

Inspection at Minsk headquarters and at training ground near Grodno

Command-and-staff training exercise on territorial defence conducted under Presidential instruction

By Vladimir Vasiliev

The notion of 'territorial defence' appeared in our lexicon a decade ago, with such units supplementing the permanent Armed Forces. In case of attack, the Armed Forces would be focused on Belarus' borders, while the reserves would watch over internal communications, and key industrial and civil sites. The cost of keeping a large army would be burdensome, so the system of territorial defence provides a good alternative. Meanwhile, it is also a deterrent for terrorists and saboteurs.

Territorial defence forces exist in each region, comprising local residents; they tend to be mature and have often already served in the forces. They are responsible for protecting their location and are subject to the head of their district, city and region.

President Alexander Lukashenko was reported on the state territorial defence system at the fixed command post of Minsk's territorial defence. Nikolai Ladutko, Chairman of the Minsk City Executive Committee, gave his ideas on how best to organise the capital's defence and some members of the reserve forces shared their recollections of engineering training.

"Sorry that we've taken you from your families, but this is necessary," noted the Commander-in-Chief. "Who, if not us, will protect our families?"

Mr. Lukashenko warned that mobilisation of the territorial defence forces — which will become regular — should never be for 'display'. "Everything should be



Alexander Lukashenko visits fixed command post of territorial defence

serious," stressed the Belarusian President.

On the following day Mr. Lukashenko also took part in the command-and-staff training exercise at Gozha firing range, near Grodno. He has granted the status of General-Majors to the chairmen of regional executive committees and to the Chair of Minsk City Executive Committee, announcing that they are now responsible for military issues as well as economic and social. According to the President, 120,000 people comprise our territorial defence troops: the 'folk army'. They cost the state budget less than the regular army, being reserves. He added that, after a year of training, they are perfectly prepared, able to efficiently interact with the Armed Forces.

The training ground hosted a meeting of the chairmen of regional executive committees, as well as representatives of the Defence Ministry, the State Border Committee, the Interior Ministry, the State Security Committee and the Emergency Ministry. The Belarusian President noted, "The West's aim is evident; it needs to shatter Belarus, cutting us off from active participation in international public and political processes, before bringing us under its own influence."

According to Mr. Lukashenko, after gaining sovereignty, Belarus 'entered the sphere of interests of the world backstage'. He stressed, "The West has already introduced various sanctions on Belarusian enterprises, with

other forms of economic pressure widespread, damaging our national economic interests."

The President also spoke of threats in the information and ideological spheres, analysing how these had been used in Libya and emphasised, "Recently, some neighbouring states have regularly hosted instruction briefings and special sessions involving high ranking officials from the US Department of State and US senators, as well as ministers and politicians of European countries. They have had a rather provocative agenda, discussing how to organise a revolution in Belarus and change the constitutional order, alongside similar hostile topics. It's impossible to underestimate such events."

Answering journalists' questions, Alexander Lukashenko told us:

About NATO

NATO assesses us quite highly. It's significant when our potential rival — not an enemy or opponent but rival — admires us. We should maintain this level.

About the Single Economic Space

We aren't joining the SES to receive something at a cheaper price. Rather, we need equal conditions. If it's cheap there, then it's also cheap here. If it's expensive there, it's also expensive here. We've already agreed on natural gas and now negotiations on oil are underway.

Mr. Lukashenko will be discussing these topics, as well as issues of defence co-opera-

tion, with colleague Dmitry Medvedev at the forthcoming Supreme State Council of the Union State. The Belarusian President shared his expectations, saying, "It seems to me that it'll be a symbolic Supreme State Council session, where significant decisions will be adopted."

About a single currency with SES partners

As president, I'm not ready to introduce a single currency tomorrow. I've always said that I'm not against the idea but, before constructing the roof, we need solid foundations and walls: equal economic conditions. Of course, we can then create a single currency based on equal terms. The issue still needs to be discussed by experts and we must be confident that it won't lead to loss of political sovereignty.

About the situation in Libya

How can we assess the activities of NATO troops in Libya? Is it a violation of the UN Security Council mandate? The UN has turned into a screen. Look at Iraq, Afghanistan and the whole Arab arch. Where is this organisation? Why didn't it prevent everything? They want to follow one mandate but NATO military forces would violate it... Aggression has been committed and the country's leadership has been killed, not only Muammar Gaddafi. In which way was it killed? NATO special units seized the country's leader and were taunting him; it's an act of 21st century vandalism and shouldn't be so. We can't allow such policy and activities to dominate our world or we'll all be in trouble. This is the face of our 'teachers of democracy'.

Reasons for optimism

By Tatiana Korovina

Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov announces rapid progress in trade-economic relations with Turkey

"Over the past five years, our trade turnover has risen almost five-fold. It rose 36 percent in 2010 and by another 20 percent in 2011," noted Mr. Martynov, speaking after a session of the Belarusian-Turkish Business Co-operation Council, hosted by Minsk. He stresses that the two sides 'are unsatisfied with the abso-

lute volume of relations, taking into account the potential of Belarus and Turkey'.

According to Mr. Martynov, collaboration in the industrial sphere looks very promising, while strategic logistics liaisons are possible. He believes that the importance of such co-operation is reinforced by the creation of the Customs Union of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan. Moreover, from January 1st, the Single Economic Space will be fully operational.

"Belarusian-Turkish interaction within a single market is a vital

area of our collaboration with Turkey," asserts Mr. Martynov. Speaking of other projects, he notes that an agreement was recently reached on the development of worsted manufacture in Belarus. A bid for \$200m has been won by a Turkish company. "Let's hope that this project will become a benchmark in our relations, inspiring other projects in various spheres, including power engineering," adds the Head of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry.

Mr. Martynov notes that our two nations view co-operation in

power engineering to be especially vital, placing great importance on the diversification of energy supplies and the development of nuclear engineering.

The next session of the Council is to take place next year in Ankara. The Turkish Culture and Tourism Minister, Ertuğrul Günay, has called collaboration with Belarus very fruitful, saying, "Our businesses currently working in Belarus are delighted that state authorities, the private sector and the Belarusian people are so friendly and hospitable."

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