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Military Policy of the Republic of Belarus: Belarusian Historiography

Abstract: The article deals with the achievement of the Belarusian scientific thought in the last 20 years in the field of military policy research, military cooperation, and partnership with Russia.

Keywords: military policy, Republic of Belarus, foreign policy, integration research

The emergence and development of the Republic of Belarus as a new historical and geopolitical subject of international relations was accompanied by finding adequate forms of its self-identification in all spheres of society. The evolution and development of the Republic of Belarus were influenced by a number of factors: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the collapse of the post-war world order, and attempts to arrange a new system of both European and global security.

Addressing these modern issues requires from the Belarusian leadership new ideological imperatives and evaluations, according to the traditions of the Belarusian people and the country's culture in the world civilization process. For a long period, mainly foreign scientists, primarily from Russia, studied the theoretical aspect of foreign policy and, especially, the military policy of the Republic of Belarus. This is probably an objective process, because the formation of an independent Belarusian scientific school, with its traditions and priorities, is a complex and a long-term process.

The center for the formation of the Belarusian school of international studies and the military policy of the Republic of Belarus became the Department of International Relations of the Belarusian State University, established in 1992. A small team of scientists almost had to found a new, Belarusian school of inter-

national political, economic, and military research. The main theoretical problem for Belarusian specialists, in our view, was the prioritization of the foreign policy, in general, to develop a frame of reference on the place of Belarus in the world and, consequently, the role of the military component in state building.

Scientific research of Belarusian historians, political scientists, politicians, military analysts, and other experts, in one way or another relating to issues of military policy, can be divided into several groups. Research of the first group covers general issues of international relations, foreign policy, and security. Among the group of authors, we would like to highlight: A. Rozanov (А. Розанов), V. Senko (В. Сенько), A. Chelyadinskyi (А. Челядінський), V. Ulanovich (В. Уланович), etc. It is also worth to note a collective work *National and State Interests of the Republic of Belarus*¹. In the study, the authors conclude that the optimal way for Belarus should be a multidirectional foreign policy and that geopolitical interests of the Republic of Belarus require constant balance between European and Eurasian political, economic, and military space. Researcher V. Ulahovich, Head of the Center for International Studies of the Belarusian State University, in his book *Formation Bases of the External Policy of the Republic of Belarus (1991–2005)* explores the theoretical bases of the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus and foreign policy in general. The book provides an overview of the formation of diplomacy of the Republic of Belarus, development of foreign policies; particularly, the researcher focuses on the policy of neutrality of Belarus. In particular, the author notes: “we agree that the idea of neutrality is not unshakeable, we should, however, recognize the phenomenon of the idea of stability in the political life of the country. This idea, enshrined in a number of official documents of the first half of the 90s ..., and confirmed in the following documents nationwide”². The author, however, notes that a number of politicians and experts point to this idea as utopian, because in today’s world, it narrows maneuvering room in proceedings requiring a more flexible, free diplomatic line.

The second group of studies presented are works by Belarusian scientists dealing with the Euro-Atlantic direction of Belarus policy. We would like to highlight the works of: A. Rozanov (А. Розанов), A. Rusakovich (А. Русакович), A. Tikhomirov (А. Тіхоміров), L. Nuhlyndina (Л. Хухліндіна), V. Shadurskyu (В. Шадурський), I. Pimoshenko (І. Пімошенко), etc. Analysis of the main publications of these leading Belarusian experts on the subject allows us to distinguish the re-

¹ *Национально-государственные интересы Республики Беларусь*, ed. Л.Ф. Заико, Скакун 1999, p. 267.

² В. Улахович, *Формирование основ внешней политики Республики Беларусь (1991–2005 гг.)*, Минск 2009, p. 352.

search works of A. Rozanov. His works cover a wide range of foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus – from the basics of the formation of Belarusian foreign policy to cooperation with Russia, NATO and some European countries, the military aspects of the policy, namely, a wide range of foreign military problems of Belarus.

Doctor of History, Professor A. Rozanov deeply analyzes the arguments and political processes in the world and in Belarus and pays great attention to developing the concept of foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus, studying features of political and military cooperation with Russia and NATO. The author takes quite a moderate position in comparison to many other Belarusian and Russian authors. At the same time, he consistently defends his views on the falsity of NATO expansion to the East.

Other Belarusian researchers also work effectively in the field of international relations. In particular, the article by A. Rusakovich, *Basic Problems of Relations between the Republic of Belarus and North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the 1990s* (*Основные проблемы взаимоотношений между Республикой Беларусь и Организацией Североатлантического Альянса в 1990-е*)³ – as well as the research of V. Shadurskiy, *Relations between the Republic of Belarus and the European Union: Internal and External Context* (*Отношения Республики Беларусь и Европейского Союза: внутренний и внешний контекст*). Despite the article's name, the author notes not only the desire of most Belarusians to live in the European Union, but also examines the reasons for the low support for NATO in Belarus, and concludes that it is a consequence of past propaganda against NATO – the aggressor in the former Soviet Union⁴.

