Determinants of Military Cooperation Between Belarus and Russia After 2014

The author discusses the scale and scope of military cooperation between Russia and Belarus after 2014. He analyses the changes that have occurred in this area after the Russian intervention in Ukraine. He presents the legal and treaty basis of the Russian-Belarusian cooperation, as well as the main points of contention in bilateral relations.

In recent years, the differences in the international policies of both countries have widened. Russia expects its closest ally to support it in its conflict with the North Atlantic Alliance and to unequivocally recognize the legitimacy of the Russian intervention in Ukraine. Russian efforts to deepen integration with Belarus, including the military sphere, have been intense, especially in recent months.

The author also draws attention to the cooperation in the field of the armaments industry of both countries, as well as joint military exercises and the process of training Belarusian soldiers at Russian military universities.

A fter the Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014, the context of Belarusian foreign and domestic policy changed. Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Belarusian authorities have tried to pursue a policy of balancing between the parties to the conflict. For many years, Belarus’ political, economic and military dependence on Russia has been increasing, which means that Minsk’s room for political maneuver is becoming more and more limited. In the consecutive months of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, Belarus did not go as far as expressing open criticism of the Russian Federation’s actions. Alexander Lukashenko did not condemn Russia for the annexation of the Crimea, and under her pressure confirmed that the Crimean Peninsula is a part of Russia. Belarus also voted against the UN General Assembly resolution supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

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Belarus, Russia, military cooperation, military bases, military exercises

KEYWORDS
Not all the measures taken by the Belarusian side have been approved by the Russian ally. Belarus has supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine and opposed Russia’s plans to federalize it. The Belarusian authorities have also declared neutrality in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and denied information about the possibility of Russian-Belarusian intervention in Ukraine. They clearly opposed the idea of transporting Russian troops through its territory. Moreover, Belarus did not recognize the newly established Donetsk and Luhansk folk republics in the international arena. The conflict in eastern Ukraine only deepened the discrepancies in Belarusian-Russian relations. The Belarusian authorities clearly distanced themselves from Russian policy towards Ukraine, as Lukashenko began to fear the possibility of Russian intervention in his own country.

The aim of the article is to present the scope and scale of military cooperation between Belarus and Russia after 2014. The main research question concerns the changes that have occurred in this area after the Russian intervention in Ukraine. A multifaceted analysis was carried out as regards the legal and treaty basis of military cooperation, points of contention in bilateral relations, cooperation in the field of the armaments industry, joint maneuvers and the process of training Belarusian soldiers at Russian military universities.

**Literature Review and Methodology**

In scientific literature, the issue of Belarusian-Russian cooperation is poorly recognized. Authors have most often analyzed the military cooperation of the two countries up to the year 2014. Articles on economic and political aspects of cooperation have prevailed. More recent works on the subject include studies by Sofia Astahova and Aleksandr Golts. There are also reports of various analytical centers concerning some areas of Belarusian-Russian military cooperation. A lot of useful information is provided as part of the Belarus Security Blog project, which contains current comments on changes in the Belarusian armed forces.
es. In general, however, these topics are not sufficiently developed, which encourages in-depth research and analysis.

In the course of the research, methods appropriate to social sciences were applied. The main research method was content analysis. Available literature, analytical reports and press materials were analyzed. Studies in such fields as internal and international security, geopolitics and international relations were used. During the examination of official documents institutional, legal and comparative methods were implemented.

**Legal and Treaty Basis for Military Cooperation**

Belarus has been a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) since 1991 and of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) since 1994. Military cooperation between the member states of both organizations is coordinated by Russia. In the case of Belarus, this cooperation is being developed bilaterally and multilaterally. Its foundations were formulated as early as the beginning of the 1990s. In 1993, an agreement on military and technical cooperation was signed. It includes provisions on tightening corporate interrelations as regards modernization and production of war equipment, and guaranteeing mutual supplies of arms and services in the military sphere. In this way, the cooperation from the period of the USSR in the field of armaments was maintained, and the foundations for further military cooperation were laid. Both parties undertook not to import arms production to other countries without an agreement. Several dozen agreements regulating various aspects of cooperation in this field have already been signed.

Over the years, political and military integration has deepened. In 1997, Belarus and Russia signed an agreement to set up a regional grouping of troops to jointly oppose aggression from third countries. In the same year, a military cooperation agreement was also concluded, providing for further integration in the field of defense policy and strategy; unification of legislation in the military field; preparation of a government procurement programme for the armaments industry; development, production and repair of military technology; unification of the system of managing a regional grouping of troops; joint maintenance and use of military infrastructure facilities; preparation of military personnel and logistics. The last two agreements have been in force since 1999. Military cooperation was also the subject of subsequent agreements: on the establishment of the Commonwealth of Belarus and Russia (1996), the Union of Belarus and Russia (1997) and the Union State of Russia and Belarus (USRB – 1999). In 2012 Belarus ratified the agreement on common air defense. Belarusian officers are trained in Russia. Both armies carry out joint operational trainings, often on Russian territory.

