



REPORT

The Union State as a tool to cover Russia's imperial policy

Prepared by the National Anti-Crisis Management

CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary	3
2. Introduction	5
3. Chapter 1. Historical and Ideological Aspects of the Formation of the Union State	8
Section 1. History of the Creation of the Union State	8
Section 2. Contradiction of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State to the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus	10
Section 3. The Union State as a Justification for Russia's Imperial Policy	13
4. Chapter 2. The Role of the Union State in the Preparation and Execution of Aggression against Ukraine	16
Section 1. Military-Political Cooperation and Aggression against Ukraine in the Context of the Union State	16
Section 2. Military-Economic and Military-Technical Cooperation within the Framework of the Union State	22
5. Chapter 3. Actions of the Regime Accelerating the Integration of Belarus and Russia	25
Section 1. Destruction of Civil Society in Belarus and Creation of a Simulation of Pro-Russian Pseudo-Civil Structures in its Place	25
Section 2. Creation of Conditions for Further Political Integration of Belarus and Russia	29
Section 3. Attitude of Belarusian Society Towards Close Integration of Belarus and Russia	32
Conclusion	35
Appendix	36

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Treaty on the Creation of the Union State of 1999 never led to the creation of a real state entity, just as the bodies of the Union State did not become full-fledged state institutions. An analysis of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State allows us to assert that it contradicts the Constitution of Belarus. The main goal of creating the Union State project is to return the post-Soviet space to Russia's sphere of influence, including consolidating occupied territories of Ukraine under its control, and the ideology of the Union State is anti-liberalism and the ideas of the "Russian World."

2. Within the framework of the Union State's activities, military-political integration holds a special place. Under the guise of the "Union Resolve-2022" exercises, the invasion of Ukraine from the territory of the Union State took place. Despite the fact that Putin's and Lukashenka's plans to "take Kyiv in 3 days" failed, they did not abandon their main goal — the destruction of Ukrainian statehood and the prospective inclusion of occupied territories into the Union State. Lukashenka's further actions in complicity with the aggression against Ukraine were carried out within the framework of the Union State's military doctrine, updated in November 2021.

3. As part of the implementation of the Union State project, military-economic and military-technical cooperation between Belarus and Russia has intensified. To date, the Belarusian military-industrial complex is an important element for the functioning of the Russian war machine. The Lukashenka regime supports Russia's systematic efforts to modernize its army, create new types of weapons, localize military production, and strengthen its human and industrial potential.

4. One of the factors that slowed down the "integration" process within the Union State was Belarus's developed civil society, which was focused on preserving its country's independence. In 2021, Lukashenka began liquidating civil society structures. Against this backdrop, and under the guise of the Union State, organizations effectively created by the Lukashenka regime, as well as Russian public associations and

foundations financed by the Kremlin. This creates conditions for the emergence of a phenomenon like the pseudo-civil society of the Union State, which could lay the groundwork for the real absorption of Belarus by Russia.

5. At this stage, steps are also being taken to form an updated political system in Belarus, which would lay the foundation for subsequent closer "integration." The party-political system of Belarus is being built following the example of Russia, and accordingly, a peculiar unification of party representation in the parliaments of Russia and Belarus is taking place. This could open a direct path to the creation of a Parliament of the Union State.

6. Despite massive propaganda efforts, there has been no significant increase in support among Belarusians for the idea of deeper integration with Russia. Belarusian society does not accept the Union State project being imposed by Moscow. The Union State has not yet become a full-fledged subject of international law and is used as a smokescreen to increase Russia's influence in Belarus. The denunciation of the Union State treaty will not strategically entail negative consequences for the Republic of Belarus; on the contrary, since the Union project itself has not brought any significant positive results for the Republic of Belarus as an independent state.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, many experts viewed the Union State as an integration project between Russia and Belarus as something of a phantom. Indeed, for almost 20 years since the signing of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State, the processes of integration between Belarus and Russia remained practically imperceptible.

Leading up to the project's 20th anniversary, the Russian side attempted to intensify efforts to create a "full-fledged" Union State. However, in 2019, for several reasons, including Lukashenka's reluctance to pursue deeper integration without preconditions such as lower energy prices, access to Russian markets for Belarusian goods, and compensation for Russia's "tax maneuver," the plans failed to materialize.

Yet, after the events of 2020, Lukashenka, prioritizing the preservation of his power over Belarus's interests, increased the Belarusian state's dependence on Russia. The logical outcome was the signing of 28 Union State integration programs on November 4, 2021, along with an updated military doctrine of the Union State. Thus, Russia achieved the goal it had set for itself back in 2019.

Under the guise of the Union State, a new phase of increasing the Russian Federation's influence over Belarus began. At this stage, it's clear that it was crucial for Russia to secure an additional springboard for its offensive in Ukraine, as well as support for Russian aggression from Belarus. Simultaneously, the Union State format was seen as a platform for the future absorption of conquered territories and the formation of a new empire, which is simply impossible without Ukraine and Belarus.

This report aims to expose and demonstrate the Union State as a tool of Russia's imperial policy towards Belarus.

To achieve this goal, an analysis was conducted on the impact of the "integration" processes occurring under the guise of the Union State on the realization of Russia's strategic objectives to ensure the dominance of the "Russian World," including by limiting and even liquidating Belarusian statehood, as well as the Union State's role in the aggression against Ukraine and its threats to regional security.

The need for this report stems from the fact that existing studies on the phenomenon of the Union State have not yet fully revealed the true nature of this phenomenon. For instance, a number of researchers are highly biased and present the Union State as some absolute good, sometimes groundlessly drawing parallels between the Union State and European integration. This applies primarily to the majority of genuinely Russian and pro-Russian experts in Belarus (A. Kosov, L. Krishtapovich, etc.).

