



Belarus  
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A new military doctrine and national security concept have been prepared in Belarus — it was unanimously approved at the so-called All-Belarusian People’s Assembly held between 19–26 April 2024).<sup>i</sup> Both documents indicate the deep concern of the regime (acting as a Russian occupational administration) about the stability of the political and military structures at a time when Belarus’s relations with the majority of its neighboring states can be defined as “conflicting” or “hostile” — with the exception, perhaps, of Russia alone. According to the results of the “public discussion”, the draft national security concept includes a provision on the need to “protect the traditional Belarusian family as a union between a man and a woman”, which “excludes various other gender approaches that are being promoted in the West.”<sup>ii</sup> In addition, according to the head of the Security Council Aliaksandar Valfovich, the concept takes into account that there is now a risk of nuclear war and the creation of a “people’s militia” in the country. The level of importance that Aliaksandar Lukashenka attaches to the new military doctrine led to a special meeting of the Security Council devoted primarily to this document.<sup>iii</sup> Lukashenka’s defense minister Viktor Khrenin stated that the doctrine defines the status and conditions for the use of nuclear weapons deployed on the territory of the country: “we have clearly defined and put forward the views of Belarus on the use of tactical weapons deployed on our territory”. Meanwhile, there is still no complete clarity on this issue. Lukashenka has repeatedly stressed that he has a decisive voice on the issue of the use of nuclear weapons: “as soon as nuclear weapons appeared in Belarus, all wings were lowered [...] Although God forbid not only me, but also a new generation of politicians to think about the use of these nuclear weapons. This is a terrible weapon.”<sup>iv</sup> Since the military doctrine has not been published, one can only speculate about its content. Military expert Yuri Fedarau<sup>v</sup> suggests that a Russian violation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is unlikely. Since this is the case, Belarus will not receive control over Russian atomic bombs — we can talk, at least, about the application of the “double key” principle, namely, that Minsk will receive not the right to use these weapons, but they do have the opportunity to give or withhold their sanction for the use of these weapons. In turn, analyst Yuri Drakakhrust is sure that there will be no complete certainty on this issue at all: Moscow will not confirm the transfer of control over nuclear weapons, since this would be a violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; Minsk does not recognize the absence of such control in any form, especially on

the pages of military doctrine, since this would be a refutation of Lukashenka's earlier statements. How things really are, one can only guess.<sup>vi</sup> The increased nervousness in Minsk is probably also related to the massive drone strikes that Ukraine has carried out on targets in Russia. According to Kyiv-based political scientist Ihar Tyshkevich, the drone with explosives that reached Ust-Luga (Leningrad region) could fly over the territory of Belarus — and even if this is not the case, the drone traveled more than 1,000 kilometers unnoticed, which means that the Ukrainian military can reach almost any target on the territory of Belarus.<sup>vii</sup> The emergency convocation of the security forces for a special meeting is probably connected to this. It was stated there that Minsk considers the states located along the perimeter of the border (except for Russia) to be an immediate military threat. Lukashenka stated, instructing the security forces: “we have a special situation: there is a war in the south, in the west, where Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic states, and even worse. I emphasize: and even worse. Appropriate detachments are being prepared there, and the commanders have been identified.”<sup>viii</sup> Accordingly, the Belarusian authorities are preparing to fight and, moreover, to win. Additionally, they intend for the war to become a national affair — it was reported that even schoolchildren should now be familiar with methods of interrogation, as well as with the specific terminology of such interrogations “in the language of a likely enemy”. For these purposes, students in grades 10-11 will be able to attend the English-language elective “Military translation.”<sup>ix</sup> Of course, the Belarusian authorities are also actively studying the experience of the Ukrainian conflict. In Kyiv, the death of Dzianis Lazareu, a Belarusian serviceman in the Donbas, made a lot of noise: a number of Ukrainian publications even called it proof of presence of military personnel officially seconded by Minsk at the front.<sup>x</sup> However, several analysts doubt that his death can be considered a proof of the Belarusian military's presence in Ukraine: the deceased was low in the ranks (a senior lieutenant), at the age limit for an active-duty soldier (47 years old) and, most likely, was a volunteer. This is confirmed, in particular, by the fact that he has a complete set of civil and military documents in his hands, which an acting officer should not have, since they are in command — this opinion was put forward by Russian journalist and military expert Kungurov.<sup>xi</sup>