Although discrepancies in Belarusian-Russian political and economic relations are growing, military cooperation remains the least conflictual. Admittedly, after 2014, the number of newly signed agreements decreased: some of them concerned the regulation of current affairs, including the conduct of joint military exercises, and some were concluded within the framework of the CSTO or the CIS. New bilateral agreements are still being signed, although Belarus is trying to slow down the pace of integration in the military sphere.

In 2014, Belarus ratified an agreement with the Russian Federation to place elements of the GLONASS global satellite navigation system on its territory. A year earlier, both countries had signed an agreement to extend cooperation in the field of the armaments industry until 2020 (the last two agreements had been drawn up before the Russian intervention in Ukraine). In November 2017, an agreement on technical protection of the regional grouping of the Belarusian and Russian armies was signed. It assumes joint maintenance of war infrastructure facilities, planning and implementation of operational and technical projects, training of specialists and development of a common policy in the field of technical security of the regional grouping of troops. In the event of a threat of war or war, Russia undertook to supply its closest ally with additional military equipment. Funds for the functioning of the regional grouping of troops were also secured in the USRD budget. Between 2018 and 2019, further agreements were signed to regulate various aspects of military cooperation, such as the exchange of information on forward-looking military technologies and on the use of satellite communications for military purposes.

### Points of Dispute in Belarusian-Russian Relations

However, the Belarusian-Russian military cooperation is not lacking in discrepancies. The Russian leadership is not interested in modernizing the Belarusian armed forces, which is one of the points of contention in bilateral relations. Russia does not provide Belarus with

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modern military technology and is not very involved in the modernization of its arms industry. Western sanctions against Russia in recent years have contributed to its serious economic problems, and this in turn has reduced the number of Russian orders in the Belarusian armaments industry. After the Russian intervention in eastern Ukraine, relations between Belarus and Russia deteriorated. Lukashenko began to remove commanders with a strong pro-Russian orientation from the structures of the armed forces and special services. The Russian intervention forced Lukashenko to review all the personnel in the authorities responsible for state security. The Russian elite, on the other hand, have redefined their perception of their closest ally. The Russians began to seek closer cooperation with Belarus and increased the assets of their influence in that country. The aim was to achieve deeper integration in the military sphere. On the so-called western flank of Russia, Belarus is a natural buffer separating the Federation from NATO member states. Military cooperation with Belarus brings Russia strategically closer to the Kaliningrad Oblast. Belarus is a key transit country for Russia and facilitates land connections with the Kaliningrad enclave. In the event of a conflict with NATO, the armed forces of the Russian Federation will strive to seize the so-called Suwałki Strip and cut the Baltic States off from the support of the Alliance.

The success of Russian actions depends to a large extent on the loyalty of Belarus, which, however, distances itself from some of Russia’s actions on the international arena. It also tried to remain neutral in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Belarus borders with Russia at a distance of 1,283 km and it is its longest land border with a neighboring country. After 2014, the Russian Federation sought to increase its control over Belarus. From its territory, Russians may conduct warfare with third countries, or they may use the Belarusian state as a buffer in the event of conflict with NATO. However, only the full availability of Belarus can guarantee the achievement of these goals. Observations show that Russia is not absolutely convinced of this. Belarus has tried to distance itself from the conflict between the Russian Federation and NATO, and has tried not to criticize NATO’s projects to strengthen the so-called eastern flank, and the plans to locate an American military base in Poland. It has adopted a neutral position in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It also refused to increase the Russian military presence on its territory and the transit of Russian troops. In addition, the Belarusian side does not always take the Russian point of view on the directions of further development of the CSTO. If the conflict with NATO escalates, this state of affairs is unsustainable for Russia. On the other hand, Belarus and Russia have developed a common plan of action in the event of deterioration in relations or military confrontation with the North Atlantic Alliance, because attempts to adopt a plan of action of the CSTO in the multilateral format have failed.

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In recent years, Belarus has been opposed to increasing the presence of Russian troops on its territory. So far, the Russians have had two military facilities there: the Volga radio station in Hantsavichy (Brest Region) and the communication point with Russian submarines in Vileyka (Minsk Region). Pursuant to the 1996 agreement, Russia will have these facilities at its disposal until July 7, 2021, and until July 6, 2020 Belarus may refuse to make them further available. Lukashenko has announced an extension of the lease agreement. At present, these facilities are already of secondary strategic importance and Russia could give up their maintenance. About a thousand Russian officers and soldiers serve there. Russians do not necessarily have to build new military bases, as they may change the purpose of the bases leased so far – after 2020, when a new lease agreement comes into force.