B. Snapkovskiy and A. Sharapa focus on the Belarusian-Russian integration in the political and economic spheres⁵. V. Shadurskiy studies mainly Belarus's relations with Western Europe⁶. The researcher believes that the low support for

³ А. Русакович, *Основные проблемы взаимоотношений между Республикой Беларусь и Организацией Североатлантического Альянса в 1990-е*, Беларусский журнал международного права и международных отношений 2003, no. 2, http://www.evolutio.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&cid=626&Itemid=54 (accessed 12.03.2014).

⁴ В. Шаду́рский, *Отношения Республики Беларусь и Европейского Союза: внутренний и внешний контекст*, Беларусский журнал международного права и международных отношений 2003, no. 1, pp. 45–48.

⁵ В. Снапковский, *Беларусско-российские отношения на рубеже столетий (конец 1999–начало 2001)*, Беларусский журнал международного права и международных отношений 2001, no. 2, pp. 49–56; Idem, *Внешняя политика Республики Беларусь: первые итоги первого десятилетия*, 2000, no. 4, pp. 45–51; А. Шарапа, *Беларусь и Россия в XXI веке* 2003, no. 3, pp. 44–45.

⁶ В. Шаду́рский, *Отношения Республики Беларусь и Европейского Союза: внутренний и внешний контекст* 2003, no. 1, pp. 45–48; В. Шаду́рский, *Республика Беларусь в зарубежных исследованиях*, Минск 2003, pp. 96–98.

NATO in Belarus is because of the idea that Belarusians associated the alliance with aggression rather than with a structure that supports peace. However, for some reason, most of these leading academic Belarusian authors do not pay attention to or even outline the military aspect of Belarus's activity as an important area of foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus. The military policy and building its own army, in the context of an alliance with Russia, is an integral part of the Belarusian-Russian integration.

The third group of studies of Belarusian scientists are analyses and military focus on problems of military construction in the broadest sense. We would like to acknowledge the works of such authors as: L. Maltsev (Л. Мальцев), Y. Portnow (Ю. Портнов), I. Gornac (И. Горнак), S. Shmatyuk (С. Шматок), T. Porovsky (Т. Поповська), S. Aharonova (С. Агаронова), S. Knyazev (С. Князев), M. Kitayev (М. Китаев), V. Nedilko (В. Неділько), V. Yakovlev (В. Яковлев), A. Alesina (О. Алесин), D. Melyantsov (Д. Мельянцов), Y. Nikolaev (Я. Николаев), A. Yekadumov (А. Екадумов), I. Yekadumova (И. Екадумова), A. Tsihamirov (А. Цихамірова), and others. Among these scientists the work of Minister of Defense of Belarus General Leonid Maltsev *The Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus: Past and Present (Вооруженные силы Республики Беларусь: история и современность)*⁷, which was published in 2003, should be noted. The author examined the complex problems of military forces building in Belarus and discussed reduction and reform of the armed forces. Sadly, in our view, too much of the text regards the history before 1991 even addressing the reasons for the defeat in 1941. At the same time, it is during L. Maltsev's term as Minister of Defence when deep reforms in the Belarusian army were conducted, and he is one of the key experts on the subject. However, traditionally for Belarusian officials, he is trying not to show the general public his achievements, almost as it was the norm in the USSR. Rector of the Academy of Public Administration S. Knyazev in his work examines issues of national security. In *National Security of the Republic of Belarus*⁸, *National Safety of the Republic of Belarus: Lectures*⁹ the attention is focused mainly on contemporary geopolitical issues and the very concept of national security of Belarus, but there is some information about the condition of the army and the defense as a foundation of the concept. The military and political aspects of Russia-Belarus integration are studied by the employee of the analytical center "Strategy" S. Aharonova in

⁷ Л. Мальцев, *Вооруженные силы Республики Беларусь: история и современность*, Мн.: Асобны дах 2003, р. 244.

⁸ С. Князев, *Основы концепции национальной безопасности Республики Беларусь*, Мн.: Акад. Упр. при Президенте Респ. Беларусь 2004, р. 103.

⁹ Idem, *Национальная безопасность Республики Беларусь: курс лекций*, 2005, р. 177.

