№ 20 (March and April 2021)

MINSK BAROMETER

Monitoring of foreign policy and regional security

Dear readers!

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We are pleased to present the twentieth issue of Minsk Barometer, which analyzes Belarus's foreign policy and security status in March and April 2021.

Minsk's relationship with **Russia** is still characterized by enhanced engagement between various agencies, primarily those operating in the security and defense sectors. The score of the relationship reached a new record high of 36 points.

A new surge of escalation in the relationship between Belarus and the **European Union** was recorded. Minsk completed the legal implementation of its response mechanisms (counter-sanctions) to match the restrictive measures originally imposed by the EU.

Contacts with **China** traditionally evolved rather smoothly. Coordination of the two countries' positions in international organizations was reinforced.

Negative developments gained momentum in the **U.S.** and **Ukraine** dimensions. The process for the ambassadors of Belarus and the U.S. to return to their respective missions was suspended; Washington announced a renewal of economic sanctions; the Belarusian authorities accused the U.S. of masterminding at attempt on Lukashenka's life. Ukraine began to put in place a full-scale strategy to protect the Ukrainian market and manufacturers from Belarusian products. Both of these priority areas of foreign policy saw a record low of minus 31 points each.

The **regional security situation** was determined by a fresh round of tensions around the conflict in the east of Ukraine. It never led to a full-scale warfare or Russian invasion, but contributed to further division and militarization of the region.

Belarus's position in the region in terms of **national security** degraded. Minsk seriously yielded to Moscow's security pressure, which was manifested in unprecedented steps — the signing of the five-year Strategic Plan, consent to have a joint combat duty with the Russian Aerospace Forces in Belarus's territory, and the establishment of joint training centers — and has already reshaped priorities in the training of its troops. The level of regional tensions has shifted upwards, into the orange zone.

Yours respectfully,

Dzianis Melyantsou,

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Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations,
Belarus's Foreign Policy Programme
Coordinator

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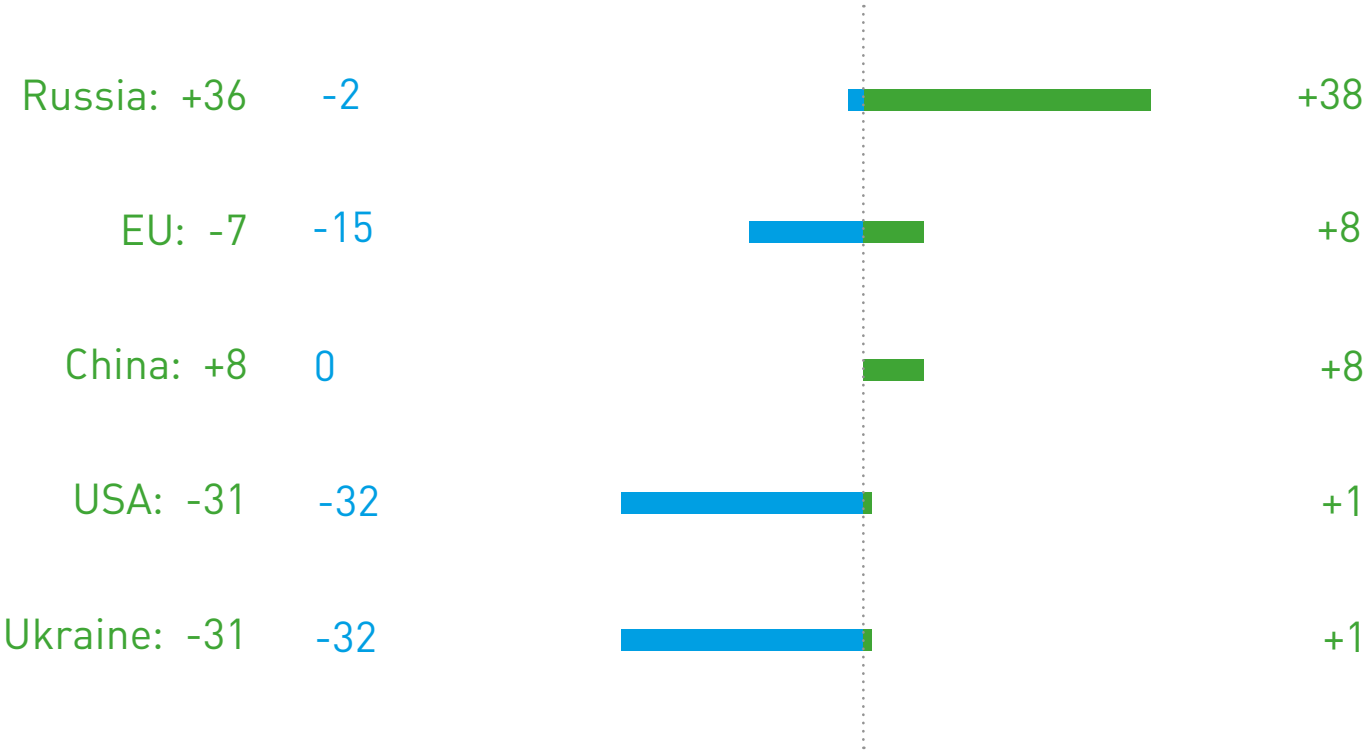
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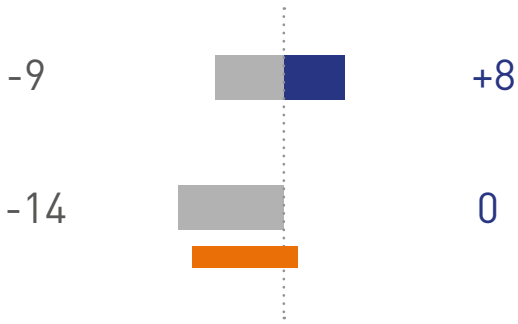
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Minsk Dialogue
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Relations development indices:



Security:

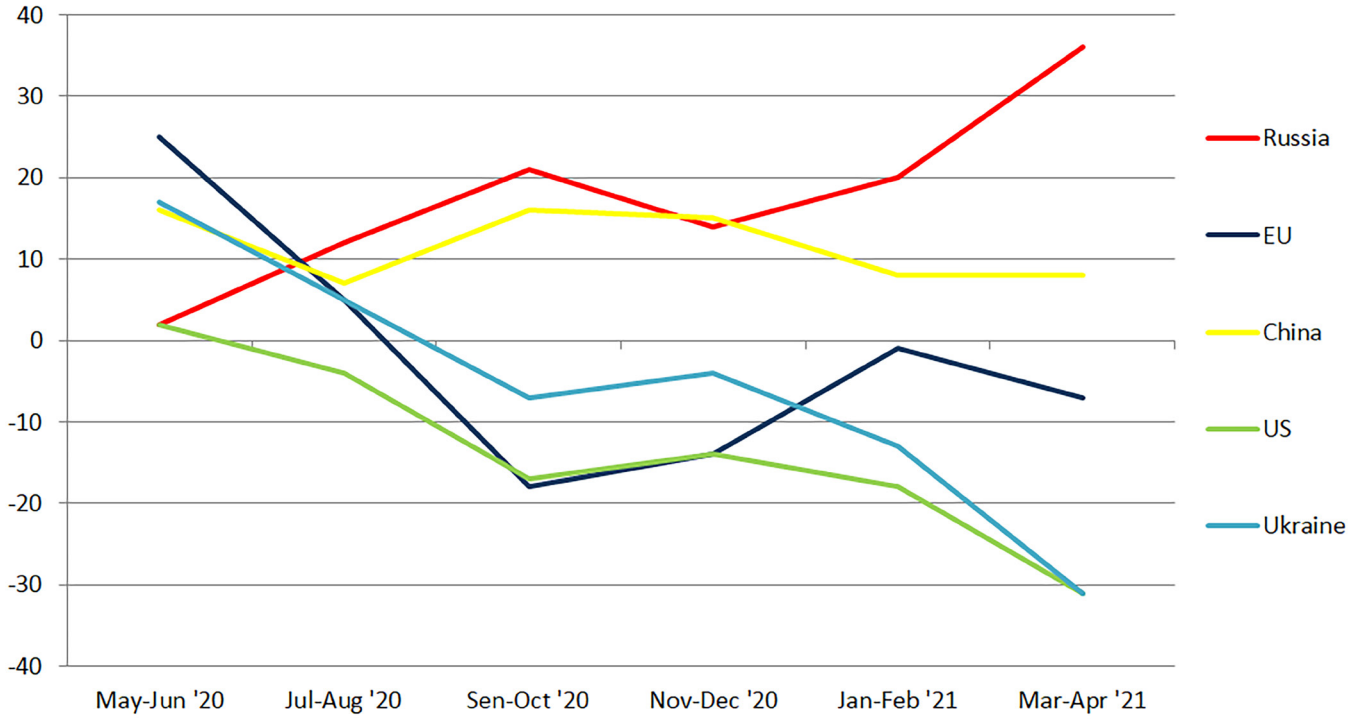


National: -1

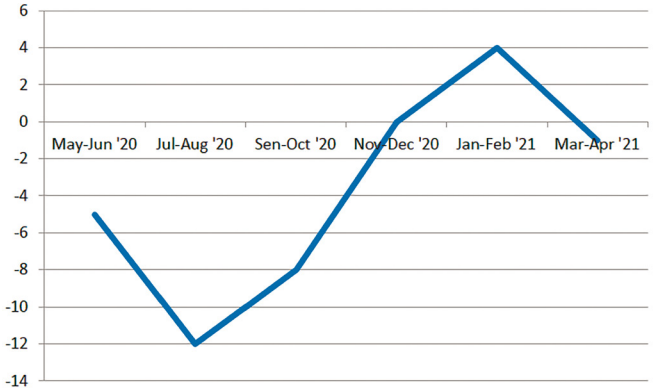
Level of regional tension: -14
(orange level)

The orange level stands for military preparations in the region and growing tensions. The situation is threatening.