In recent years, the Russian side has taken many steps to increase its military presence in Belarus. Already in 2013, they were planning to deploy a regiment of air forces in Baranavichy (Brest Region). Although Russian fighters appeared there, the facility did not have the character of a permanent military base, it was only a temporary residence of Russian combat aircraft. At the end of 2013, the first four Russian Su-27 fighters appeared in Baranavichy. Initially, Belarus encouraged Russians to relocate other Su-27 fighters there, because its air defense system – after the decommissioning of all 22 Su-27s in 2013 – was based mainly on outdated MiG-29 fighters. Lukashenko also tried to convince Russia to give it or sell at a lower price a dozen or so such aircraft. At the end of 2014, Russia tried to force the Belarusian side to locate a new military base in Bobruisk, where it intended to deploy 12 Su-27 fighters, 2 Su-27 training and combat fighter aircraft and 4 Mi-8 helicopters. The Russian Su-27s had already landed there before. The Russians had changed their plans for the number and types of aircraft that would be stationed in Bobruisk, there was also information on the possibility of relocating 24 Su-27SMs aircraft there. In September 2015, the Russian government prepared a preliminary agreement on the principles of operation of the air base in the territory of Belarus. It provided for the deployment of additional Russian military facilities. The contract was to be valid for 15 years and provide for automatic extensions for further 5 years, unless a one year’s written notice of termination was given by either party before the expiry of the agreement. The agreement does not specify either the number of Russian aircraft or the strength of Russian units deployed there. The Belarusian side was to guarantee the infrastructure for the air base. After the Russian intervention in eastern Ukraine, Belarus’ interest in the new Russian military base in Bobruisk weakened, as Lukashenko was afraid to increase Russian military presence on the territory of his country. Belarus consistently denied information on the possibility of building a new Russian military base on its territory. This topic did not return until 2018, when Russia began to put pressure on its ally.\(^9\)

It is no coincidence that in the last two years the Russian Federation has been forcing Belarus to strengthen military cooperation. In the nearest future, they are probably going to try to increase their military presence in this country. They have already accelerated the work on the new editorial of the war doctrine of the Union State, so as to open the way to future detailed agreements aimed at increasing Belarus’ dependence on it in the military sphere. The previous version of the doctrine had been in force since 2001. The first Belarusian-Russian consultations on this issue began in 2016, and a new draft was prepared two years later. Minsk delayed the adoption of the document for fear of increasing the zone of Russian military influence. The project was to be adopted by the end of 2018, but it was still not approved by mid-2019. At the end of 2018, Russia demanded that Belarus accelerate the process of integration of states, including in the military sphere. Previously, the Belarusian authorities spoke cautiously about the plans to locate a permanent US military base in Poland and strengthen the so-called eastern flank by the North Atlantic Alliance. Although they did not accept the increased presence of NATO troops at their borders, they also did not want to interrupt the dialogue with NATO. Russia expected Belarus to be loyal and clearly distance itself from talks with the North Atlantic Alliance. Belarus tried to maintain its neutral position and play the role of an intermediary between Russia and NATO. After the outbreak of war in Ukraine, it took many steps to improve relations with the US and the EU and thus to balance Russia’s growing influence10.

Attempts by Belarus to distance itself from the conflict between Russia and NATO caused a reaction from Moscow. In 2018, under Russian pressure, Minsk changed its rhetoric towards the USA, as it considered the deployment of American bases in Poland to be a direct threat to its security. It also did not rule out the possibility of locating a Russian war base on Belarusian territory. In October 2018, during a meeting of the boards of the Defense Ministries of Belarus and the Russian Federation, the North Atlantic Alliance was identified as the main opponent of the USRB. Moscow intensified its demands for deeper Belarusian-Russian integration. The Russian answer to Fort Trump was their plan to deploy a new Russian military base in Belarus. Russia began to use the possibility of building Fort Putin as a deterrent. So far, however, its actions have remained mainly in the sphere of propaganda, but the Belarusian authorities have begun to speak in a similar tone. Although in recent years Lukashenko has been opposed to increasing Russian military presence on the territory of his country, Russia has every instrument at its disposal to force him to change his position. It may make further subsidies for the Belarusian economy conditional on Minsk’s consent to the deployment of additional Russian troops on Belarusian territory. There is also continued speculation about the size of the future Russian base and the types of armed forces deployed there. In the Russian media there is information about the possibility of deploying Su-35 fighters and rocket systems (e.g. Iskanders), or building