her article *Military and Political Dimension of Russian-Belarusian Integration*¹⁰. The author summarizes the importance and necessity of military cooperation between the two countries and analyzes concrete measures of this direction. The researcher believes that the Russian-Belarusian group of troops is a key element of armed protection in the European direction. Moreover, it may be even necessary to provide these forces with a greater autonomy in crisis situations outside the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Published in 2002, the collection of articles *Belarusian-Russian Integration: Analytical Articles* (*Беларуска-расійская інтэграцыя: Аналітычныя артыкулы*) has practical value for our research paper¹¹. The group of authors, among which we would like to highlight A. Yekadumov, I. Yekadumova, J. Mikalayev, and A. Tsihamirova deeply and comprehensively analyze the issues of Belarusian-Russian military cooperation. They are a bit away from the Belarusian tradition of “positivism” in the assessment process and often critical of the results and the progress of military cooperation between Belarus and Russia. The authors point to the unequal state capacity of military cooperation between the countries and worried about the possibility of losing sovereignty by the Republic of Belarus. Separately, we should note the work of a junior researcher of the National Academy of Sciences T. Popovska *The Union of Belarus and Russia: the Military-Defense Aspect of Integration*¹². The author explores both the background and the whole range of contemporary issues of cooperation in the field of defense, defense industry, and the legal framework. It is concluded that for nearly two decades the military and defense implications in the integration process of Belarus and Russia are the key components, which guarantees the sovereignty and security of both countries.

Belarusian military expert Alexander Alyesin productively engaged in the issues of military construction, arms trade, military cooperation, and so on. Many of his publications in the Belarusian and Russian press help to more clearly understand the processes in the Belarusian army and the military-industrial complex (MIC)¹³. In particular, the expert reasonably believes that the Belarusian army is

¹⁰ С. Агаронова, *Военно-политическое измерение российско-белорусской интеграции: новая динамика*, Вестник аналитики, Москва 2004, no. 1, pp. 171–188.

¹¹ *Беларуска-расійская інтэграцыя: Аналітычныя артыкулы*, Мн.: Энциклапедыкс 2002, p. 422.

¹² Т. Поповская, *Союз Беларуси и России: военно-оборонительный аспект интеграции*, Мінск 2008, p. 411.

¹³ А. Алесин, *Конверсия через торговлю оружием*, Беларуский рынок 1996, no. 4; А. Алесин, *“Дунфэн” садится на колеса*, Беларуский рынок 2000, no. 30; Idem, *Белорусы могут все*, Беларуский рынок 2000, no. 43; Idem, *Если ухватиться за “Бук”*, Белорусы и рынок 2007, no. 47, p. 7; Idem, *Белорусская армия заслуживает уважения*, http://kraina.by/pages/topicaldaily/topicaldaily_3260.html (accessed 13.08.2014).

a major force in our region, with good discipline, good training and good physical conditions. Military service specialists have an opportunity not to recruit but to select applicants for military service. Only one out of eight youths in the military age is drafted into military forces. We believe that by the sum of published materials and professional training, Mr. Alyesin today is a major public expert on army building.

Also political columnist Pavlyuk Bykovskyy should be noted for his article *Military-technical Relations between Belarus and Russia*¹⁴. He analyzed this aspect of the relations between the two countries quite deeply, using a number of sources. The author notes that the cooling of the integration process after the end of the Boris Yeltsin's leadership and conflicts caused by the rising prices for Russian energy resources for Belarus make doubtful the question whether the military-technical cooperation between the two countries will develop further. However, since 2005, Belarus reduced the number of troops that are sent to military schools in Russia, and since 2007 the Belarusian military-industrial complex is realizing a goal: organizing a full cycle of creation and modernization of military education – without the participation of Russian colleagues. Researcher V. Ptashnyk in the article *On the Guard of Independence and Sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus*¹⁵ describes in details the first years of the Belarusian army in the 1990s. Special attention is paid to the development of the Belarusian State Army by the expert of the Institute for Political Studies “Political Sphere” A. Volodkin. In particular, he is a regular contributor of articles to the *Belarusian Yearbook (Беларусский Ежегодник)* publications, which gives a wide range of analytical materials about the life of Belarusian society in various fields. Additionally, A. Volodkin published a review *The Armed Forces of Belarus: Internal Development and International Cooperation (Вооруженные силы Беларуси: внутреннее развитие и международное взаимодействие)*¹⁶ as a detailed analysis of problems in that area. The author, in addition to presenting the military relations in the Union State, describes in detail the cooperation in military technical field with other countries, in particular with China, UAE, etc.

In general, this article is not a complete, but rather a representative overview of the Belarusian historiography on the subject. In our view, studies of military

¹⁴ П. Быковский, *Военно-технические связи Беларуси с Россией*, <http://review.w-europe.org/16/1.html#Птор> (accessed 13.08.2014).

¹⁵ В. Пташник, *На страже суверенитета и независимости Республики Беларусь*, <http://www.homoliber.org/ru/xx/xx010117.html> (accessed 13.08.2014).

¹⁶ А. Володькик, *Вооружённые силы Беларуси: внутреннее развитие и международное взаимодействие*, http://belinstitute.eu/images/doc-pdf/ej_2011_rus.pdf (accessed 13.02.2014).

policy of the Republic of Belarus, made during the last two decades, clearly are incomplete. The Republic of Belarus is a country, which like other states of the former Soviet Union, initially actively reduced the armed forces and military industry, but later deliberately and effectively (in current terms) regained serious economic and combat potential. It confirms the need for a deep and comprehensive analysis of the topic in the future.