addition he is deprived of a right to strike.

But there are also successful examples of alternative service regulation among Belarus' neighbours. In Moldova, the term of alternative civilian service is only one year. The conscript's motivation to refuse military service can vary: from ethical views to religious and political views. Young people work at normal jobs, and simply paying 25 per cent of their salary to the state.

In Lithuania, the alternative civilian service term is 18 months, while "the objector" is also not limited in grounds for choosing alternative service. And he is also allowed to keep his entire salary. The same rules (with a small difference in the conscription period) exist in Estonia.

Belarusian lawmakers are likely to choose the worst. The latest available draft, dating back to 2010, contains all restrictions imaginable: long-term appointment, a minimal salary, service in remote areas and serious deprivations of social rights.

Mikhail Pashkevich, the coordinator of the For Alternative Civilian Service campaign, says that according to his sources, the Belarusian authorities have gone even further in their desire to make alternative civilian service unbearable for young people. They plan to forbid distance learning during the alternative service and leave only one ground for conscientious objection: religion.

It is good that the Belarusian authorities are starting to at

least do something about civil service, but their attitude may undermine its whole purpose.

Artyom Shraibman

Foreign Domains of Belarusian Parties – Digest of Belarusian Analytics

Oil products trade, Belarus parliamentary elections, business associations, informal education and modernization are among the topics which interested Belarus experts recently.

[Foreign Domains of Belarusian Parties](#) BDG journalist examines whether Belarusian political parties and movements have websites and how properly their websites work. The study found that government and opposition political parties/ movements are paying a little attention to internet. Six political parties do not have websites at all, and only some entities regularly update their websites: BRSM, BSDP, UCP, BCD, Tell the Truth campaign, and movement For Freedom. Ultimately, the author doubts whether political parties are interested in the recruitment of new members and in their presence in the media space in general.

[The Balance Sheet on Belarus](#) Rodger Potocki, Senior Director for Europe at the National Endowment for Democracy, offers a comprehensive assessment of the successes and problems of the Western policy response to the December 2010 post-election crackdown in Belarus. In particular, the expert fixes that the international aid after 2010 was of crucial importance given the scarcity of internal resources. However, while the

numbers were impressive, many of the pledges included support for already existing or planned programs. Most aid actually benefited Belarus-related projects based outside of the country. Less than a quarter of what was delivered went to those trying to cope with the crackdown and promote change inside Belarus.

[Corporate Social Responsibility: from the European standard to the Belarusian reality](#) – this manual of materials provides the analysis of the main conceptual approaches and models of CSR, summarizing the experience of regulations of foreign strategic CSR practices, and analysis of social and cultural traditions and political aspects of the formation of the Belarusian CSR models, as well as develops recommendations for a national model of cooperation between business and society. The study was conducted in the framework of the project "Slovak experience in corporate responsibility in Belarus".

[Modernization. The Government's Plans Require Unrealistically Big Money](#) – Alexander Avtushko-Sikorski, BISS, notes that despite of frequent statements of the Belarusian authorities on the need for modernization, their understanding of the term itself is incomplete: they still see it as a technical update of production without structural changes of economy in general. Such an understanding of modernization in the medium term again raises the question: where it is possible to get money.

[Belarusian Business Associations: Problems and Potential Development](#) – Olga Belskaya and Daria Uryutina, BEROC, present the research aimed to examine the existing obstacles for doing business in Belarus, as well as analyze the compliance of business associations activity in Belarus with the needs of business associations members and business in general. The research was conducted under the joint project with the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) with

the financial support of USAID.

[Belarusian Oil Industry Canceled Devaluation](#) – a journalist of [naviny.by](#) refers to the Ministry of Economy, which gave birth to a mini-sensation, "recognized" that a positive balance of trade in Belarus over the last year is entirely on the conscience of export of solvents. Persistent attempts by the authorities to convince the public in dependence of the Belarusian economy on not quite clean oil needle look quite strange, moreover the information specified in the report, is simply not true.

[Parliamentary Elections: Final Report](#) – The “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” campaign released the final report on Monitoring the Election to the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus (September 23, 2012). The report concludes that the election process was marked by serious violations of the principles of democratic and fair elections, as described in the OSCE standards and the Belarusian legislation. The authors also suggest recommendations to the electoral legislation of Belarus which will bring the elections close to the international standards.