Further discrepancies arose during the preparation of the new war doctrine of Belarus. The work on the draft began after the Russian intervention in the east of Ukraine. Russia expected Belarus to identify NATO as the main enemy in its document. Minsk did not, however, decide to make any official reference to the North Atlantic Alliance, as it used the neutral formula “coalition of states” to describe it. The new war doctrine of Belarus was also a response to the threat of hybrid warfare because it was feared that Russia would destabilize the country. In its doctrine, Belarus emphasized its rights to conduct an independent security policy and advocated the development of good-neighborly relations with the EU and NATO. On the other hand, it emphasized the importance of relations with its existing allies. As one of the priority objectives, it declared the strengthening of the collective security system through strengthening relations within the framework of the USRB, the CSTO and the CIS. In the defense sector, it remained a supporter of strengthening cooperative ties with Russian armaments companies and armaments factories of the CSTO and CIS states. It clearly indicated its intention to maintain its status as a neutral state and as a nonparticipant in the NATO-Russia dispute. Its position was not accepted by Russia, which expected loyalty from its closest ally and a clear commitment from its side in the conflict with NATO.\footnote{Закон Республики Беларусь 20 июля 2016 г. № 412-З „Военная доктрина Республики Беларусь“, pravo.by/document/?guid=38710=H11600412 [access: 04 Jul. 2019.]

In recent years, an additional point of contention has arisen in the Belarusian-Russian relations. After the Russian intervention in Ukraine, Lukashenko began to consider the possibility of Russia repeating a similar scenario in his own country. In this context, the attitude of the authorities towards the purchase of Russian military equipment has changed. In order not to increase dependence on Russia, Belarus is, as far as possible, modernizing older weapons itself. This is also due to the limited financial resources available for the purchase of modern weapons.

In Russian military circles, Belarusian-Ukrainian cooperation in the field of armaments causes irritation, so Belarus is trying to hide its scale from its Russian ally. According to Russian sources, in 2015 Belarus supplied Ukraine with engines and spare parts for lighter armored vehicles (BTR, BWP) and various types of batteries for tanks and armored transporters. Additionally, they sold to the Ukrainians side optics for small arms, telescopes, thermal vision devices, reflex sights, rangefinders, targeting devices and monitors.
The sales of the leading Belarusian producer of wheeled tractors and special chassis, Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant (MZKT), have also increased in Ukraine. Its production has both civil and military applications. Russia is trying to force the Belarusian side to limit its military cooperation with Ukraine. It is likely that under the influence of actions undertaken by Russia, Lukashenko nationalized in 2018 the Orsha Aircraft Repair Plant, in which 60% of the shares are held by the Ukrainian company Motor Sich. After the West 2017 (Zapad 2017) maneuvers, Belarusian-Ukrainian military cooperation was clearly limited. In 2014, after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, cooperation between the defense sectors of Russia and Ukraine ended. Russia began to search for missing components for the armaments industry at other manufacturers, also in Belarus. In 2015, Minsk’s Peleng plant pledged to provide Russia with reconnaissance and targeting systems for self-propelled launchers of Chrysanthemum-S anti-tank guided missiles. Russia is putting a lot of effort into persuading Belarus to give up its cooperation with the Ukrainian arms complex, but so far without any major results13.

Cooperation of Armaments Industries

The beginnings of cooperation between Russia and Belarus in the field of the armaments industry date back to Soviet times. Close corporate ties between the two defense industries prevented them from separating after the collapse of the USSR, so a decision was made to maintain the relationship. For several years, Russia has been consistently withdrawing from importing spare parts from the post-Soviet states for the needs of its armed forces, and replacing purchases with its own arms production. However, this is not possible in all cases, so it has to buy parts in other countries. Russia’s policy of becoming dependent on external suppliers of armaments components has already resulted in the reduced number of orders in the Belarusian state military and industrial complex in recent years.

The Belarusian arms industry is mainly based on outdated Soviet technologies, and the modernization projects undertaken in recent years have not yielded the expected results. Some Belarusian armaments factories are primarily focused on cooperation with the Russian partner, e.g. Integral and MZKT, which sell 85-90% of their military production to the Russian arms industry. If Russia ended its cooperation with them, they would fall into financial trouble. For several years now, Russia has been developing a programme to build multi-wheeled transport vehicles (“Program-O”) to replace the MZKT chassis, but the tests carried out in 2018 failed. In addition, the armed forces of Belarus are equipped mainly with Russian equipment, while a smaller part comes from domestic production. For Russia,

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Belarus is a small market for its arms, while Belarus exports a significant part of the arms to its closest partner. In 2016, the Belarusian state budget received approximately USD 400 million from this source. It is difficult to verify, as Belarus does not provide detailed data. It has also abandoned the provision of such information to international organizations, including the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA). If these figures are true, Belarus sold almost 70% of its arms production to the Russian Federation at that time.