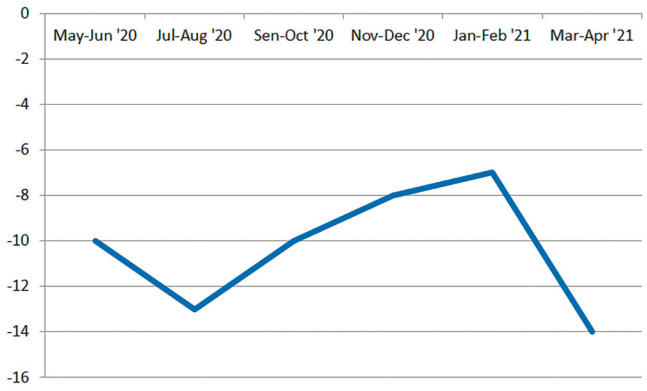
Dynamics of foreign policy indices

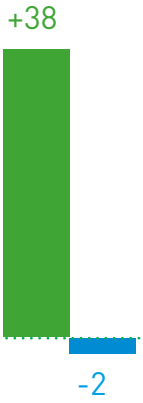


National security



Level of regional tension





Relationship with Russia

Aggregate index: +36
Positive points: +38
Negative points: -2

Trends

1. Coordination between the Union State agencies deepened.
2. Special services showed close cooperation by unmasking a plot against Lukashenka.
3. Union State's foreign policy becomes increasingly anti-Western.

Developments and processes

Political agenda

Throughout March and April, in line with the forecast we made in the previous issue, the high intensity of the bilateral relations was maintained and even further increased; the focus was on military cooperation; the road maps and promotion of the Union State were high on the bilateral agenda. Belarus solemnly celebrated the Day of Unity of the Peoples of Belarus and Russia on April 2.

The sensational joint operation by FSB and KGB to uncover preparations for a coup and an attempt on Lukashenka's life further contributed to the trends in the bilateral relationship that were initially established after August 2020. Regular joint ministerial meetings, joint military exercises, Russia's achieving a 50% share in Belarus's combined foreign trade turnover, and the prevalence of the Russian agenda and Russian approaches in Belarusian media space enabled Minsk and Moscow to ultimately flesh out the Union State agreement.

The case of the coup

On April 13, the Belarusian KGB detained in Moscow political technologist and philologist Aliaksandr Fiaduta and lawyer Youry Ziankovich, a U.S. citizen, and in Belarus, Ryhor Kastusioŭ, the leader of the Belarusian Popular Front. Ziankovich's assistant in Belarus Volha Halubovič was detained later.

The leaders of Belarus and Russia either directly or indirectly accused the United States of masterminding a coup in Belarus and a murder plot against its president. Moreover, Russian FSB, Vladimir Putin and the Russian Foreign Ministry view the conspiracy as a real danger to Lukashenka personally and Belarusian statehood. The scandal was broadly covered by the Russian media. The effective cooperation between the special services of the two countries was heavily emphasized. For his part, Lukashenka repeatedly drew attention to the danger that Western technologies that were used in Belarus during the presidential campaign and during the protests will pose to Russia in the future, emphasizing that Russia's interest in helping Belarus in the current situation was only natural.

The joint assessment of the situation in Belarus as vulnerable will likely require Russia to become more involved in ensuring Belarus's internal security.

Military cooperation

Russia's involvement in guaranteeing Belarus's external security substantially enhanced in March and April. A five-year joint action plan was signed, a few joint exercises were held, several meetings of defense agencies were conducted, delegations of those agencies exchanged visits, and an agreement on the establishment of joint army training centers was signed.

On March 2, the Defense Ministries of Belarus and Russia signed their first ever five-year strategic partnership program.

On March 5, Moscow played host to a meeting of the Defense Ministries. Plans for 2021 were identified, and an agreement was reached to establish three joint military training centers, one of them in Belarus. It is planned that combat crews for the Su-30SM will be trained in the Belarusian territory, and Belarusian specialists will be taught to operate state-of-the-art anti-aircraft missile systems.

In March, joint exercises were held at the Russian training ranges of Mulino and Polivno, as well as at the Belarusian training range in Asipovičy.

On March 29 a delegation of the Russian Air Force visited Minsk; on March 30–31 the chiefs of the Joint Staffs had a meeting in Moscow; on April 8 representatives of the Defense Ministries considered inviting foreign observers to the West-2021 exercise.

Restoring economic ties

The low base effect — primarily due to the conflict over crude supplies in early 2020 — had a positive effect on two-way trade figures.

In value terms, exports to Russia amounted to USD 3.5 billion in January–March 2021, up 8% year-on-year. Imports from Russia were at USD 4.8 billion, an increase of 32.8%. Belarus's trade with Russia came to a deficit of USD 1.4 billion.

Crude oil supplies from Russia tripled from USD 520 million to USD 1.575 billion, whereas exports of petroleum products doubled from USD 524 million to USD 1 billion, not enough to recover the costs of crude purchases. The Belstat service does not specify the number of oil deliveries during that period.

Natural gas supplies from Russia also went up in both value and volume terms in January–March 2021. In the first quarter, gas imports increased from 5.173 billion cubic meters to 5.831 billion cubic meters (with the average price edging up from USD 130 to USD 131 per thousand cubic meters). The total value of imported natural gas rose from USD 673 million to USD 770 million. This was partly due to growing gas exports from Belarus to Ukraine, Russia itself, and Poland, but the main reason is the expanding domestic consumption.

The disappointing results of energy trade with Russia prevented Belarus from updating the agenda of the previous two years — compensation for the tax maneuver and cuts in pumping rates for gas bound for Belarus transited via Russia are still pending. Neither will be addressed in the short term; negotiations are underway over natural gas supplies for a more distant period, targeting the year 2025, when the common EEU gas market is supposed to be created, i.e. prices in Russia itself are supposed to markedly grow.

The compliant attitude of Belarusian negotiators to the most controversial issues is primarily caused by the lack of alternatives due to the political predicament of the Belarusian administration. However, additional incentives offered by Russian negotiators should not be ruled out. It is to them that the weird Belarusian statistics on these positions may be attributed. For example, the "customs re-clearance" scheme of 2018 might be used again,

which, given Belarus's commitment to export some oil products by rail via the seaport of Ust-Luga, could envisage a deal for direct supplies of crude oil or oil refined in Russia to Ust-Luga as commodities of Belarusian origin delivered by pipeline transport with a portion of the export duty credited to the Belarusian budget.

The conflicts around Zapadtransnefteprodukt and Rosneft's threats to cut off oil supplies to Belarus due to U.S.' sanctions suggest that the compromise is only temporary and suits the ruling groups in neither country. At the same time, the insignificant conflicts over energy issues are nowhere near the disputes observed in previous years in terms of their intensity.

The same applies to all areas of economic interaction. The months of March and April saw joint sessions and meetings of the governments, Union State agencies and region administrations as frequently as several times a week in almost all areas of cooperation. As far as science and the humanities are concerned, the respective Union State framework is being developed at a rapid pace.

Against the backdrop of intensified allied engagement it seems only logical that Belarusian side for the first time in many years celebrated the Day of Unity with Russia in grand style, where every speaker expressed hope for even greater integration.

During the period under review, Russian Ambassador Dmitry Mezentsev was dismissed and succeeded to Grigory Rapota, who retired from his post as secretary of state of the Union State. Russia's new ambassador to Belarus Yevgeny Lukyanov arrived in Minsk.

Forecast

Given that Union State integration processes reached new record highs in terms of the intensity of communication and coordination in March and April, it is unlikely that these trends can be extrapolated to the months of May and June. A probable scenario is that if Russia fails to start financing the projects approved during the Union State sessions and meetings, and Belarus refrains from making steps to actually deepen integration, the pending conflicts may reach the level of the presidents. In any case, the intensity of engagement will hardly continue to grow in May and June.

Relationship with the European Union

Aggregate index: -7
Positive points: +8
Negative points: -15



Trends

1. The new surge of escalation in the relationship between Belarus and the EU is caused by two conflict episodes between Minsk and Warsaw.

2. Minsk's retaliation mechanisms (counter-sanctions) to respond to the EU's restrictive measures are legally formalized

Developments and processes

The Belarus–Poland relations became the main factor contributing to additional tensions between Minsk and the EU, with two scandalous episodes in March and April. The first one was connected with the "cursed soldiers" controversy, which complicated bilateral dialogue in previous years, but this time resulted in the mutual expulsion of diplomats. On February 28, Jerzy Timofiejuk, the Consul of the Consulate General of Poland in Brest, took part in an unofficial event at a Polish school dedicated to "the day of the cursed soldiers" — the participants of the anti-communist underground resistance movement in Poland after World War II. Minsk accused the Polish side of "promoting Nazism in Belarusian schools" and on March 9, the Foreign Ministry of Belarus suggested that Timofiejuk leave the country "due to a gross violation of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations."