The preparations for the so-called elections of deputies of the House of Representatives and deputies of local councils were a long, fake electoral marathon: on 4 April, deputies of the Council of the Republic were elected, followed by representatives of the All-Belarusian People's Assembly.<sup>xii</sup> Active participants in information campaigns even formulated in this regard something like the semi-official motto of the electoral campaign: "the slogan of the elections in Belarus is: One country; One people; A single voting day". The authors of this were Siarhey Haidukevich, a deputy of the National Assembly, and the publicist Vadzim Ialfimau.<sup>xiii</sup> This motto vividly reminded many of its historical equivalent of 80 years ago — "Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer"<sup>xiv</sup> — and it became the object of numerous online puns. However, the Belarusian authorities treated the falsifying of elections with the utmost seriousness. Despite having complete control of the information sphere, as well as the absence of any organized opposition, a campaign of political repression continued in the country. Some of them were symbolic in nature: for example, the Investigative Committee launched special criminal proceedings against more than 20 people — namely, Dabravolsky, Drakakhrust, Vusau, Rudkousky, Astapenya, Lahvinets, Kuchynsky, Krasulina,<sup>xv</sup> all of whom are analysts and experts who are allegedly connected with the activities of the Joint Transitional Cabinet (in exile) of Belarus. All these people are outside the country, so they were asked to appear at the Main Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee for interrogation and arrest. Information also became known about the detention in Zhodina of several former policemen who in 2020 made an appeal to colleagues to refrain from violence — we are talking about at least four high-ranking retired officers.<sup>xvi</sup> It is noteworthy that the number of people persecuted for "treason against the state" has suddenly increased dramatically in Belarus: for a long time there were a little more than a dozen of them, while today there are 39 people.<sup>xvii</sup> The police were transferred to an enhanced duty regime during the election period. Mobile groups and rapid response teams in special equipment were formed, and volunteer squads worked with them. At polling stations, the service was carried out around the clock.<sup>xviii</sup> At the same time, changes have been made to military regulations: practically all obstacles to the use of weapons by military personnel against citizens have been eliminated. Back in December 2023, KGB officers were given the right to shoot into a crowd, including at women, disabled people and children, if they offered armed resistance.<sup>xix</sup> Now, military personnel are allowed to open

fire without a warning shot: in addition, the paragraph on abuse of authority when using weapons has been abolished.<sup>xx</sup> All this together is evidence of the readiness of the authorities in Belarus to suppress any kind of protests by all means: moreover, weapons can now be used even to suppress any form of discontent, including rather mild and unrelated violent ones. Another step towards creating a comprehensive system of control over any protest activity can be seen in the “creation of a unified register of extremists and extremist resources”. This was announced by the Ambassador of Belarus to Russia Dzmitry Krutoy.<sup>xxi</sup> The creation of such a registry will mean that in both countries, the persons on the registry will be subjected to uniform repression and transferred into the hands of the security forces of the partner country. Of course, all these measures are long-term, not short-term, but their coincidence with the Belarusian electoral campaign is hardly an accident.