Belarusian authorities are aware of the dangers resulting from such a situation, which is why in recent years they have been trying to diversify the directions of their arms exports (e.g. to Azerbaijan). The post-Soviet, African and Asian countries are traditional markets for the Belarusian armaments industry. According to official data, which are difficult to verify, Belarus has recently significantly diversified its arms exports. This year it has so far sold 30% of its arms to Russia. Bilateral trade in the armaments sector was to amount to USD 500-600 billion annually, of which Belarus accounted for two-thirds and Russia for one-third. The analysis of official communications shows that in recent years Belarus has been selling armaments components to Russia at a similar level every year, i.e. around USD 400 million. Azerbaijan proved to be the most important new partner. In January-November 2018, Belarus sold military equipment to the Azerbaijani army for over USD 411 million (almost three times more than in 2017). In the first half of 2019, arms exports to Azerbaijan alone accounted for about 40% of the production of the Belarusian state military and industrial complex. Belarus receives newer weapons mainly from Russia, because the domestic armaments industry is not able to compete with the Russian one. Russia is interested in Belarusian chassis for its missile systems, although it is also interested in other military-related plants of its closest ally (e.g. Peleng, Tetraedr, Display, Integral, Horizon).

The almost total dependence on Russian production equipment only exacerbates the problems of the Belarusian armed forces. In order to reverse this dangerous trend, Belarus has decided to modernize its own military and industrial complex. The result is, for example, the Polonez multiple launch rocket systems. However, the Belarusian arms industry does not have sufficient financial resources for full modernization. It can only produce individual types of new weapons.

The economic crisis in Russia also resulted in the reduction of its funds for the modernization of the armed forces, which resulted reducing the number of orders in the Belarusian arms industry. Russia is seeking to take over some of the most valuable Belarusian arms companies, but its activities are being blocked by the Belarusian side. These companies provide considerable revenue to the state budget. Russia treats Belarus as a cooperation partner, a supplier of components needed for its armaments industry, and a contractor for the repair of older weapons. They do not care about modernizing their ally’s armaments complex and providing them with the most modern military technology. This issue is also one of the points of contention in bilateral relations. Russia also refrains from selling or transferring newer weapons free of charge, although Belarus has repeatedly asked for them. The Russians will only accept the transfer of armaments withdrawn from their own forces and older, modernized military equipment. They are mainly providing equipment
to strengthen the potential of the Belarusian air force and air defense, as they are thus increasing the security of their own borders, as well as implementing the provisions of the 2012 joint air defense agreement. However, the pace of building an integrated air defense system is slow and depends entirely on Russian decisions14.

In 2013, both countries signed a new agreement on continuing cooperation within the armaments industry. Such agreements have been concluded cyclically since the 1990s. Many of the items included in the inventory concerned joint research and development and construction work, as well as repair of military equipment. The agreement contains provisions on cooperation in the field of air defense, rocket forces, and the development of a space programme. These include the joint work of Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant, Rosoboroneksport and Moscow Institute of Thermal Technology to build new and modernize older chassis for air defense vehicles, as well as rocket forces. Further integration in the area of armaments production and joint projects are also planned, e.g. construction of a helicopter for the Belarusian special forces on the basis of the Russian Ka-226T machine, or participation in the modernization of the air force (e.g. repairs of the Russian transport aircraft Il-76). Both sides assumed joint modernization of military aircraft equipping armed forces of other countries. They also undertook to conduct a common policy in the field of technical normalization, standardization and cataloguing of defense production.

Detailed agreements include a commitment by Belarus to supply parts for the Russian armaments industry, including the Be-200 amphibious aircraft and the 5P-50 radars. Belarus has expressed its readiness to participate in the repair and modernization of the Russian Il-76M, Il-76MD and Il-79 aircraft intended for foreign contractors. It would continue to supply multi-axle chassis for the Russian armed forces, as well as parts for the Russian missile forces. Similarly, Russia has undertaken to supply parts for the Belarusian military and industrial complex, mainly for the repair and modernization of Russian combat aircraft. In addition, the Russian arms industry would participate in the repair and modernization of the Belarusian air force and support the Belarusian side in the execution of foreign contracts.

According to information from the 2018 of the Belarusian state military and industrial complex, 99 companies from the armaments sector supplied 1,880 different types of components to 255 Russian armaments companies. Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant has supplied multi-axle chassis for the production of, i.e.: the Tor-2ME and the Buk-M2E air defense systems, the Russian Topol-M and Jars long-range ballistic missiles, the Iskander operational and tactical systems, the Uragan 1-M multiple rocket launchers, the S-400 Triumph

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missile systems, engineering support and masking vehicles, the TMM-6 mechanical bridges and the S-500 Prometheus anti-aircraft and missile defense systems. MZTK also produces parts for Russian rocket troops for strategic purposes. The state military-industrial complex provides optical systems and optical-electronic targeting systems for Russian tanks: the Sosna-U gunner’s sight (T-72B3), the Essa thermal viewer, the Plisa (T-90C), the Essa-72 (T-72), and the Vesna-K (BMP-3) thermal imaging systems. Belarusian components are used, among others, in MiG-29, Su-30 and Su-33 aircraft, in Bal-E mobile coastal missile systems, Bastion-P missile complexes, the A-222 Bereg self-propelled coast defense system, as well as Typhoon-U trucks. Russian Mi-8 helicopters, MiG-29 and Su-27 fighters are repaired in Belarus. Five Belarusian and 12 Russian plants cooperate within the framework of the Interstate Financial and Industrial Group “Defense Systems,” established in 2000.

