

# Co-ordinated test of strength

## Presidents of Belarus and Russia observe final stage of *Zapad-2013* joint exercise

By Vasily Kharitonov

The Belarusian-Russian strategic joint army exercise *Zapad-2013* (West-2013) took place from September 20th-26th on both Russian and Belarusian territory. This defensive exercise is designed to confirm Belarus' policy aimed at building up regional security, and its adherence to its allied commitments with Russia.

The concept of the exercise envisaged a crisis situation and an unfolding conflict. The warring sides were located within real borders of Belarus and three adjacent regions of the Russian Federation.

The exercise consisted of two phases. The first focused on modernising approaches to using troops based on the experience of the armed conflicts of recent years, combat training measures, troop deployment and other methods that have been worked out by the Belarusian and Russian armies.

The practical part of the army exercise was held at six firing grounds in Belarus and Russia's Kaliningrad Region. The tactical episodes were built around units of the Belarusian and Russian armies, which belong to the regional group of forces. During the war-games they worked together to safeguard and defend military sites, eliminate the enemy's diversionary and recon units, as well as terrorist units, while also dealing with consequences that arose from man-made emergencies.

The exercises involved not only Belarusian and Russian military but also army units from Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan within the framework of the Interaction-2013 exercise of the Collective Rapid Response Forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation.

The exercises on Belarusian soil



Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin observe final stage of *Zapad-2013* exercise at Gozhsky firing range

involved around 12,900 military personnel: a little over 10,000 Belarusian military, about 2,500 Russian military and around 300 people from other CSTO member states). The joint exercise also deployed 350 armoured vehicles, including about 70 tanks, over 50 artillery units and MLRS and over 50 aircraft and helicopters. In the Russian based events, the Belarusian army was represented by about 200 soldiers from the 103rd Guards Separate Mobile Brigade. The firing range was also attended by foreign observers and military attaches who highly praised the joint exercise.

Upon arriving at the firing range in Gozhsky, which is located 15km from Grodno, the Belarusian Head of State went to an auxiliary com-

mand post of the regional group of forces. The President was informed about the schemes that had been developed and the strategic options the Belarusian and Russian military units could take to against an aggressor to the Union State of Belarus and Russia.

At the auxiliary command post of the 20th army of the Western Military District of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, the Belarusian President was made familiar with the general procedure for using the army as part of the regional group of forces during a rising threat of aggression. Alexander Lukashenko was also informed about the role of the Russian military in the regional group of forces, working in association with units of the Belaru-

sian Armed Forces, border service agencies, and territorial troops during the special operation.

Then the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, arrived at the firing range, and the heads of the two states went to an observation post to watch how the combat operations transpired.

The firing range was used to practise interaction between the motorised infantry and mobile units of the Belarusian and Russian armed forces. These included territorial troops, internal troops of the Interior Ministry, the Emergency Ministry of Belarus, and units of attack planes and combat helicopters, as they carried out missions involving the protection of the state border, the search for, and elimination of, recon and

diversion groups and illegally armed terrorist units.

After the exercise at the Gozhsky firing range, the Presidents went to Kaliningrad where the Khmelevka firing range hosted the final phase of the *Zapad-2013* exercise.

The Heads of State observed an episode of the special joint operation carried out by the Baltic Fleet, the 1st Command of the Air Force and Air Defence of the Russian army and the 350th Independent Mobile Battalion of the 103rd Guards Separate Mobile Brigade for Special Operations of the Belarusian Armed Forces.

Belarusian and Russian army units carried out missions aiming to eliminate terrorist units, who had captured part of the shore that held small 'populated communities'.

These makeshift communities had been built in Kaliningrad specifically for this exercise. Dozens of models of residential houses, schools and shopping centres had been erected, and the streets had been fitted with models of cars and armoured vehicles.

In accordance with the exercise's concept, Belarusian special operations units worked together with the Russian army to storm the shore from a Mordovia hovercraft, where they entered the battle against the terrorists and destroyed them.

This is the first time the regional group has practiced the multi-service interaction of troops of the Russian and Belarusian armed forces, as well as units of the Russian Navy.

The State Secretary of the Security Council of Belarus, Leonid Maltsev noted that the exercise was arranged for the sake of improving control systems and ways to deploy the armed forces. He underlined that the military exercises and the armed forces were not designed to wage wars, but to prevent them.

# A collective response to external threats

## The meeting of the Council of Collective Security Treaty Organisation takes place in Sochi

By Lilia Khlystun

"Co-ordinated approaches to respond to arising challenges and threats." Topical issues concerning world policy which were included in the agenda of the session of CSTO Council, and are relevant for each of the participating countries. Comprehension and general understanding of these issues is important. Firstly, these topics were discussed at the traditional meeting of the presidents of six countries privately, then later at the expanded meeting where about ten documents were signed. One of the most significant was the decision on collective help for Tajikistan in strengthening its border with Afghanistan. At the private meeting, Alexander Lukashenko called this issue vital.

"The problems coming from Afghanistan are transnational, and if we are inactive,

they will snowball. Therefore it is vital for our own safety to help Tajikistan," said the President.

The situation of the external borders of CSTO underwent special attention at the meeting presided, this year, by Kyrgyzstan. Considering the current situation, the President considers that the difficulties in Tajikistan are currently the main issue for CSTO.

"Right now we are close to taking decisive steps to aid in the prevention of this threat. This is what our allies expect," noted the President.

According to Mr. Lukashenko, the possibility of aiding Tajikistan has been discussed many times, and at various levels, in recent years. In particular, Belarus made the decision to train Tadjik officers in the Military Academy free of charge. Lukashenko emphasised that, only by joint efforts

it will be possible to effectively help an ally which needs real help. The President paid special attention to the timeliness of common actions.

"It is known that the Americans are interested in the region, and there is in-



At the CSTO Council session

formation regarding the intent of the USA and NATO to leave some armaments and hardware, which are currently in Afghanistan, in the area. Moreover, they are ready to finance the construction of border guard posts at the

Tajikistan-Afghanistan border. But nothing comes for free. It is expected that they will ask something in return for their services. We will discuss and decide today whether it will be beneficial for our allies in CSTO, or not. I doubt that it

is beneficial," said Mr. Lukashenko.

The problems relating to Afghanistan were discussed at the expanded meeting. Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, who will hold the CSTO Presidency next year,

emphasised that CSTO, will try to operate in advance, jointly helping Tajikistan with development of the infrastructure at the border with Afghanistan.

There are no doubts that such a task is within the grasp of this military-political block. According to the President, since the formation of CSTO it has been possible to create an effective flexible system. It can respond to new challenges and threats, relying first of all on preventive measures. This meets, not only the interests of all member states, but also provides safety, stability and predictability for a considerable part of the Eurasian continent.

According to the President, it is also vital to develop new directions of activity for CSTO, including a peace-making component. Other areas of co-operation as information and boundary safety

protection are developing dynamically. The foundation of a co-ordinated information policy of CSTO member states is being created.

The President said that this had been a relatively calm year for the organisation. No internal surprises occurred, work was carried out normally and this allowed them to focus on everyday tasks aimed at strengthening and developing CSTO in all areas.

Alexander Lukashenko also noted that the type of actions suggested by Russia at the Sochi meeting gives them a chance to hold necessary meetings in a quiet atmosphere, as well as to discuss current international problems, problems of safety within the organisation's zone of responsibility and to develop the co-ordinated approaches on responding to any challenges and threats that may arise.