In response, Poland declared a diplomat of the Belarusian Embassy in Warsaw persona non grata. Minsk believed that this decision "at the very least does not conform to the established practice of equal exchange of the expelled diplomatic personnel depending on their jobs and functions." That is, according to the Belarusian authorities, Warsaw expelled a higher-ranking diplomat. Already on March 11, the charge d'affaires a.i. of Poland was again summoned to the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, where he was handed a note ordering the head and consul of the Consulate General of Poland in Hrodna to leave Belarus. Minsk justified its decision as follows: *"due to Poland's excessive, asymmetric, and destructive response to Belarus's legitimate and motivated decision to expel Consul of the Consulate General of Poland in Brest Jerzy Timofiejuk and due to the relevant requests of the Belarusian side being ignored."*

Warsaw refrained from further escalation, and the diplomatic conflict seemed to be over. Moreover, a discussion of possible ways out of the deadlock began, albeit very cautiously and tentatively, via diplomatic channels. Specifically, ideas started to be voiced about the possible "closure" of the "cursed soldiers" issue.

However, on March 25 the Prosecutor General's Office of Belarus announced that a criminal case was initiated against Andżelika Borys, the chair of the unregistered Union of Poles in Belarus, Andrzej Poczobut, a board member of the organization, as well as some other representatives of the Union of Poles. They were also charged with the "rehabilitation of Nazism and justification of the genocide of the Belarusian people." Borys and Poczobut were arrested; searches were conducted at the homes of some of the Union representatives. In parallel, inspections of the Polish schools operating in the country began. The response was naturally wide and extremely negative in both Poland and the EU, where the treatment of national minorities is traditionally among the most sensitive matters. Moreover, in Poland, it instantly transformed from a foreign policy issue into that internal — and of top priority. Belarus once again appeared on the front pages of national newspapers, and Polish politicians began to react accordingly, including at the regional level. For example, the Bialystok City Council announced the suspension of its official partnership with Hrodna. This escalation was certainly qualitatively different from the diplomatic conflict two weeks earlier.

On April 6, Lukashenka held a meeting focusing on the optimization of the network of Belarusian foreign institutions, which addressed the status of relations with Poland. At the end of the meeting, Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makiej once again criticized Warsaw, but emphasized that Minsk remained interested in "normal, constructive relations with Poland and other neighboring countries." According to Makiej, the meeting explored options for de-escalating the situation in the Belarus–Poland relations:

"We are interested in the promotion of trade and economic engagement, and today possibilities for the ambassadors to return to our countries were discussed. But apparently there must be serious grounds for this, which would give all parties a hope that this would lead to a calmer development of the situation and its transition to a normal discussion."

Another crucial development during the period of monitoring was Minsk's putting in place the mechanism of counter-sanctions against the states that imposed restrictive measures on Belarus. As we noted in the previous issues of Minsk Barometer, the Belarusian authorities said they were committed to respond to the pressure of sanctions, and Lukashenka essentially demanded that not a single episode of new restrictions be disregarded. Despite the lack of any fundamental opportunities for counter-pressure by economic means due to the narrowness of the Belarusian market and the fact that many retaliatory measures could hurt the Belarusian economy itself, Minsk prepared a respective response mechanism.

On March 30, Lukashenka signed Decree No. 128 "On the application of special measures", which de facto introduced a mechanism for imposing counter-sanctions against goods and services from the states that apply restrictive measures against Belarus. The decree does not directly name any state as its target and authorizes the Council of Ministers to "compile a list of goods, operations (services) and, where necessary, foreign legal entities and individuals" subject to it; however, the overall focus of the document on the EU member states becomes clear from the context of specific arrangements. The Council of Ministers' Resolution No. 240 of April 23 confirms this, as each of the three companies on the list of banned commodities is a European firm — BEIERSDORF, SKODA AUTO and LIQUI MOLY. Prime Minister Raman Haloŭčanka stressed in this respect the commitments of the authorities to apply the countersanctions exclusively on a targeted basis and only to reciprocate: *"The decree will only be applied to those firms and companies that perform unfriendly acts against our country."* The decree also emphasizes that it does not apply to the transit of goods through the territory of Belarus and other obligations of the country as an international transiter and broker.

Furthermore, Minsk openly declared its intention to continue to respond to any restrictions with repression inside the country. In an interview to the Belarus-1 TV channel aired on April 10, Makiej delivered a message, which later drew a wide response, about the possible outcomes of the ongoing pressure of policies and sanctions on Belarus: *"It will definitely lead, if the scenario should continue to escalate, to a situation where civil society that our European partners are so concerned about will be no more."*

Other notable developments of the period include Makiej's telephone conversation with the Finnish foreign minister and several meetings of senior officials of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry with ambassadors of the EU member states. The number of such meetings decreased for obvious reasons compared to the period before the 2020 presidential election, whereas the substance and quality of communication became completely different — extremely negative — in their nature. At the same time, in follow-up of most of the meetings, reports were issued about the mutual interest in preserving communication channels and maintaining working contacts.

According to Belstat, in January–March 2021, two-way trade between Belarus and the European Union amounted to USD 3,541.8 million (up by 28.8% from the first quarter of 2020). Belarusian export reached USD 2,088 million, a hike by 86.5% from the first three months of 2020. Import from the EU countries amounted to USD 1,453.8 million (down by 10.8% year-on-year). Belarus reported a surplus of its trade with the European Union of USD 634.2 million.

Forecast

Following the foreign policy meeting with Lukashenka, official Minsk's considerations concerning possibilities for de-escalation in its relations with Warsaw were probably shared with the Polish side. It will become clear in the foreseeable future to which extent Belarus's proposals can be embraced by Poland, given the deterioration of the relations, as well as possible aggravation in the future. There is no reason to expect any rapid consistent stabilization, let alone normalization of the relationship. However, the degree of tensions may as well decrease again and return to the level observed before the negative developments of March.

Minsk's overall relations with the EU will stay in the area of increased turbulence. The parties will be searching for the most acceptable approaches to each other in the new conflict-ridden reality; however, it will be difficult for them to establish any stable agreements due to the ongoing repression inside Belarus and the pressure of the EU's newly imposed restrictions on Minsk. Under the circumstances, there is a very high probability of new crisis "outbursts" contributing to new escalation in Minsk's relationships with both individual EU member states and the European Union as a whole.

Relationship with China



Aggregate index: +8
Positive points: +8
Negative points: 0

Trends

1. Coordination of the two countries' positions in international organizations enhanced.

2. Throughout the period under review, cooperation in culture and educational was notably active.

Developments and processes

Whereas in summer 2020 (Barometer No. 16) we noted that the Belarus–China agenda was uncharacteristically overshadowed by the Russia–China engagement in the Chinese media, in March 2021, President Lukashenka addressed prospects for trilateral cooperation with China via the Primorsky Krai during his meeting with Russian Ambassador Mezentsev, who was concluding his mission to Belarus.

In the context of the Belarus–Russia and Belarus–China relationships, the results of a survey conducted by the Belarusian think tank EcooM, in which respondents were asked, among other things, to share their attitude to some of the foreign countries' policies on Belarus, are quite notable. The positive attitude score (the "positive" and "rather positive" assessments) for Russia and China turned out to be rather close, at 56.1% and 45.3% on aggregate, whereas the negative assessment of China's conduct with respect to Belarus (the "negative" and "rather negative" answers) even had a lower score than that of Russia, 13.8% against 16.5%.

In early April, the first round of negotiations for the agreement on trade in services and investments was held online, where Minsk and Beijing approved the general principles, objectives, and approaches, the mechanism of the negotiation process and established three working groups for trade in services, investments and IPR protection, respectively.

Also during the reviewed period, Belarus and China intensified their coordination to support China's initiatives in international organizations. In March alone, the deputy foreign ministers of Belarus and the Chinese ambassador to Belarus met four times, and in early March, the permanent representative of Belarus at the UN Human Rights Commission supported China's position on non-interference of Western countries in Hong Kong, which deserved a special note by the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

For his part, the Permanent Representative of China to the UN in late March spoke against the EU's draft resolution on human rights in Belarus and supported Russia's draft resolution, noting that the unilateral sanctions applied by some countries "under the pretext of human rights" to other countries, including Belarus, "seriously violate the basic provisions and

principles of the UN Charter and international law and harm the welfare of the Belarusian people and human rights."

The Chinese Embassy in Belarus was notably active: in March and April, Chinese Ambassador to Belarus Xie Xiaoyong met with Defense Minister Chrienin, Interior Minister Kubrakoŭ, Health Minister Pinievič, Sports and Tourism Minister Kavalčuk, and Lower Chamber Speaker Andrejčanka. Furthermore, the Belarusian state media continued publishing materials about China in partnership with the Xinhua News Agency, along with comments by Chinese experts and agencies and representatives of the Chinese Embassy in Belarus on a variety of topics — from explanations of the Chinese domestic and foreign policy agenda (Hong Kong, Xinjiang, etc.) to refutations of allegations about the efficacy of Chinese vaccines.