The basis for cooperation between Belarus and Russia in the military sphere are the annual and long-term plans of cooperation. In the agreement on military and technical cooperation for the years 2016-2020, Russia did not commit itself to larger supplies of new military equipment to Belarus. Russia declared that it would supply the Yak-130 training and battle aircraft, the MiG-29M/M2 fighters, the Dozor-E unmanned reconnaissance drone systems, the Tor-M2E rocket systems and military helicopters. In addition, it would transfer new long-range missiles to the 9K51 Grad truck-mounted rocket launcher systems or the BM-30 Smerch multiple rocket launchers. The agreement also specifies other weapons and ammunition to be sold by the Russian side to its nearest ally (e.g. the RPG-29 handheld anti-tank grenade launchers), but does not specify the number of weapons and ammunition to be sold. Joint consultations and training are also provided for. In July 2019, an additional protocol was concluded to extend the scope of the agreement.

In 2015, Russia delivered the first four Yak-130 training and combat aircraft, which replaced the outworn L-39 training aircraft of Czechoslovakian production. Also in 2015, the holding company Russian Helicopters signed a contract with the Belarusian Ministry of Defense for the delivery of 12 Mi-8MTV-5 transport and combat helicopters in 2016-2017. Although this is an obsolete structure from Soviet times, it was upgraded to later equip many armed forces, including Russian ones. During this period, Russia handed over to Belarus all the ordered machines of this type. At the beginning of 2016, the Belarusian Ministry of Defense signed an initial contract with the Russian company Irkut for the purchase of multi-purpose SU-30SM combat aircraft, which were to replace the worn out and obsolete MiG-29 fighters. Due to the limited financial possibilities, Belarus expected to
purchase them only after 2020. Ultimately, the Belarusian side ordered 12 such aircraft, and Irkut undertook to deliver first machines in 2018. Due to sanctions imposed by the West, the implementation of the agreement was delayed. Four out of twelve contracted fighters will be delivered to Belarus only in 2019. In the years 2020-2021, Russia will transfer four Su-30SMs to Belarus each year. The cost of their purchase will probably amount to approximately USD 600 million and will be financed with Russian loans17.

In 2016, the Belarusian Ministry of Defense received the fourth of the promised S-300PS anti-aircraft squadrons, which were replaced by newer S-400 and S-350 batteries in the Russian army. Russia’s actions resulted partly from its commitments to build an integrated CIS air defense system, and not necessarily from the will to modernize Belarusian air defense, despite Belarus’ efforts to receive from Russia the S-400 Triumph anti-aircraft and anti-missile system. A regiment of the latter system was installed by Russia in the Kaliningrad region at the beginning of 2019. The deployment of the S-300PS rocket systems in Belarus and the S-400 Triumph in Kaliningrad has allowed the Russian Federation to increase its control over the airspace of the Baltic States18.

For several years now, there has been information about the possibility of deploying Russian modernized Iskander-K rocket systems in Belarus. Russia uses the prospect of deploying IsKanders in Belarus mainly as an element of strategic deterrence directed at the North Atlantic Alliance and its plans to strengthen the so-called eastern flank. Russian declarations on the possibility of redeploying Iskanders to Belarus were intensified after the US President Donald Trump declared that a permanent base of American troops would be located in Poland. Although the probability of permanent stationing of the Iskander systems in Belarus is low, Russia is deliberately escalating tensions in order to induce the United States to reduce the scale of military engagement in Central and Eastern Europe. Already in 2003, the first unofficial information appeared about Belarus’ efforts to obtain the export version of Iskanders-E with a range of 200 km. In 2007 the plan was to equip the 465th Missile Brigade with them. Belarus was to receive this armament at internal Russian prices as part of its cooperation with the CSTO, but these projects were not carried out. Belarus did not have the financial means to purchase the system, so it was only possible to transfer them free of charge by the Russian side. Previously, Russia had repeatedly refused to supply Belarus with a newer version of this type of weapon (e.g. the


Iskander-M version), as it did not have any interest in strengthening the military potential of its closest ally. Furthermore, Russia feared that Belarus may disclose military technologies used in missile systems (e.g. to China). Russia’s reluctance to hand over the Iskander system to the Belarusian side was the main reason why Belarus started cooperation with China in this area. In 2016, the Belarusian armed forces were equipped with Polonez multiple launch rocket systems, developed in cooperation with the Chinese partner, with a range of up to 200 km. After modernization, their range has increased to 300 km (Polonez-M), and the target is to reach 500 km.\(^19\)

