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No breakthrough as planned: the current state of Russia-Belarus integration

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On 26 February, Moscow hosted a further meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State, a format for regular meetings between the leaders of Russia and Belarus, together with their respective government delegations. On this occasion, the event carried particular symbolic significance, as April marks the 30th anniversary of the integration process between the two states. The parties reviewed progress in implementing the 2024-26 plan, formally titled the Main Directions for the Implementation of the 1999 Treaty on the Establishment of the Union State. According to the information provided, 125 of the 310 planned measures have been completed so far, amounting to only 40 per cent. Despite this, Alyaksandr Lukashenka stressed the need to develop guidelines for the next planning cycle (2027–29), arguing that 'technological sovereignty' of the Union State should become its central priority.

The Belarusian authoritarian leader also highlighted the growth in bilateral trade, which increased from $6.5 billion in 1996 to nearly $55 billion last year. Another key item on the agenda concerned cooperation in the security sphere, implemented through four programmes covering defence, security, and the exchange and protection of information. In summing up the meeting, Lukashenka stated that "a new vector has been given to our integration in all areas".

On 16 February, during a meeting with Sergei Glazyev, the State Secretary of the Union State, Lukashenka dismissed media reports alleging that the Trump administration was seeking to detach Belarus from Russia or otherwise weaken the alliance between the two countries. At the same time, without elaborating, he pointed to 'differences on economic issues' between Minsk and Moscow.

The meeting between Vladimir Putin and Lukashenka was routine, as it followed the previously agreed schedule of Russia-Belarus integration that includes meetings at the level of heads of state. Discussions within the Supreme State Council have taken place since the beginning of the century, when the two countries commenced construction of the Union State network. Belarus is aware that it has no viable alternative to cooperation with Russia; hence, it has repeatedly declared full loyalty to its ally.

Commentary

- **The leaders have sought to conceal the limited momentum of integration between the two countries through grand declarations about its 'development in all directions'.** For

years, meetings of the Supreme State Council have been ritualistic, serving primarily to demonstrate progress in integration, even though this has not been reflected in reality. Given that only 40% of the measures planned for 2024-26 have been completed, it is effectively impossible for the two countries to fully implement the schedule within the agreed timeframe. On the one hand, this confirms the limited willingness of both sides to accelerate integration. On the other, it underscores the inefficiency of both the Union State's institutional apparatus and the respective governments. To date, the parties have failed to fully implement the objectives adopted at any of the three-year stages of integration.

- **Improving the trade balance with Russia is an important objective for Belarus.** In recent years, its overall trade deficit has widened, reaching $6.9 billion in 2025, the worst result since 2010. Although the country maintains a trade surplus with Russia, which may have exceeded $2 billion last year (for the past five years, the Belarusian statistical office has only provided fragmentary data, distinguishing merely between 'CIS countries and non-CIS countries'), the volume of goods sold has been steadily falling, with profits driven primarily by periodic price fluctuations. Belarusian exporters, for example in the machinery sector, face mounting obstacles on the Russian market, stemming both from efforts by domestic producers to curb the inflow of foreign goods and from the difficult economic situation of a country engaged in war.
- **As Russia accounts for approximately 90% of Belarus's trade, securing preferential terms is of critical importance to the government in Minsk.** This also explains Lukashenka's strong emphasis on efforts to achieve 'technological sovereignty', understood as a means of mitigating the impact of Western sanctions. Such efforts may involve joint projects aimed at industrial modernisation and the construction of new facilities intended primarily to fulfil orders from Russia.
- **The latest meeting between the two leaders has once again demonstrated that whenever Belarus signals the possibility of engaging in a limited dialogue with the West, Russia responds by increasing pressure on Minsk.** The meeting's agenda did not include any security-related documents, as this sphere has already been governed by earlier agreements granting Moscow full control. However, Glazyev's statement regarding the need to strengthen the Union State's joint security in the face of the West's 'aggressive escalation' underscores Russia's intention to continue using Belarus as an instrument of its anti-Western policy.