In the middle of March, Belarus started vaccinating its population against COVID-19 using the SinopharmSARS-CoV-2 vaccine, which was donated to Belarus in February (100,000 doses).

March was marked by a notable intensification of cultural and educational cooperation. Belarusian State University published the first textbook on the Belarusian language for Chinese students, and in China, the first "Speaking Belarusian" Belarusian language contest for students of Chinese universities was organized with the support of Beijing Foreign Studies University.

Great Stone

During the period under review, the following companies were registered as residents of the China–Belarus Industrial Park: LLC Novoera Biotech 新时代生物医药公司, established with the participation of Jintai Institute of Culture and Economics, LLC Xishanqingxue Clinic of Chinese Medicine (Beijing) and LLC Xishanqingxue Pharmaceutical Technology Company (Beijing) to manufacture medical products for the treatment of the new type of coronavirus infection and establish a center of traditional Chinese medicine. During the months of March and April, the park development company received delegations from the Embassies of India, Cuba, Pakistan, Iran, and held workshops for other stakeholders.

Forecast

Mutual political support voiced publicly and coordination of positions in the UN and other international organizations as the fundamental trend will continue. However, the economic and financial and banking component of the engagement will hardly show significant improvements — new loans that Belarus requires will remain conditional on Belarus's macroeconomic and regional factors.

Relationship with the U.S.

Aggregate index: -31
Positive points: +1
Negative points: -32



Trends

1. The process for the ambassadors to return to Belarus and the U.S. was suspended.
2. The Belarusian authorities accuse the U.S. of plotting an assassination attempt on Lukashenka and his family.
3. Washington announced a renewal of economic sanctions.

Events and developments

Rhetoric and contacts

As in the previous monitoring period, the U.S. continued to speak out on the situation in Belarus at various levels. Such statements mostly originated from briefings of the Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Belarus and Ambassador Designate of the U.S. to Belarus Julie Fisher who has been unable to assume her office so far.

In total, 13 such statements were made in March and April. They focused mainly on the following:

- condemnation of the persecution of protesters and journalists;
- condemnation of the Belarus–Poland diplomatic conflict in March;
- support for Belarusian opposition initiatives;
- sanctions;
- appeals to the Belarusian government to embark on nationwide dialogue.

At the end of March, the annual country reports by the Department of State on human rights practices were published. The section on Belarus reads that massive civil unrest followed the August 9 presidential election as demonstrators protested vote rigging as well as law-enforcers' widespread use of brute force against peaceful protesters. According to the authors of the report, significant human rights issues included: torture in detention facilities and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by security forces; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on free expression, the press, and the internet, including violence, threats of violence, or unjustified arrests or prosecutions against journalists, censorship, site blocking, and internet blockages.

On April 20, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution entitled "Supporting the people of Belarus and their democratic aspirations and condemning the election rigging and subsequent violent crackdowns on peaceful protesters by the illegitimate Lukashenka regime." The resolution says that "the August 9, 2020, presidential election in Belarus was neither free nor fair and, therefore, does not recognize the government-announced results or Aliaksandr Lukashenka as the legitimate President of Belarus."

The resolution notes that "in the months since the election, the Belarusian authorities have arbitrarily detained and brutally assaulted tens of thousands of peaceful protesters, journalists, and opposition figures, of which hundreds remain in detention." The U.S. House of Representatives calls for a new, free and fair, election in Belarus under the OSCE observation and also recognizes the Coordination Council established by Sviatlana Cichanoŭskaja as a "legitimate institution to participate in a dialogue on a peaceful transition of power."

On March 22, U.S. State Department Counselor Derek Chollet and Belarusian Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makiej had a telephone call. According to the press service of the Department of State, "Counselor Chollet made clear the need for the immediate release of all political prisoners in Belarus without exception, specifically citing the urgency of the case of RFE/RL consultant Ihar Losik." The Counselor and the Foreign Minister also discussed the pending exchange of ambassadors between the United States and Belarus, noting that "open lines of communication would benefit both countries." The Belarusian Foreign Ministry added that during the conversation Makiej "called on the U.S. to objectively assess the situation in Belarus and emphasized the counterproductive nature of any attempts to put pressure on the sovereign country." He also "warned against attempts to influence the work of law-enforcement or judicial system of Belarus." According to the press service of the Foreign Ministry, the officials agreed that in recent years, it was the mutually respectful dialogue between Belarus and the U.S. that made it possible to achieve significant progress in bilateral relations.

The Belarusian state continues to regard the United States as a source of military threats. On April 27, Belarusian Defense Minister Viktar Chrienin referred to the expansion of the U.S. military presence in Europe as one of the main sources of threat to the members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as he spoke at a meeting of the CSTO Council of Defense Ministers in Dushanbe (Tajikistan). According to the minister, the most urgent problems of the Eastern European region include "the unleashing of large-scale information warfare, destructive activities of the West aimed to destabilize and undermine the situation in the post-Soviet space, and the unresolved conflicts and color revolutions."

Exchange of the ambassadors

As we predicted in the previous Minsk Barometer issue, during the months under analysis, the exchange of ambassadors between Minsk and Washington was suspended.

On April 18, it became known that the appointed U.S. ambassador to Belarus, Julie Fisher, was unable to come to Minsk because she did not have a visa. She shared the news in an interview to the U.S. National Public Radio. On April 20, Foreign Minister Makiej explained the official position of the Belarusian authorities on this issue. According to the minister, the U.S. had not yet given a clear answer as to which status the ambassador intends to enjoy in Belarus. "We are by all means ready to receive the American ambassador at any time, but we wish to have a clear and understandable outlook for our further cooperation in all areas with our American partners." What is meant here is the disinclination of the American side to present credentials to Lukashenka, based on the non-recognition of his status as the legitimate president of Belarus.

On April 19, the U.S. addressed to the government of Lithuania its request to accredit Fisher. The U.S. Embassy in Lithuania said that the ambassador "will continue to engage with Belarusians outside of Belarus, including the leaders of the protest movement, media

professionals, students, and other members of civil society to express our support." In turn, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry commented: "Purely hypothetically, if this is the accreditation of the ambassador at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, it means that there will be two U.S. ambassadors in Lithuania who will represent American interests there. It is quite obvious that the ambassador who stays in Lithuania cannot and will never have anything to do with Belarus."

Sanctions

On March 31, the U.S. Department of State recommended that the Department of the Treasury resume sanctions against nine Belarusian companies that were "frozen" after the 2015 election. State Department spokesperson Ned Price stressed that the U.S. is interested in promoting bilateral relations with Belarus, but the developments in the country after the "rigged presidential election", violence and repressive tactics against peaceful protesters, as well as over 300 political prisoners cannot be ignored.

On April 19, the U.S. Department of the Treasury announced that the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) revoked Belarus General License 2G and replaced it with Belarus General License 2H, "Authorizing the Wind Down of Transactions Involving Certain Blocked Entities." This license authorizes a 45-day wind down period for certain transactions involving nine sanctioned Belarusian state-owned entities, and entities in which they own a 50 percent or greater interest, which were previously authorized pursuant to Belarus General License 2G. According to the document, the sanctions apply to Belarusian Oil Trade House, Belneftekhim, Belneftekhim USA, Inc., Belshina OAO, Grodno Azot OAO, Grodno Khimvolokno OAO, Lakokraska OAO, Naftan OAO, and Polotsk Steklovolokno OAO. The sanctions will come into force on June 3, 2021.

In this regard, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry issued a statement voicing its regret over the U.S.' decision to resume its sanctions. According to the Belarusian side, this step is "aimed at undermining the welfare of Belarusian citizens and reducing the economic potential of our country — one of the pillars of Belarus's independence." In addition, the statement says that Belarus "reserves the right to an asymmetric response to the U.S. side."

On April 27, Reuters reported that the Russian companies Rosneft and Surgutneftegaz were not planning to supply crude to Naftan in May, fearing they might be affected by the sanctions, which the U.S. had previously imposed on the Navapolack-based plant. Russia supplies Naftan with 5.5 million barrels of oil per month and if supplies should be suspended, they expected the volumes of hydrocarbons to be redirected to sea ports for export.

According to the Belarusian Trade Union of Chemical, Mining and Petroleum Industries (Belkhimprofsoyuz), the sanctions, which the U.S. has decided to renew against the companies of the Belneftekhim concern, might result in a situation where the state companies would lose their sales outlets. In turn, the loss of markets due to the failure to meet obligations under contracts and the resulting reduction of companies' revenues could render employers unable to comply with provisions of collective agreements, bring about staff reductions, as well as curtailment of social guarantees for veterans, women and young people. According to the statement, the consequences of the sanctions imposed on the companies of the oil and petrochemical industry might be more painful than the impact of the pandemic.

Alleged attempt on Lukashenko's life

On April 17, Lukashenka announced that a planned assassination attempt against him and his family was foiled, and the group of people responsible for it was detained. Initially, fragments of his speech were aired in the Nashi Novosti news program on ONT and posted in the Pul Pervogo telegram-channel. According to Lukashenka, "we found the work of clearly foreign intelligence agencies, most likely the Central Intelligence Agency, the FBI."

On April 21, White House press secretary Jen Psaki denied that the United States was involved in an alleged plot to assassinate Lukashenka. In her comment she said: "I can confirm there's no basis in fact there."

