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Security above all: A revised Belarus–Russia alliance

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On 6 December, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Treaty on the Establishment of the Union State of Russia and Belarus (Union State), the leaders of the two nations signed a package of ten agreements in Minsk. These included a pact on mutual security guarantees, the Union State's security concept, and an agreement to establish a joint electricity market.

The bilateral agreement on security guarantees reaffirms the strategic military alliance and includes mutual guarantees of assistance using all available forces and resources in situations where either signatory faces a security threat. Alyaksandr Lukashenka stated that the document facilitates the attainment of an "unprecedented level of strategic alliance and coordination of military activities". Vladimir Putin clarified that it includes mutual commitments aimed at ensuring effective military defence, safeguarding sovereignty, independence, constitutional order, territorial integrity, and the external borders of both states. Regarding the potential deployment of Russian tactical nuclear weapons for Belarus's defence, Putin noted that this possibility is delineated in the *Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence*, adopted on 19 November.

Lukashenka requested that Putin deploy the Oreshnik strategic missile system in Belarus, citing an alleged threat from NATO units in Poland and Lithuania. He also claimed that Poland's defence spending poses a security threat to the Union State. In response, Putin announced that Russia could deploy such systems in Belarus in the second half of next year and that they would fall under the command of Russia's Strategic Missile Forces.

The new agreement has not introduced any qualitative change to the framework of security cooperation between the two states. Belarusian territory has long been an integral part of Russia's security domain, with the Russian military enjoying access with minimal restrictions. The meeting between the two leaders primarily served as a political demonstration of their close cooperation and the ongoing progress in integration within the Union State.

Commentary

- **The declarations by both sides are a manifestation of their policy of deterring the West.** It is highly unlikely that Moscow will demand, under the agreement, that Minsk deploy military units to the Ukrainian front. Such a move would be imprudent and ultimately detrimental for the Kremlin, as it could severely exacerbate public discontent in Belarus and jeopardise the stability of the Lukashenka regime. Instead, the Belarusian army, potentially with support from Russian forces, is expected to focus on countering the

alleged Western aggression targeted against Belarus.

- **The security guarantees agreement provides Russia with the means to interfere with Belarus's internal affairs.** In the event of a crisis threatening the stability of the "constitutional order", the Russian military and other security agencies have now been formally authorised to intervene in support of the pro-Russian regime in Minsk. The deployment of the National Guard to assist Lukashenka was previously considered during the 2020 protests; this provision now merely provides the appearance of legitimacy to such use of force.
- **Lukashenka has not been granted permission to independently use either tactical nuclear weapons or the Oreshnik ballistic missile systems** (should Belarus receive them). Contrary to the bellicose declarations by Alyaksandr Valfovich, the Secretary of Belarus's Security Council, who claimed that Lukashenka has his own "nuclear button", the authority to use such weapons remains exclusively with the Kremlin.
- **Next year's celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War will serve as a demonstration of unity between Russia and Belarus.** Elevating the event to the level of heads of state underscores the importance for Minsk and Moscow of promoting their own version of history. The grand-scale festivities are expected to feature a pronounced anti-Western narrative, with numerous references to contemporary actions by the West, framed as allegedly hostile.
- **The agreement to establish a joint electricity market does not imply that either party will immediately eliminate existing barriers.** Minsk and Moscow have been discussing this issue, as well as the possibility of establishing joint gas and oil markets, since at least 2018, when a special intergovernmental commission was formed to develop an agreement to this effect. Based on available information – the final text, approved on 6 December, has not yet been published – the document appears to be a general declaration of intent. The actual integration of electricity markets will proceed gradually, likely in tandem with a similar process in the gas sector, which is even less advanced. Consequently, full liberalisation of electricity trade is not anticipated in the near future, leaving Belarus uncertain about the potential export of surplus electricity from the Astravyets Nuclear Power Plant to the Russian market (see '*The second unit of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant goes online*').