In 2011, Belarus purchased the first battery of the Tor-M2K rocket systems from Russia. The second battery was transferred by the Russians to the Belarusians at the end of 2012, the third one at the end of 2013 and the fourth and fifth one in 2018. In 2015, the Russian company Almaz-Antey concluded a contract with the Belarusian Ministry of Defense for the supply of the Opponent-G 3D radar (59H6E). The first radar unit of this type was received by the Belarusian radio technical forces in 2016. In 2017, the Belarusian Ministry of Defense signed another contract with Almaz-Antey for the supply of new radar units to strengthen the state’s air defense. In the following years, Belarus continued its cooperation with the Russian military tycoon. In 2018, it contracted the purchase of the TRLK 12A6 Sopka-2 radar complex. In 2018, it was announced that Russia intends to deploy Samarkand radio-electronic combat sets in the territory of Belarus. However, they have not been officially confirmed to be stationed in Belarus. Russian radar stations are competition to the national company KB Radar, which manufactures radar equipment and radioelectronic systems.\(^20\)

At the end of 2015, Belarus signed a contract with Russia for delivery of modernized BTR-82A armored transporters. The agreement provided for the sale of 32 units of this type of machines (USD 0.9 million per unit). The delivery of the first infantry fighting vehicles of this type was already planned for 2016, but there were difficulties in fulfilling the order because the Belarusian side was delaying the finalization of the contract. Eventually, Belarus withdrew from the purchase of this equipment, because it decided to modernize the BTR-70MB1 armored transporters in its own armaments factories. Russia has also committed to provide the Belarusian side with PBS-915 Shelf landing sets.\(^21\)


One of the most serious problems of the Belarusian armed forces is the outdated machinery. Although land forces have 1,276 T-72 tanks (including 446 T-72Bs) in their armament, according to Western experts they use only 515-530 tanks, the rest is decommissioned, preserved and stored in warehouses. Supported by Russia, Belarus undertook to modernize its tanks, but the scale of the undertaken actions is small and results from the limited financial resources of the state. In addition, the Russian Federation has mainly been involved in projects to modernize air defense, aviation and special operations forces. In 2017, the Russians gave Belarusians the first four tanks modernized to the T-72B3 standard. The Russian UralVagonZawod plant in Nizhny Tagil undertook the task of their modernization. In 2018 another 10 machines were renovated. In mid-2019, a two-year contract was signed for the modernization of another 11 T-72B tanks (a total of 25 T-72B3 tanks). They have been equipped with Belarusian targeting complex PNM Sosna-U\(^2\).

### Joint Military Exercises

For many years, Belarus and Russia have been running military trainings together. They are conducted in both bilateral (Federation of Russia and Belarus) and multilateral (CSTO, CIS) formats. Russian and Belarusian troops also train regularly with other armies, including the Serbian one (“Slavic brotherhood”). In this sphere, too, Belarus’ dependence on Russia can be seen. The Belarusian armed forces organize their own tactical training and operational training in cooperation with the Russian side. When the Russian Federation became involved in eastern Ukraine in 2014, the Belarusian armed forces intensified their own exercises to prepare them for the threats of hybrid war. The process of expanding the territorial defense forces was also continued, although the initial plans to reach the state of 120,000 soldiers proved to be completely unrealistic. These actions are, in fact, of a propaganda nature, because the Belarusian army is not capable of resisting Russian aggression. Joint Russian-Belarusian exercises are still being conducted. In operational terms, the Belarusian army should be treated as an integral part of the grouping of Russian armed forces in the western strategic direction. During joint maneuvers, a large number of soldiers and equipment have been involved, often on Russian military training grounds.

One of the largest joint ventures in this dimension is the exercise of the Regional Grouping of Armed Forces of the Union State of Belarus and Russia under the code name Zapad (West). The previous editions of these maneuvers took place in 2009 and 2013. The exer-

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Exercise is a part of Russia’s preparations for a potential conflict with NATO. Since 2009, it has been organized regularly every four years. In 2017, maneuvers of this type (West-2017) were preceded by a series of tests checking both armies’ combat readiness on the training grounds of both countries (including exercises of radio-electronic warfare, logistics, engineering, communications, and anti-chemical defense formations). On a smaller scale, the joint Belarusian-Russian Union Shield military maneuvers take place every two years. They are preceded by annual joint exercises to check the interoperability and compatibility of the different types of armed forces. Every year there are also joint exercises of special forces. In 2015, the Russian landing forces conducted 26, and in 2016 – 38 joint exercises with the special forces of the Republic of Belarus. Moreover, a similar number of joint military drills were attempted in 2017. The activities of the North Atlantic Alliance concerning the strengthening of the so-called eastern flank, and projects of creating a permanent base of American troops in Poland have contributed to the intensification of joint Belarusian-Russian training23.