On April 25, a report aired on ONT added specifics to the alleged involvement of the U.S. in the assassination attempt. The mastermind behind the conspiracy is Michael Carpenter, Joe Biden's foreign policy adviser and a former Defense Department official overseeing Russia and Eurasia, the Belarusian TV channel insisted.

Russia appears to support the idea of the involvement of Western intelligence agencies in plotting a coup in Belarus. This issue was addressed, among others, by Russian President Vladimir Putin during his telephone call with Joe Biden.

Forecast

The re-imposition of sanctions against Belarusian companies will additionally complicate the already strained bilateral framework. Further escalation of the diplomatic crisis may be one of the results of the move.

Minsk's accusations of the U.S. plotting a coup amid the absence of diplomatic relations at the level of ambassadors considerably restrain both formal and informal channels of communication between the two countries, which will further promote the conflict.

Relationship with Ukraine

Aggregate index: -31
Positive points: +1
Negative points: -32



Trends

1. The relations between the two countries tended to follow the logic of confrontation: the countries changed from the independent interest-based framework of bilateral relations to the logic of "coalitions" and collective interests: Ukraine acts together with the EU and the U.S., whereas Belarus is compelled to increasingly rely on the orientation and interests of Russia in its relationships with Ukraine and the Western world.

2. Ukraine started to put in place a full-scale strategy to safeguard the Ukrainian market and producers against Belarusian products.

3. Ukraine's likely refusal to use Minsk as a venue for negotiations of the contact group for the peaceful settlement of the situation in eastern Ukraine has potential to strip Belarus of its status of a security partner and necessitate more robust security measures on the borders.

Events and developments

Politics

While the new U.S. administration was shaping its policy on the region, Ukraine put official relations with Belarus "on hold", which affected both the number and quality of developments and contacts during the reviewed period. Most of them constitute assessments or statements made by officials or institutions of both countries, with the overall tone in most cases being negative. There were very few real developments and decisions, and they concern national security (mutual strengthening of the borders) and trade (a state protecting its national market). The only public political contact that remains is what has become a traditional visit of Yevhen Shevchenko, a member of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, to Minsk — he was on vacation in Belarus for the third time.

Ukraine's probable decision to reject Minsk as a platform for negotiations on the conflict in Donbass and to seek options for diplomatic settlement of the conflict beyond the Minsk process as such may have wide repercussions and was therefore the focus of the period under review. Belarus is forced to adapt its defensive rhetoric on this matter, citing the need for a consensus of all parties involved in the Minsk process in order to dismiss Minsk as the platform and concept.

The Security Service of Ukraine declassified and publicized some documents on the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster on the anniversary of the tragedy. Media reports claimed that the documents allegedly showed that the USSR withheld evidence of other accidents at the Chernobyl power plant. The publication served as not only a coverage

opportunity, but also became an additional argument for opponents of the Belarusian nuclear project to launch new image offensives on Belarus's capability to safely produce and export electricity generated by its nuclear power plant.

Therefore, the relations between Belarus and Ukraine are looking increasingly like military-political blocs; their diplomatic contacts have been frozen, while trade and economic relations become subjected to the restructuring of Russia's interests in Ukraine and the EU, which de facto undermines their ability to implement independent bilateral interests in all areas.

Economy

Although economy used to serve as the foundation of the Belarus–Ukraine relationship, it is currently acquiring a geopolitical implication, as for the first time in the history of independence of both countries, Ukraine and Belarus have come close to full-scale trade wars. Belarus was sending signals that such a scenario was extremely undesirable during March and especially in April 2021.

Having decided to protect its own market (probably against certain guarantees from Western partners, since Belarusian manufacturers are awarded contracts due to the best price bids, which prove to be more beneficial than price quotes of Ukrainian manufacturers), Ukraine essentially refuses to build up relations with Belarus that would be independent of Russia in both political and economic sector.

For example, Ukraine appointed Ukrtransnafta as new owner of the nationalized assets of Prykarpat-Zapadtrans, which prior to February 2021 was owned by Belarusian businessman Mikalaj Varabiej, and also imposed protective duties on a number of commodities in the petrochemical sector, mechanical engineering and the processing industries. In late April, a Ukrainian court revoked the 2020 decision of the Interdepartmental Commission for International Trade, which previously ruled that duties on fertilizers were inadvisable. Contracts for one of the most sensitive Belarusian export are therefore at risk.

Ukraine basically leaves agricultural produce as virtually the only group of commodities that can remain a subject of trade and economic cooperation with Belarus. Ihor Kizim, Ukraine's Ambassador to Belarus, told the Ekonomicheskaya Gazeta weekly in late March that Ukraine was also looking to have the assembly facilities of a number of Belarusian industrial enterprises transferred to its own territory.

By shutting the market to (finished) Belarusian products, Ukraine may find itself in trade confrontation with the entire Eurasian economic space, but will probably enjoy a better promise of getting closer to the economic space of the European Union in return.

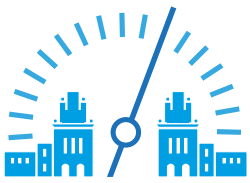
Forecast

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Kyiv confirmed the core of Washington's foreign policy strategy on Ukraine: Russia is the external enemy and corruption is the internal one, whereas the U.S. will support Ukraine in its combat against both.

The same strategy applies to the Eastern Partnership and the CIS, which in practical terms signifies that Ukraine, together with the U.S., will pursue a policy to counteract Russia's sectoral interests and oust the network of associated companies, including those from third countries, Belarus being one of them.

The few months to come will see Belarus articulate its response, coordinated with Russia. We are likely to witness a trade war between Belarus and Ukraine. It should be understood that this confrontation will also affect the mobility of citizens of both countries: it will become markedly more difficult for people to cross the border than before.

Security Barometer: status of national and regional security





Trends

1. The situation in the region was determined by a fresh round of tensions around the conflict in the east of Ukraine. It resulted in neither full-scale warfare nor Russian invasion, yet contributed to further regional split and militarization.

2. While street protests in Belarus were fading out, some segments of the opposition were radicalizing, and so were the measures taken by the authorities to tighten control and narrow the room for legal political activity. Coupled with probable provocations on the part of both internal and external actors, this seriously undermines stability inside the country.

3. Belarus's position in the region in terms of national security deteriorated. The relationship with Ukraine was affected the most, as Kyiv started to pursue a consistently tougher policy on Minsk.

4. Belarus yielded to Russia's pressure considerably in terms of security, judging by unprecedented steps, i.e. the signing of a five-year strategic plan, approval of the joint combat standby duty with the Russian Aerospace Defense Forces in the Belarusian territory, and setting up of joint training centers. All this has already influenced the army training priorities (airborne operations on a larger scale, etc.).

1. National security

Overall status of national security

The government was obviously looking at political problems from the security viewpoint. It was stated at the meeting with the president on March 18 that about a dozen of bills pertaining to national security and public order had been prepared in the previous six weeks, because "all legislative acts that regulate criminal, labor and other procedures call for adjustments" in connection with the protests. Lukashenka stressed that "those documents were to be examined by the parliament as soon as possible, and promptly put into effect."

In early April, the parliament set in motion the passing of a bill to amend some laws, which specifically expands the powers of law enforcement agencies, empowering them to use weapons and special equipment "to suppress mass riots".

The daily joint patrolling of public places in Hrodna by the local military commandant's office personnel and the police since April fits the general trend of the army's involvement in domestic political processes.

Designed to respond to radicalized confrontation and, probably, provocations from both sides of the conflict, these arrangements cement the aftermath of the securitization of Belarus's politics. A number of protesters, who stood trials in March and April, were found guilty of committing violence against policemen and conspiracy to capture state organizations. According to the Prosecutor General's Office, 97 criminal cases were initiated on railroad sabotage episodes from October 2020 to late March 2021. Lukashenka said on March 5 that one more radical group that possessed explosives was detected. The Interior Ministry reported on March 26 the detention of a suspect with explosives intended for terrorist attacks in Minsk and Pieči.

Staff reshuffles in security agencies

On March 15, Lukashenka increased the number of permanent members of the Security Council from five to eight. Alongside the prime minister, speakers of both chambers, presidential chief of staff and state secretary of the Security Council, the Council now includes the chiefs of the Interior and Defense Ministries and the KGB. On March 24, Lukashenka announced a decree on the full transfer of powers to the Security Council in case of the president's death.

Security agencies had their chiefs reshuffled on March 11 — the Investigative Committee chairman, chief of General Staff, deputy minister of defense and commanders of both Operational Commands were replaced. New chiefs of Minsk, Brest and Hrodna regional police were appointed on April 30. Personnel turnover increased after the crisis erupted following the 2020 presidential election.

The government acknowledges that serious incidents occurred because of the sympathy for the opposition in security and defense agencies. It was reported on March 29 that a former contract serviceman of the 103rd special operations brigade was detained and dismissed from the force "for destructive views and participation in street protests." According to the Interior Ministry, he cooperated with the BYPOL initiative and followed its instructions to track down Interior Ministry personnel. On March 31, the ONT TV channel aired the documentary entitled "Mankurts", which, among other things reported revealed instances of collaboration of KGB and General Staff officers with the opposition.

On April 13, Aliaksandr Fiaduta and Youry Ziankovich were detained in Moscow and Ryhor Kastusioŭ was detained in Belarus on suspicion of plotting a coup. The published investigation materials suggest that they did discuss radical scenarios, but the circumstances and the goal of the provocation are not clear yet.