[The future of Belarus. Opinion of independent experts](#). It is the title of the book which was presented on December 10 in the Latvian Embassy in Minsk. Edited by Professor Oleg Manaev, the book represents the view of the leading independent national and international experts on the future of Belarus.

[Informal Education for Regional Democratic Transformation](#) – The book has been prepared by the experts from the EaP 6 countries, including Belarus, within the Education sub-working group of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. The aim of the book is to show the actual situation on the ground of non-formal education in the EaP states. The publication aims to grasp the most relevant trends currently shaping the non-formal education as a mechanism for democratic transformation in the six EaP countries.

[Monthly Brief on Security: November 2012](#) – Belarus Security Blog authors note that in November, the Belarusian authorities have continued to play up the theme of modernization, however, so far there are no specific proposals. Moreover, the plans that have already been announced most fall into the category of cosmetic tweaks.

[Legal Regulation of Philanthropy in Belarus](#) – Valery Zhurakovsky, NGO ACT, has developed a methodical manual, which provides an analysis of the Belarusian legislation in the field of philanthropy. The manual identifies the main legal barriers that hinder the development of charity in Belarus and offers seven key ideas to improve the legislation.

[Survey of Brest Young People on Youth CSOs](#) – In September-October 2012, Brest CSO "Dzedzich" conducted a survey of local young people to identify their relation to youth non-profit organizations in Brest. The main conclusion is that the Brest youth do not have a coherent understanding of the nonprofit sector, its role and importance in society. One of the key reasons is the lack of awareness of young people about CSOs.

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.

Suicide Triggers Changes in the Belarusian KGB

On 16 November, Alexander Lukashenka appointed Valer Vakulchyk as Chairman of the KGB. Vakulchyk remains one of the least

famous Belarusian security service officials and the Belarusian state leader trusts him a great deal.

A week earlier, on 9 November, Lukashenka discharged the previous KGB head, Vadzim Zaitsau, whom he suspected of being complicit in "betrayal of the state's interests, corruption and nonfeasance". Recently, the KGB has been in the news in connection with several mysterious events such as the death of KGB Colonel Kazak and dismissal of the head of Military Intelligence, KGB Major General Zakharau. In addition, this summer's [teddy bears stunt](#) seriously damaged the reputation of the KGB and the Belarusian authorities in the face of the whole world.

Lukashenka wants to reform the Belarusian KGB. However, he realises that reforms may put him in conflict with those state security officials who will not benefit from the changes.

KGB Crisis

Former KGB head Vadzim Zaitsau lost Lukashenka's trust. On 19 November, Lukashenka claimed that the reason for his removal was the "moral and psychological atmosphere in some KGB departments". State Secretary of the Security Council Leanid Maltsau was acting head of KGB for a week. He said that the discharge was related to the suicide of KGB Colonel Alyaksandr Kazak. According to Maltsau, "there still remain a series of other issues that require close investigation".

Maltsau promised that Zaitsau could return to his position if the investigation confirms his innocence. However, Zaitsau will not return, as Lukashenka has serious claims against him. Only the people close to the Belarusian president know the exact nature of the "serious issues" mentioned, but we can hazard several guesses.

First, the mysterious death of KGB Colonel Kazak. The Belarusian authorities give the official version as suicide.

However, the KGB at first denied Kazak's death. This looks suspicious and has caused rumours. For example, Kazak could have known about the corruption schemes inside the Belarusian governing elite and some officials could have benefited from his death.

Secondly, the uncertainty of the KGB's actions back in July, when the Swedish PR-company Studio Total organised the so-called "[teddy bear landing](#)" in Belarus. The KGB denied an obvious fact for a long time then, and looked at the very least inadequate as a result.

Third, Belarusians learned the details of the post-Square 2010 criminal cases. Zaitsau supervised these cases. Several Belarusian politicians, including ex-presidential candidate Ales Michalevic revealed information about torture in the KGB detention centre. Another ex-presidential candidate, Andrei Sannikau, stated that Zaitsau had threatened to inflict damage to the health of Sannikau's wife and son were he not to act as a witness against himself. Both ex-candidates have since escaped from Belarus and Lukashenka was able to blame the former KGB for this as well.