### III

Anaïs Marin, UN special rapporteur on human rights in Belarus, commented in January on the situation in Belarus, which has been going from bad to worse since August 2020. According to her, there are three extremely concerning issues. First is that the situation has pushed hundreds of thousands of Belarusians into exile. The second main issue is the weaponization of anti-extremist, anti-terrorist legislation. And the third main problem is the situation with political prisoners. Since about February-March 2023, dozens have been held incommunicado.<sup>xxii</sup> The problem of “the weaponization of anti-extremist, anti-terrorist legislation” had already been discussed in detail a little earlier, in an October statement by UN experts.<sup>xxiii</sup> The opinion of human rights defenders on the human rights situation in Belarus generally coincides with the opinion of the UN Special Rapporteur. According to the Human Rights Center Viasna-96 (Spring-96), “the repressive policy of the Belarusian authorities has not changed, an atmosphere of fear is still being imposed in the country.”<sup>xxiv</sup> It is noted that as of 31 January, there were 1,429 political prisoners in the country, and 28 people were recognized as such in only one month. In total, 4,500 people have been convicted in politically motivated cases in Belarus, including Nobel Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski (he got the prize after his conviction), Vice-president of the International Federation for Human Rights Valiantsin Stefanovich, and many others. In January alone, 560 cases of repression were recorded, of which 310 are detentions. Sociologists note that the intensity of repression in the public consciousness

is justified by a number of circumstances.<sup>xxv</sup> Firstly, Lukashenka has defiantly withdrawn from participation in the Russian war in Ukraine and even pretends to act as a peacemaker (exclusively rhetorically). He managed to inspire this opinion not only in his fellow citizens, but even, for example, in representatives of the Ukrainian political community: they are ready to agree that Lukashenka is the guarantor of the further non-interference of Belarus in the war and that he limits Russia's aggressive activity to some extent. However, it is also evident to Ukrainian intelligence that direct participation in the war is an unpopular idea among the population in Belarus as well as its military (for more about this, see the article by Siarhei Mazol for Belarus Research Network<sup>xxvi</sup>).<sup>xxvii</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Sputnik. “Оргкомитет по подготовке и проведению ВНС создан в Беларуси [The Organising Committee for the preparation and holding of the SNC was established in Belarus].” February 2, 2024. <https://sputnik.by/20240202/orgkomitet-po-podgotovke-i-provedeniyu-vns-sozdan-v-belarusi-1083329671.html>

<sup>ii</sup> БЕЛТА. “Традиционная семья и социальная ответственность бизнеса. Вольфович о новеллах Концепции нацбезопасности Беларуси [Traditional family and social responsibility of business. Volfovich on the novelties of the National Security Concept of Belarus].” January 1, 2024. <https://www.belta.by/society/view/traditsionnaja-semjja-i-sotsialnaja-otvetstvennost-biznesa-volfovich-o-novellah-kontseptsii-610058-2024/>

<sup>iii</sup> БЕЛТА. “Обновленные Концепцию нацбезопасности и Военную доктрину Беларуси вынесут на утверждение ВНС [The updated National Security Concept and Military Doctrine of Belarus will be submitted to the National Assembly for approval].” January 16, 2024. <https://www.belta.by/president/view/obnovlennye-kontseptsiju-natsbezopasnosti-i-voennuju-doktrinu-belarusi-vynesut-na-utverzhenie-vns-610028-2024/>

<sup>iv</sup> РИА Новости. “Лукашенко назвал последствия появления ядерного оружия в Белоруссии [Lukashenko names consequences of nuclear weapons in Belarus].” January 19, 2024. <https://ria.ru/20240119/belorusiya-1922400028.html>

<sup>v</sup> Дракахруст, Ю. “Ці атрымаў Лукашэнка магчымасьць самастойна выкарыстоўваць ядзерную зброю? [Did Lukashenka get the opportunity to use nuclear weapons on his own?].” *Svaboda*, January 17. <https://www.svaboda.org/a/32780008.html>

<sup>vi</sup> Васілеўскі, С. “Дракахруст: «Напісаць так, як гавораць у Маскве, для Лукашэнкі азначала б тое самае, што самому сабе па вуху даць» [Drakakhrust: "Writing the way they speak in Moscow, for Lukashenka, would mean the same thing as talking to oneself"].” *Салідарнасьць*, January 24, 2024. <https://gazetaby.com/post/drakakhrust-napisacz-tak-yak-gavoracz-u-maskve-dlya-lukashenki-aznachal/197684/>