Increased role of Russia

Moscow successfully increases its influence on Belarus. Lukashenka admitted at a meeting addressing defense cooperation with Russia on March 2 that matters related to defense and the military industrial sector were among the priorities on the agenda for his talks with Putin in Sochi. Lukashenka said that the Belarusian army "should adopt advanced combat techniques and master the latest weaponry together with the Russian military." Head of the Belarusian Defense Ministry's International Military Cooperation Department Alieh Voinaŭ said following the meeting "the plan of international cooperation with the Russian Federation at the level of the Defense Ministries is the most extensive one at the moment, with more than 160 events." It was announced on the same day that the Defense Ministries of Belarus and Russia had signed an unprecedented five-year strategic partnership program.

Defense Minister Viktar Chrienin visited Moscow on March 5-6 for talks with his Russian counterpart Shoigu. The latter called the joint air defense system the main point for discussion. The parties decided to set up three joint training centers: an air force and air defense center for Su-30SM crews and SAM personnel in the Hrodna Region, a center land forces training center in the Nizhny Novgorod Region, and a Russian Baltic Fleet center in the Kaliningrad Region for training Belarusian units together with the Russian marines.

On March 23-26, a delegation of the Defense Ministry led by Army Communications Chief Alieh Miščanka took part in a meeting with Russian counterparts in Moscow focusing on advanced military communication facilities of the Belarusian and Russian armed forces and their interfacing with the field communications systems.

Chief of General Staff Viktar Hulievič visited Moscow on March 30-31. Air Force and Air Defense Commander Ihar Holub said on April 15 referring to the action plan for on-duty troops of the unified regional air defense system adopted in late 2020 that "joint combat alert duty" of the Belarusian Air Force and Air Defense and Russian Aerospace Forces at a Belarusian airfield was planned to start in the summer of 2021.

Breach of trust in regional security

Several dangerous steps and security incidents involving the neighboring countries and contributing to growing mistrust were reported in the period under review. In early March, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania dismissed the complaint filed by the Biriu kroviniu terminalas port terminal, which deals in transshipments of Belarusian potash fertilizers, against the decision of the Lithuanian government to deny any significant expansion of production capacities in Klaipeda. The expansion project was regarded by the Lithuanian authorities as a threat to national security.

In March, Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov said, citing Ihar Makar, that there was a trail leading to the Belarusian authorities in the Pavel Sheremet assassination case. According to Avakov, Ukraine is likely to bring new charges against Minsk. The Security Service of Ukraine reported on March 24 that it apprehended a Belarusian citizen engaged in the reconnaissance of border protection facilities in the Volyn Region. It became known on April 13 that Ukraine imposed extensive restrictions on near-border activities in the Rivne Region until December 31 "to enhance border protection monitoring in order to prevent violations of human rights and protect national security."

Negative trends were also observed in the Belarus-Poland relationship. An intrusion of an unidentified aircraft into Belarus's airspace from the Polish territory was reported on April 12. Warsaw said it was not a military aircraft. Another intrusion was registered on the night of April 29. Poland admitted that it was its Mi-24 helicopter.

Training and equipment of the army

The second phase of the comprehensive inspection of the Belarusian armed forces began on March 9. Emphasis was placed on the formation of infantry brigade units, for which about a thousand reservists, (as was emphasized, of different ages and social statuses) were called up. The inspection ended with a tactical exercise held in late March and early April, involving the 19th and 11th infantry brigades and, probably, the 51st artillery brigade and the 6th infantry brigade. Fifteen exercises were also conducted at the battalion and brigade levels.

Joint exercises. A Russian-Belarusian peacekeeping exercise was held on March 9-20 in the Ulyanovsk Region of Russia involving more than 400 servicemen of the Russian 31st airborne assault brigade. Belarus delegated a reinforced airborne assault company of the 38th airborne assault brigade (more than 80 servicemen).

Russian-Belarusian company and battalion exercises with composite infantry and tank companies of the 6th, 19th and 120th infantry brigades of Belarus were held from March 9 to April 2 in the Nizhny Novgorod Region of Russia.

On March 15-27, a Belarusian-Russian exercise of a reinforced parachute battalion was held at the Asipovičy training range to practice defensive and offensive operations against illegal armed groups. It involved more than 400 servicemen of the 103rd special operations brigade of Belarus and about 90 servicemen of the 76th airborne assault division of the Russian airborne forces.

A joint air force and air defense HQ exercise was held in conjunction with the Russian military on March 16-18 under the supervision of Air Force and Air Defense Commander Holub. Russia delegated air force and air defense operative groups of its Western, Southern and Central Military Districts, which was an unprecedented move.

Territorial Defense. A mobilization readiness exercise with the Minsk regional territorial defense authorities was held on March 9-12 under the leadership of the chairman of the Minsk Regional Executive Committee. The second stage of the comprehensive territorial defense management inspection took place on April 19-30 in the Mahilioŭ Region to assess the readiness for the deployment of territorial defense units and the performance of control agencies.

Other. It was reported in early March that the Russian 9M120 Ataka anti-tank guided missiles had been supplied to the Belarusian army. Successful test launches of the R-73 air guided missiles repaired by a Belarusian defense industry enterprise was reported in March. In April, the State Military-Industrial Committee said that the PTAB-2.5-1 small-size anti-tank aerial bombs had been adjusted to combat strike drones.

As part of the national military education program, a military department was opened at the Brest State Technical University in March. It is going to enlist 200 cadets annually.

Repairs of a portion of the runway at the Mačuliščy airfield, one of the major military airfields of the country, started in April.

International security contacts

A delegation of the Belarusian Interior Ministry led by Minister Ivan Kubrakoŭ visited Qatar on March 14-15.

The Joint Consultative Group on Arms Control of the Ministries of Defense of Belarus and Russia sat on April 8 to coordinate inspections under the 2011 Vienna Document of the Negotiations on Confidence and Security-Building Measures, implementation of the Open Skies Treaty, and cooperation to facilitate foreign observation of the Zapad-2021 exercise.

On April 9, Interior Minister Kubrakoŭ met with Chinese Ambassador to Belarus Xie Xiaoyong. According to the minister, cooperation between Belarusian and Chinese law enforcement agencies "had reached an unprecedented level" in recent years. The ambassador said that

China supported Belarus's "independent development policy and does not tolerate foreign interference." On April 19, the Chinese ambassador met with Defense Minister Chrienin.

Representatives of the Security Councils of Belarus and Uzbekistan held consultations on April 12.

On April 14, Chief of General Staff Viktar Hulievič took part in a session of the CSTO Military Committee in Moscow. At the session of the Defense Ministers Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization held on April 27 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, CSTO Secretary General Zas stated that explicit external attempts to destabilize Belarus became a threat to the entire CSTO. However, judging by the results of the meeting, this will not affect the action plan of the organization this year, and the CSTO will focus its efforts on the Central Asian region.

2. Regional Security

Overall situation in the region

The conflict in the east of Ukraine escalated at the end of March, and so did the related trend for Belarus to be dragged into the regional confrontation. The OSCE reported a manifold increase in the number of ceasefire violations. Twenty-eight Ukrainian servicemen perished during the entire ceasefire period since July 27, 2020. Twenty-four of them were killed from January to early April 2021 alone. The number of casualties peaked in March and early April.

The Normandy Format talks and the Trilateral Contact Group negotiations on Donbas deadlocked. Furthermore, Oleksiy Reznikov, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, unequivocally stated that Ukraine would not participate in Trilateral Contact Group meetings should the consultations continue in Minsk, because of "Belarus's hostile rhetoric."

The confrontation in the east of Ukraine began to subside when President Volodymyr Zelensky invited Russian President Putin to meet on April 20. Zelensky generally relied on support of the West. Speaking at a PACE session, German Chancellor Merkel called for continuing dialogue with Russia, while saying: "the situation in Belarus, eastern Ukraine and Crimea, Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, the Nagorno-Karabakh Region, and, of course, in Syria and Libya is more than alarming."

On April 22, Russian Defense Minister Shoigu announced the beginning of the pull-out of more than 10,000 soldiers from the Ukrainian border, which was planned to be completed before May 1.

Confrontation shifted from mainland Ukraine to the Black Sea. On April 24, Russia closed three areas of the Black Sea to foreign warships for six months, planning a navy exercise there, and deployed 15 extra ships of the Caspian Flotilla and four ships of the Baltic and Northern Fleets in those areas. Ukraine, the U.S. and the EU criticized this decision. NATO reinforced its fleet in the Black Sea and planned response exercises.

Against the backdrop of the confrontation with Russia, on March 25, Ukraine published a new national security strategy that is almost entirely focused on the "deterrence" of Russia. The strategy is more stalwart than previous statements made by the Ukrainian authorities. It points at manifestations of the Russian threat, particularly, the Kremlin's aspiration to retain its strong influence on Belarus, and suggests avoiding "excessive militarization" and "depletion of the national economy." However, the mission to maintain balance through "synergizing military and non-military means", "territorial defense potentialities of the

Ukrainian army and the resistance movement backed by civil society" inevitably leads to the militarization of Ukrainian society. The goal to achieve compatibility of the Ukrainian armed forces with NATO and subsequent accession to the EU and NATO is emphasized.