The authors of the Belarus Security Blog list [several possible reasons](#) for Zaitsau's dismissal. First, "deficiencies in organisational and personnel work." The analysts noted that in 2012, suddenly and without apparent reason the head of Military Intelligence, KGB Major General Zakharov, was dismissed. Secondly, they point to the struggle inside the governing elite and redistribution of spheres of influence on Alexander Lukashenka by the Belarusian security forces."

The system of the current Belarusian governing elite remains very non-transparent. The attack on the Lithuanian Embassy in Minsk on 6 November and the blast near the KGB building in Vitsebsk on 11 November could be connected with the crisis in the main state security service of Belarus as well.

Who is Vakulchyk?

Belarusian society does not know much about the new KGB boss, and he rarely gives press conferences or interviews. Valer Vakulchyk comes from Brest Region and was born in 1964. The Belarusian media do not even know the exact place of Vakulchyk's birth.

The new KGB boss studied in the Kharkiv guard higher tank command school and the Belarusian Presidential Academy of Administration. He also graduated in advanced courses of counter-espionage of the USSR KGB.

Vakulchyk comes from frontier troops. Alexander Lukashenka's elder son Victar, who is the Presidential Advisor on the national security issues, also served in the frontier troops. Connections between them could facilitate Vakulchyk's new appointment.

The new KGB boss has great organisational skills and preserves absolute loyalty to Lukashenka. Vakulchyk served in the KGB in 1991-2008, and after that Lukashenka appointed him to head newly created structures on several occasions.

In 2008, the Belarusian authorities formed the President's Operative Analytical Centre. Alexander Lukashenka appointed Valer Vakulchyk as a head of the new most secretive state security institution. According to Belarusian Partisan, Victar Lukashenka facilitated this appointment. The main task of the Operative Analytical Centre is control over top government officials.

In 2011, the authorities created the Investigatory Committee. Valer Vakulchyk headed the new structure. He supervised several important criminal cases against bureaucrats who had abused their positions: for example, the case of former Chairman of Polatsk city executive committee Tachyla or Deputy Interior Minister Poludzen.

What Will Happen to the KGB?

The criminal cases against the nomenclature and control over the top state officials clearly show that Lukashenka relies on Valer Vakulchyk. The new KGB head is neither more democratic nor less democratic than his predecessor. There should be no illusion: a person who works as KGB head follows Lukashenka's orders and cannot play any political role.

On 19 November, Lukashenka said that some people in the KGB want to “*feel free and not to go to work, and forget that they have shoulder-straps*”. He suggested that they should look for new jobs. Moreover, Belarus hinted that he might reduce the number of KGB officials from 12,000 to 3,000. Where these people will go is not exactly clear.

It will be Vakulchyk's task to deal with it. Changes inside the KGB will happen as a follow-up to the reforms of the [police](#) and [nomenclature](#). These three columns have been the basis of the authoritarian government for a long time.

Ryhor Astapenia

Language of Democracy and Language of Dictatorship – Digest of Belarusian Analytics

Belarusian analysts discuss the role of language in Belarusian society, media barometer, abolition of death penalty, European and Eurasian integration among other topics.

[Language of Democracy and Language of Dictatorship](#) – brief but probably the most popular article of the week authored by journalist Siarhei Dubavets states that the Belarusian democracy remains the only value – Belarusian. Language (Belarusian or Russian) is the main criterion for distinction opposition and the government, democracy and dictatorship, independence and provinciality, genuine culture and serving at the tsar's table. Dubavets says he is speaking the humiliated in Belarus but his native language of democracy while Russian speaking opposition activists use the colonial language of dictatorship forced upon them.

[The creation of the “sixth column”?](#) – Belarusian Security Blog notes the increasing of activity of the pro-Moscow “initiative” in Belarus which “buys” local activists. The experts see that Moscow supported groups are working mainly in the free mode, and have the main task of the increasing the number of activists. More strict and clear requirements for their activities will appear near 2015, when presidential elections are to be held. As a result, Alexander Lukashenka may well face a rival far more powerful than even the candidate from the united national democratic opposition.

Politics

[BISS Political Media Barometer №1](#) – Belarusian Institute for Political Studies (BISS) presents the first public issue of a new quarterly report– BISS Political Media Barometer covering April-June BISS designed this product with one major goal in mind: to scientifically analyse the quality of the political communication between the Belarusian democratic political forces and the society, and contribute to its improvement. The new BISS product has already got some [feedback of the politicians](#).