Military Personnel Education Process

Since 1998, the USRB budget has been used to finance the education of Belarusian soldiers in Russian military schools. Since 2004, the costs of their education have been borne by the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. According to official data, 1,273 Belarusian soldiers were trained in Russian military universities between 1998 and 2016. They are trained mainly for joint military operations (missile and engineering forces, air defense). The Belarusian side sends its troops to Russia to train in rare or capital-intensive specialties that are too burdensome to be launched in the country (e.g. space troops). In 2016, 383 Belarusian military men studied in Russia. Moreover, in the following years the number of trained soldiers was maintained at a similar level, i.e. about 400 soldiers. Belarusian military personnel have the opportunity to be trained in Russia, which gives them a chance to improve their qualifications. On the other hand, however, it increases the risk of building pro-Russian officer cadre in the Belarusian army. Pro-Russian sympathies are a serious problem for the Belarusian armed forces. Joint military exercises and education at Russian military universities further reinforce this negative trend. The prestige of military service is also higher in the Russian Federation than in Belarus. After Russia became involved in Ukraine in 2014, Lukashenko took many steps to minimize the risk of

Russian influence in the Belarusian army, including the dismissal of the most pro-Russian officers. The issue of the loyalty of own armed forces in the event of Russian intervention in Belarus is more than problematic, and close cooperation between the two armies only deepens the area of uncertainty. However, the Belarusian Ministry of Defense does not give up further training of its military personnel in Russia24.

Conclusions

Military cooperation remains one of the least problematic areas of bilateral relations between Belarus and Russia. In recent years, however, differences in this area have become more pronounced, mainly as a result of the adoption of different priorities. Belarus is trying to maintain a neutral position in the dispute between the Russian Federation and NATO as it is trying to improve relations with Western structures. It takes a similar position as regards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Belarus is clearly afraid of increasing Russian military influence on its territory. Although the threat of direct Russian intervention in Belarus seems small, it cannot be ruled out.

After 2014, the intensity of signing new bilateral military agreements has clearly decreased. Belarus has taken steps to reduce its military dependence on its closest ally. Its priority objective has become the diversification of export directions for its armaments to reduce dependence on the Russian market. Despite limited financial resources, Belarus started to modernize its armed forces on its own. It is also trying to block Russia’s takeover of the most valuable armaments companies. Russia, on the other hand, has reduced the scale of orders in the Belarusian military and industrial complex. It also strives to replace Belarusian components with its own armaments production. This trend will intensify in the upcoming years.

At the beginning of the intervention in Ukraine, Russia tolerated the actions of Belarus and its attempts to maneuver between the parties to the conflict. However, the plans of the North Atlantic Alliance to strengthen the so-called eastern flank and to build an American military base on Polish territory have determined Russia to increase its control over Belarus. Moscow expects loyalty and support from the Belarusians in the conflict with NATO. Belarus plays too important a strategic role for Russia not to secure its interests on its territory. It is no coincidence that at the end of 2018 the Russians began to demand more strongly Russian-Belarusian integration also in the military sphere. Although Lukashenko is trying to slow down its pace, Russia has all the assets to achieve its goal. In the years to come, it will probably force Belarus to make real concessions. In the military sphere, the priority is to increase the Russian military presence on Belarusian territory. Only the way

in which Russia achieves its objectives remains debatable. We should not expect any increase in Russia’s involvement in the modernization of the Belarusian armed forces and its arms complex, because it is not certain about Lukashenko’s attitude. It will strengthen only those elements that increase its own safety (air forces, air defense). Only a change of power in Belarus and the election of a loyal, pro-Russian president can change Russia’s decision.

Paradoxically, EU countries can support Lukashenko’s power. As a reaction to the actions of the North Atlantic Alliance in Central and Eastern Europe, Russia is able to force its closest ally to accept its plans. In the first scenario, it will demand the deployment of additional components of the Russian armed forces on the territory of Belarus. In the second scenario, however, it will decide to place a permanent military base in that country. After 2021, when the lease term expires, Russia may change the purpose of the military facilities previously used in Belarus. Lukashenko already accepts Russian ideas of their further functioning. Alternatively, Russia may decide to build a completely new military base. The first scenario is easier for Belarus to accept. Unfortunately, it is not able to block the implementation of the second option, or the increase in the Russian military presence in the country.

Russia is not opposed to plans of joint military maneuvers or improving qualifications of Belarusian soldiers at its military universities, as it is building its influence in the allied armed forces. In the coming years, Lukashenko will have to make difficult decisions if he wants to continue to rule. Recently, Russia has significantly strengthened its political and economic influence in Belarus. Increasing pressure and determination from the Russian side do not leave Lukashenko much room for maneuver, as Russia will not allow him to escape its influence. It has invested too much effort and resources in Belarus to allow the disloyal attitude of its ally to continue.

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