Amid the tensions in eastern Ukraine, Russia actually suspended its participation in the Open Skies Treaty (OST), and, judging by official statements, it will withdraw from it unless the U.S. resumes cooperation under the Treaty. Moscow does not allow observation flights over its territory, and has not made such flights since November 2020 when the U.S. withdrew from the OST, although inspections were expected to resume in late February or early March. It became known in March that Moscow turned down the first application for an observation flight over its territory.

Exercises in the region

The Russian Army conducted 40 regional exercises and three large-scale inspections of troops stationed close to the Belarusian border. Ten exercises conducted by NATO member states that neighbor on Belarus were identified. This information is incomplete since NATO does not share much of it. Ukraine conducted five exercises in the regions adjacent to Belarus.

Regional forces buildup

Russia. It was announced on March 10 that eight T-90M tanks were supplied to the 27th Sevastopol infantry brigade of the 1st tank army deployed in the Western Military District near Moscow.

NATO. The delivery of the Guardian armored vehicles produced by IAG to the Public Security Service under the Ministry of the Interior of Lithuania was reported in early March. The number and the price have not been specified.

On March 11, Commander of the 18th Field Division of the Polish army Jaroslaw Gromadzinski announced the next stage of the deployment of the 18th air defense regiment, 18th artillery regiment and 18th reconnaissance battalion along the eastern border of Poland. New barracks are being built for the latter two units.

The delivery of one more batch of several hundred Piorun air-defense system missiles and launchers (entered service in 2018) to the Polish army began in March.

The somewhat late delivery of nineteen repaired and upgraded T-72M1R tanks to the Polish army in January-April was announced on April 12. A total of 230 tanks are to be upgraded.

On April 12, Poland entered into an agreement with the U.S. to acquire five C-130H Hercules military transport aircraft from the U.S. Air Force. The planes manufactured in 1986 will be supplied in 2021-2024. The deal is financed from an American grant. Poland will pay USD 14.3 million for the preparation and transportation of the planes.

As reported on April 14, Lithuania will receive the M72 LAW disposable handheld anti-tank grenade launchers worth USD 10 million from the United States to arm volunteer units.

Ukraine. On March 1, the U.S. Congress approved the first tranche of USD 125 million in security assistance to Ukraine for the fiscal year 2021. In late April, Ukraine received another USD 7.85 million in technical assistance from the U.S. for defense purposes.

At the end of March, Turkey stated its readiness to sell the Bayraktar TB2 combat drones to Ukraine without preconditions.

On April 21, Ukrainian President Zelensky endorsed the law that allows recalling reservists to active duty during a "special period" within 24 hours without announcing mobilization. Dodgers will be criminally prosecuted.

Infrastructure. It was stated at the session of the ad hoc committee of the Polish parliament held on March 10 that the Defense Ministry gave the highest priority to investments in infrastructure for the deployment of the American troops. At present, 114 projects to build new facilities and upgrade and adapt available accommodation are underway in 11 localities.

Forecast

Relatively high tensions in the region will continue until the conclusion of the series of high-profile military exercises. NATO's Defender Europe 2021, Belarusian-Russian West-2021 and reciprocal exercises of Ukraine and NATO are scheduled for this autumn. The lengthy period of tensions will lead to irreversible consequences for the unity of the region in the near term, including its militarization, internationalization of regional challenges, and increased foreign military presence.

In addition to the security difficulties already in place in the relationships with its neighbors, Minsk will face new problems of this kind in its contacts with Kyiv, which stem from the concessions made to Moscow in the defense and transit sectors, as well as general policy of the Ukrainian government, which is trying to become an important partner for the West in the region. Ukraine has already indicated its intention to adhere to its hard line towards Minsk.

The situation inside Belarus will also remain shaky. On the one hand, the authorities have managed to extinguish street protests. On the other hand, in the absence of ideological cohesion, significant material incentives, or other consolidation factors, the system of power remains loose even as far as the security and defense agencies are concerned, and is compelled to make new concessions to the Kremlin. Given the complicated socioeconomic situation and the refusal of the country's leadership to enter into a genuine dialogue with civil society, confrontation may be rekindled at any moment, yet it by no means guarantees victory of the opponents of the incumbents.

Appendix 1

Catalogue of events underlying the relations development indices

Relationship with Russia

Date	Event	Score
1 March	Chief of the State Customs Committee of Belarus and Ambassador Mezentsev discuss cooperation	+1
1 March	Representatives of Mahilioŭ business have a telephone call with the leadership of Primorsky Krai	+1
2 March	Military cooperation program for 5 years is signed	+2
4 March	Joint meeting of the Energy Ministries in Moscow	+1
4 March	EEC on the compulsory list of Belarusian commodities	-1
5 March	Meeting of the defense ministries in Moscow focusing on air defense	+1
6 March	Belarusian gasoline delivered to Ust-Luga	+2
16 March	Decision to establish three joint military training centers	+2
25 March	Lukashenka-Kozhemyako meeting (Primorsky Krai)	+1
26 March	Joint session of the Russian and Belarusian Academies of Sciences	+1
29 March	Russian Aerospace Forces delegation in Minsk	+1
30 March	Negotiations of the Chiefs of Joint Staffs in Moscow	+1
2 April	Unity Day celebrations in Minsk	+1
2 April	Putin and Lukashenka have a telephone call	+1
8 April	Joint meeting of the Defense Ministries	+1
14 April	Belarusian-Swiss relations discussed by ambassadors in Moscow	+1
14 April	Transneft on financial sanctions against its Belarusian subsidiary	-1
15 April	Meeting of Homiel and Bryansk regional authorities	+1
15 April	Putin-Lukashenka phone call	+1
15 April	Discussion of Belarusian-Swedish relations by the ambassadors in Moscow	+1
16 April	Meeting of the transport ministers	+1
16 April	Russian PM Mishustin in Minsk	+2
17 April	Joint FSB-KGB operation to uncover a plot against the president of Belarus	+3
19 April	Putin, Biden discuss the attempted coup in Belarus	+1

Date	Event	Score
21 April	Putin mentions Belarus in his message	+1
22 April	Lukashenka meets with Putin in Moscow	+2
28 April	Transfer of 26 initialed integration maps	+1
30 April	Putin warns Kurtz against interfering in Belarus's affairs	+2
30 April	Russian Ambassador Lukyanov meets with Makiej	+1
March	Regular railway passenger service is restored	+1
March	Joint military exercise in Belarus's territory	+2
Total		**+36**

Relationship with the EU

Date	Event	Score
9 March	Charge d'Affaires of Poland to Belarus Marcin Wojciechowski summoned to the Foreign Ministry; decision that the presence of the consul of the Consulate General of Poland in Brest in Belarus is inadvisable	-3
11 March	Siarhiej Aliejnik has a videoconference meeting with Michael Siebert, Director for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in the Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany	+1
11 March	Charge d'Affaires of Poland to Belarus Marcin Wojciechowski summoned to the Foreign Ministry; decision that the presence of the head and consul of the Consulate General of Poland in Hrodna in Belarus is inadvisable	-3
17 March	Aliejnik meets with Hungarian Ambassador Zsolt Csutora	+1
24 March	Online negotiations between Head of Belarusian Railways Uladzimir Marozaŭ and CEO of JSC Lithuanian Railways Mantas Bartuska; a cooperation agreement is signed	+1
25 March	A criminal case is instituted against the leadership of the Union of Poles in Belarus	-3
25 March	Aliejnik meets with Italian Ambassador Mario Baldi	+1
30 March	Adoption of Decree No. 128 “On application of special measures”	-1
30 March	Aliejnik meets with Danish Ambassador Karsten Sendergord	-3
31 March	Makiej’s telephone call with Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto	-1
16 April	Makiej meets with German Ambassador Manfred Huterer and French Ambassador Nicolas de Lacoste	-3
28 April	Aliejnik meets with Head of the European Union Delegation to Belarus Dirk Schuebel	-3
March-April	Numerous negative articles in the official media and statements by the country's leadership about the EU; direct accusations of certain EU member states of interfering in Belarus’s internal affairs and attempts to exert military influence.	-1
Total		**-7**

Relationship with China

Date	Event	Score
4 March	Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations supports China's position on non-interference by Western countries in Hong Kong affairs	+1
15 March	Vaccination against COVID-19 with the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine starts in Belarus	+1
24 March	Permanent Representative of China to the UN opposes the EU draft resolution on the human rights situation in Belarus at a meeting of the UN Human Rights Committee	+1
March	The first Belarusian language contest for students of Chinese universities supported by Beijing Foreign Studies University, publication of a Belarusian language textbook for Chinese students and a limited edition of a Belarusian-Chinese dictionary	+1
9 April	An agreement on twinning relations between the Homiel Region and Sichuan Province is signed	+1
14 April	Ambassador of Belarus to China Jury Sianko presents credentials to President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping	+1
27 April	Sino-Belarusian conference on trade and economic cooperation within the framework of the SCO events in Shandong Province	+1
Total		**+8**

Relationship with the U.S.