[Lukashenka is running out of arguments in public speeches](#) –

Alexander Zimouski, media consultant and former head of Belarusian state television and radio company, states that Alexander Lukashenka goes to the public "archi poor" prepared. The expert refers not to rhetoric, but content of the speeches, which contain only a set of old templates. Zimovski suggests that the president's associates cannot grasp the new rapidly changing trends and therefore not able to offer a new image of the father of the nation.

[What Could be a Transition to Democracy?](#) – a politician Vital Karatysh notices that the transition to democracy in the current Belarusian context does not mean a change of power and the existing laws, but only change of the vector of the existing political system in Belarus. Accordingly, he believes that "any strategy of the opposition, which claims to be effective, must include the achievement of the unity of the democratic forces. Their leaders should always remember that the art of politics is the ability to enter into agreements and to reach a compromise".

[Opposition Politics: the Art of the Possible](#) – political analyst Dmitry Kukhlei notes that the official results of the parliamentary elections of 2012 consolidated the trend of the last twelve years, according to which the electoral campaign does not cause changes in the political system. The election showed that neither the leading opposition force, nor an independent civil society did not demonstrate the capacity to mobilize people and create a pole of attraction for the supporters of the changes that have recently dominated in Belarusian society.

[National Security Brief: September 2012](#) – Belarusian Security Blog has released its monthly brief paper covered the national security issues in September. In particular, the experts note that the recent parliamentary campaign demonstrated the authorities' loss in the domestic field. The regime was unable to mobilize the population to ensure the necessary turnout that confirms the idea of a low level of trust of the

population to the government.

[Abolition of Death Penalty in Belarus is not Realistic](#) – defender Vyachaslau Bortnik speculates if it's possible that Belarus will abolish the death penalty. The expert gives an unambiguous answer: this question is political, and Belarusian authorities use it as a tool for dealing with foreign and domestic policy issues. Accordingly, its abolition is not realistic in the foreseeable future.

[European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries](#) – The second edition of the European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries has been published – a study aiming to explore the process of convergence between the six Eastern Partnership countries and the European Union. The work involved over 30 experts from various institutions in the EU and Eastern Partnership countries. Belarus was represented by the BISS who have participated in the preparation of the Index.

[BISS Launches Research in a New Field, to Analyze Eurasian Integration](#) – the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) launches research in a new field in order to provide its expert analysis of Eurasian integration, taking into account that this is becoming a reality, which cannot be ignored and requires a thorough analysis by the expert community. The first paper authored by Maksim Karliuk centers on the institutional structure of Eurasian integration.

Economy

[Belarusian Monthly Economic Review, No.10, October 2012](#)The IPM Research Center released its monthly analysis of Belarusian economy. The October issue covers the following topics: Belarus held parliamentary elections; sharp slowdown in industrial growth; problems of external borrowing come to the fore; growth of imports outpaced growth of exports.

[What Model of Social Policy is Needed in Belarus?](#) – Belarusian social policy shows a number of successes, but it has a certain inconsistency, and the government's participation is too large. Such an assessment was given by Oksana Yerofeeva, Head of Department of Economics and Finance of The Belarusian State University, during her report at the 2nd International Congress of Belarusian Studies.

Civil Society

[Belarus Researchers Shared Their Knowledge Outside the Country](#) – [TUT.BY](#) journalist describes his impressions of the 2nd International Congress of Belarusian Studies held on September 28-30, in Kaunas. The author believes the event the largest Belarusian Science Conference in the Humanities, organised by NGOs. Particular emphasis is placed on the fact that the Congress is above politics and its main task is to give opportunity for scientists and researchers to share their knowledge.

[Results of the II Congress of Belarusian Researchers: Expected Topics and Unexpected Conclusions](#) – Natalya Ryabova elaborates at length on key results of the II International Congress of Belarusian Researchers, which took place in Kaunas on September 28-30, 2012. The author suggests that the Congress is becoming a 'happening' for Belarusian academic community, while establishment of national scientific data base of research and citation.

[Organizational Development: the Situation is Stable, but Need to Keep a Hand on the Pulse](#) – representatives of non-profit organisations positively perceive the idea of the First Capacity Building Fair, that's confirmed with a blitz survey of the Fair participants. The event takes place on October 12 and brought together representatives of CSOs interested in receiving consulting services in organizational development, and consultants who are ready to offer their services.

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.