<sup>vii</sup> Тышкевіч, І. “Украинский беспилотник, который наделал шума в Усть Луге не на шутку испугал Лукашенко [The Ukrainian drone, which made a lot of noise in Ust Luga, scared Lukashenko.].” *Telegram*, January 23, 2024. [https://t.me/slavic\\_brotherhood/3679](https://t.me/slavic_brotherhood/3679)

<sup>viii</sup> БЕЛТА. “Лукашенко призвал к бдительности на фоне милитаристической обстановки в соседних странах [Lukashenko called for vigilance amid militaristic situation in neighbouring countries].” January 23, 2024. <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-prizval-k-bditelnosti-na-fone-militaristicheskoy-obstanovki-v-sosednih-stranah-611128-2024/>

<sup>ix</sup> Sputnik. “Старшеклассников в Беларуси обучат переводить допросы пленных [High school students in Belarus will be trained to translate interrogations of prisoners].” January 16, 2024. <https://sputnik.by/20240116/starsheklassnikov-v-belarusi-obuchat-perevodit-doprosy-plennykh-1082823815.html>

<sup>x</sup> Kherson-News. “Под Крынками ликвидирован офицер белорусской армии, воевавший на стороне РФ [A Belarusian army officer who fought on the side of the Russian Federation was liquidated near Kryнки].” January 25, 2024. <https://kherson-news.net/herson-i-obshestvo/item/13652-pod-krynkami-likvidirovan-ofitser-belorusskoj-armii-voevavshij-na-storone-rf.html>

<sup>xi</sup> Кунгуров, А. “КАКИЕ УКРАИНСКИЕ МЕДИА СТОИТ ЧИТАТЬ [WHICH UKRAINIAN MEDIA ARE WORTH READING].” *Teletype*, January 24, 2024. [https://teletype.in/@a\\_kungurov/OZT39pB0QwB](https://teletype.in/@a_kungurov/OZT39pB0QwB)

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- <sup>xiv</sup> Ayto, J. and Crofton, I. “Brewer's Dictionary of Modern Phrase & Fable (2 ed.).” *Oxford University: Chambers Harrap Publishers*, 2011. From: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199916108.001.0001/acref-9780199916108-e-2490>
- <sup>xv</sup> <https://sk.gov.by/uploads/files/Perechen-lits-v-otnoshenii-kotoryx-nachato-spetsialnoe-proizvodstvo-i-vyzyvaemyx-v-organ-ugolovnogo-presledovaniya.docx> official site of The Investigative Committee of The Republic of Belarus
- <sup>xvi</sup> Зеркало. “В Жодино задержали экс-милиционеров, которые в 2020 году записали обращение к коллегам [In Zhodino detained ex-militiamen who recorded an appeal to colleagues in 2020].” February 5, 2024. <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/60368.html>
- <sup>xvii</sup> Вясна. “Мінімум 55 фігурантаў. Распавядаем, каго і як у Беларусі пераследуюць за “збразу дзяржаве” [Minimum of 55 participants. We tell you who and how they are persecuted in Belarus for “treason”].” February 8, 2024. <https://spring96.org/be/news/114288>
- <sup>xviii</sup> <https://www.mvd.gov.by/ru/news/12239/1000> official site of the belarussian Ministry of interior
- <sup>xix</sup> Беларусь головного мозга. “Поправки в закон «о борьбе с терроризмом» разрешили «КГБ» стрелять в толпе [Amendments to the ‘anti-terrorism’ law authorised the ‘KGB’ to shoot in crowds].” *Telegram*, December 14, 2023. <https://t.me/belamova/42854>
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- <sup>xxvii</sup> Astapenia, R. “Russia’s war on Ukraine has strengthened Lukashenka but undermined Belarus.” *Chatham House*, January 10, 2024. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/12/russias-war-ukraine-has-strengthened-lukashenka-undermined-belarus>