Date	Event	Score
3 March	U.S. condemns conviction of Barysievič and Sarokin	-1
9 March	Maryja Kaliesnikava wins the Courage Award of the U.S. State Department	-1
10 March	Ex-presidential candidate Sviatlana Cichanoŭskaja's phone call with U.S. State Department Counselor Derek Chollet	-1
12 March	U.S. condemns expulsion of three Polish diplomats from Belarus	-1
17 March	Cichanoŭskaja speaks at the online hearing in the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs and calls for an extension of sanctions	-1
18 March	U.S. welcomes Cichanoŭskaja's initiative to vote in favor of negotiations with the authorities	-1
18 March	Department of State's statement condemning the "Lukashenka regime for violence and repression against peaceful protesters"	-1
22 March	Telephone call between U.S. State Department Counselor Derek Chollet and Uladzimir Makiej	+1
23 March	U.S. Embassy comments on the picket by people with red-green flags near the U.S. diplomatic mission in Minsk on March 23	-1
25 March	U.S. supports the establishment of the International Platform for Belarus to bring the perpetrators to justice	-1
25 March	U.S. urges the Belarusian authorities to start a dialogue	-1
26 March	U.S. representative to the OSCE calls on the Belarusian authorities again to start a nationwide dialogue	-1
30 March	Negative opinion on Belarus in the annual country reports by the Department of State on human rights practices	-1
31 March	U.S. Department of State Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary Tom Selinger on the situation in Belarus	-1
31 March	U.S. Department of State recommends the Treasury to renew sanctions against nine Belarusian companies	-2
16 April	U.S. spokesman: we call on the Belarusian authorities to stop treating their citizens as opponents	-1
17 April	Lukashenka announces detention of a group that allegedly planned to assassinate him and his children, and draws a connection with the U.S. intelligence agencies	-2
18 April	U.S. Ambassador Julie Fisher is denied a visa	-1
19 April	U.S. renews sanctions against Belarusian state-run enterprises	-4
19 April	U.S. Department of State fully supports the decision of the U.S. Treasury to renew sanctions against nine Belarusian enterprises.	-1
20 April	Statement by the Belarusian Foreign Ministry about the sanctions	-1
20 April	U.S. House of Representatives passes a resolution on Belarus	-1

Date	Event	Score
22 April	Statement by the Belarusian Foreign Ministry on the U.S. ambassador	-1
25 April	Minsk claims Michael Carpenter, Joe Biden's foreign policy adviser, masterminded the plot	-1
26 April	Julie Fisher meets with representatives of the steering committee for the establishment of the Vmeste (Together) party	-1
27 April	Chrienin accuses the West of "destabilizing the situation" in the post-Soviet space	-1
28 April	Statement by the Belarusian Trade Union of Chemical, Mining and Petroleum Workers about the sanctions	-1
30 April	U.S. Embassy accuses the Belarusian authorities of double standards with regard to participants of mass events	-1
Total		**-31**

Relationship with Ukraine

Date	Event	Score
1 March	Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation submits to the SBU a list of Belarusian officials proposed to be denied entry to Ukraine	-1
5 March	Belarus is included in the list of COVID-19 "green zone" countries in Ukraine envisaging free entry	+1
10 March	Head of the KGB Ihar Cierciel speaks about intensified activity of terrorist groups in Western Europe and Ukraine	-1
10 March	Negative comment of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry on Cierciel's speculation	-1
13 March	Journalist Iva yn, a citizen of Belarus with the status of a "foreign Ukrainian", detained in Hrodna. His apartment was searched and electronic media were seized	-1
15 March	Ukrainian Foreign Ministry voices concern over Ivašyn's detention	-1
17 March	Ukrtatnafta requests the State Fiscal Service of Ukraine to look into Belarusian enhancing additives for gasoline supplied as "solvents"; excise taxes are not paid to the budget of Ukraine	-1
22 March	Ukrainian Cabinet tightens rules for entering the country: COVID-19 tests; Belarus is in the "red zone"	-1
23 March	Pickets at the U.S. and Ukraine diplomatic missions with Belarusian flags	-1
24 March	SBU reports the detention of a KGB informant in the Volyn Region; the detainee's alleged objectives included collection of data about the security of the Ukrainian border, officers of the Ukrainian frontier and customs service	-2
25 March	A court finds the book "Belarusian Donbass" by Belarusian journalists Ihar Iljaš and Kaciaryna Andrejeva to be extremist	-1
30 March	KGB informant released after a deal with the investigation: he turned out to be a Belarusian citizen of Russian origin.	-1
2 April	Online media disseminate reports about the "advance of the Belarusian army" to the Ukrainian border; the machines could have been sent as part of the exercise, which had been previously reported by the telegram-channel of the Ministry of Defense	-1
3 April	First president of Ukraine and head of the Ukrainian delegation to the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) called Belarus a "lackey of Russia" and referred to Russia as an enemy	-1
4 April	Airport of Odessa denies entry to several male Belarusians and Russians: the Ukrainian border service insists that the purpose of their trip has not been confirmed	-1
6 April	Ukrainian Deputy PM A. Reznikov rules out Ukraine's using Minsk as the venue for actual TCG meetings: "There is no trust in this country"	-1
6 April	Mayor of Lviv Sadovyy asks EIB to invite bids again for purchasing buses for the city: Belarusian MAZ won the original tender to supply 100 buses	-1
10 April	Critical statement by Belarusian Foreign Minister Makiej about the idea of circumventing the Minsk Agreements and proposals to move TCG meetings from Minsk to another country	-1

Date	Event	Score
10 April	Critical statement by Belarusian Foreign Minister Makiej about the "text message from the Ukrainian ambassador" about excessively harsh media reports about Ukraine: "We had to react"	-1
10 April	A bus with 35 Belarusians was not allowed into Ukraine; the State Border Service of Ukraine said that all of the COVID-19 certificates were forged	-1
13 April	Ukraine imposes additional restrictions on the border with Belarus	-1
15 April	Press conference of Ukrainian bus and trolleybus producers demanding that the domestic market should be protected from Belarusian products	-1
16 April	Ukrtransnafta wins the tender for the operation of the nationalized company Prykarpatzapadtrans previously owned by Belarusian businessman Varabiej	-2
18 April	Secretary of the Security Council of Belarus Arčakaŭ on the Minsk process: "Belarus sees no alternative to the Minsk agreements"	-1
20 April	Verkhovna Rada deputy Oleksandr Shevchenko visits Belarus on his vacation: "Currently there are no alternatives to the Minsk negotiating platform"	-1
20 April	Lukashenka on the idea of moving the TCG negotiating platform from Minsk: "There should be a consensus of those who once proposed it"	-1
21 April	Interdepartmental Commission for International Trade (ICIT) launches an anti-dumping probe into a number of items imported from Belarus	-1
22 April	ICIT decides to introduce a special duty on exports of Belarusian buses and trucks. The 35% duty will be levied starting on May 1, 2021	-1
26 April	SBU declassifies documents on Chernobyl; media say accidents occurred before April 26, 1986	-1
27 April	Ukrainian court overrules ICIT decision that quotas on supplies of fertilizers from Belarus were inadvisable — trade restrictions may be imposed	-1
27 April	Ukraine's Ambassador to Belarus Kizim's interview to the TUT.by portal	-1
Total		**-31**

Appendix 2

Catalogue of events underlying the security indices

Date	Event	National security	Regional tension
March-April	Conflict in eastern Ukraine	-2	-2
March- April	40 exercises of the Russian army	0	-1
March- April	15 exercises of NATO and Ukraine	0	-1
March- April	Second phase of the comprehensive inspection of the Belarusian army	+2	0
March- April	15 exercises of the Defense and Interior Ministries of Belarus (battalion and higher levels)	+3	0
March- April	Securitization of the internal political processes	-1	0
March- April	Expansion of powers of Belarusian defense and security agencies and their increased role in domestic policies	-1	0
March- April	Radicalization of some segments of the Belarusian protest movement	-1	0
2 March	Statement on the signing of the strategic partnership program by the Defense Ministries of Belarus and Russia	+1	-1
5 March	Decision on the arrangement of joint combat training centers in Belarus and Russia	+1	-1
10 March	Statement in the Polish parliament on the development of infrastructure to accommodate U.S. troops	-1	-1
11 March	New phase of the deployment of 18 infantry divisions of Poland	-1	-1
March	4 Belarusian-Russian exercises	+1	0
March	Actual suspension of Russia's membership in the Open Skies Treaty	0	-2
25 March	Adoption of the military security strategy by Ukraine	0	-1
12 April	Poland-U.S. agreement on supplies of military transport aircraft	-1	-1
13 April	Ukraine tightens control measures on the Belarusian border	-1	-1
15 April	Statement on the joint combat standby duty of the Belarusian air force and air defense and Russian Aerospace Forces at the Belarusian airfield	0	-1
Total		**-1**	**-14 (Orange)**

Appendix 3

Colour scale of regional security tensions

Colour Value	Numerical Value	Interpretation
White	higher than -1	Low likelihood of escalation. A non-threatening situation
Green	from -2 to -6	Presence of military activities, which do not pose a direct threat and will not necessarily lead to the escalation of tensions. The situation calls for cautious attention.
Yellow	from -7 to -12	Military and other activity is observed that is capable of leading to an escalation of tensions. The situation calls for close attention.
Orange	from -13 to -17	Military preparations in the region. Growing tensions. The situation is threatening.
Red	-18 and lower	A dramatic escalation of tensions. The conflict is virtually unavoidable. A pre-war situation.

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