Others point to the artificiality of this association, to the fact that it still lacks real substance. For example, A. Suzdaltsev believes that the Union State is an association through which the Lukashenka regime has managed to exist for many years at the expense of Russian subsidies, selling the status of a close ally, while simultaneously preserving sovereignty and independence and not going for real unification.¹

In turn, a number of experts, including even some affiliated with the Lukashenka regime, not without reason, point out that for such support, the Belarusian side has to pay with concessions, primarily expressed in the gradual loss of sovereignty and independence. Thus, E. Preigerman notes that in the late 2010s, Russia intensified pressure on Belarus with the aim of completing its absorption by Russia.²

However, this researcher believes that the Lukashenka regime plays a key role in counteracting this process, which, in our opinion, is not a proven fact. A similar approach can be seen in D. Meliantsov, who was one of the first to consider the problem of creating and functioning of the regional military grouping of the Union State.³

Many Belarusian independent researchers point to the fact that behind the facade of the Union State, the imperial aspirations of the Russian Federation towards Belarus are genuinely hidden. For example, in their analytical report, iSANS experts presented this problem quite systematically, who, in contrast to pro-regime political scientists, note that the key role in counteracting the full absorption of Belarus by Russia is played by not the authoritarian regime, but Belarusian society itself and its organized structures.⁴

R. Turarbekova, a specialist in international relations, was among the first to highlight in her research that the so-called "roadmaps" are a key element of the policy aimed at depriving Belarus of real sovereignty and independence.

5

¹ <https://ras.jes.su/meimo/s013122270009009-0-1-en>

² https://minskdialogue.by/Uploads/Files/research/comments/pdf/2020-01-21_MD_Comment_ECFR_Preiherman.pdf

³ <http://minskdialogue.by/research/memorable-notes/regionalnaia-gruppirovka-voisk-belarusi-i-rossii>

Given the changing context, an analysis of the Union State's role requires updating and further discussion, both within expert circles and among Belarusian society.

This report aims to stimulate public discussion to foster a perception of the Union State within Belarusian discourse that is adequate to the threats and challenges it poses, and to emphasize the importance of preserving the Republic of Belarus's independence.

⁴ <https://isans.org/analysis-ru/reports-ru/vozhrozhdenie-imperii-za-fasadam-soyuznogo-gosudarstva-rossii-i-belarusi.html>

⁵ <https://obo.web.ox.ac.uk/files/rosaturarbekovarussiaandbelarusunionstate-jq-2pdf>

Chapter 1. Historical and Ideological Aspects of the Formation of the Union State

Section 1. History of the Creation of the Union State

After the collapse of the USSR and the formation of the CIS, attempts were made from 1992 onwards to strengthen bilateral ties between Russia and Belarus. However, the full integration process was only launched after Belarus adopted a new Constitution, which introduced the post of president, and Alexander Lukashenko was elected to this position. Upon coming to power, Lukashenko began implementing policies aimed at unification with the Russian Federation. In 1995, Lukashenko held a referendum that granted Russian the status of a state language, changed state symbols to neo-Soviet ones, and approved a course towards rapprochement with Russia.

In accordance with the Treaty on the Formation of the Community of Belarus and Russia, signed on April 2, 1996, the creation of a "politically and economically integrated" community was declared "with the aim of combining the material and intellectual potential of the two states." The Treaty on the Formation of the Community of Belarus and Russia provided for the creation of a representative body. On April 29, 1996, in St. Petersburg, the heads of the parliaments of the two countries signed an agreement on the establishment of the Parliamentary Assembly.

After the November 1996 referendum, when Lukashenko truly consolidated dictatorial powers in his hands, the Treaty on the Union of Belarus and Russia was signed in Moscow on April 2, 1997, as a development of the previous document. On May 23, 1997, the Charter of the Union of Belarus and Russia was signed. In accordance with this Charter, the Supreme Council and the Executive Committee of the Union of Belarus and Russia were formed in 1997. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Community was transformed into the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union of Belarus and Russia.

In 1997-1998, the executive bodies of the Union and a common budget were formed, and the first Union programs were developed and implemented. Border and Customs Committees and a Committee on Security Issues were established.

It should be noted that most of these bodies never became full-fledged, independent structures of the new interstate association. They remained merely platforms for discussing bilateral relations between representatives of Russia and Belarus. Even the Supreme State Council can be considered

merely a platform for coordinating the positions of the two countries on bilateral relations, not to mention the parliamentary assembly, which is more of a simulacrum of a representative body.

Furthermore, the budget of the Union State cannot be considered a full-fledged joint budget of two states. Instead, it is a special fund of the Permanent Committee of the Union State, used primarily for servicing the current needs of the apparatus, as well as for implementing small grant programs and projects.

On December 25, 1998, the Declaration on the Further Unification of Belarus and Russia was signed, along with the Treaty on Equal Rights for Citizens and the Agreement on Creating Equal Conditions for Economic Activities of Economic Entities. These documents were also largely declarative in nature.

Nevertheless, in the formation of supranational bodies and the further deepening of "integration," prerequisites were created for establishing a real state union.

For example, for Lukashenka, with an aging and ailing Russian President Boris Yeltsin, there was a prospect of obtaining the highest state post in this new entity. In turn, the Russian authorities also benefited from the unifying rhetoric, which was presented as a major success in restoring Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space.

Under these circumstances, the parties to the "integration" process took the next step – the creation of a united state of the two countries. On December 8, 1999 (symbolically, on the anniversary of the signing of the Belovezha Accords on the denunciation of the Treaty on the Formation of the USSR), the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State was signed in Moscow, and the Program of Actions of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation for the Implementation of the Provisions of the said Treaty was adopted.

It should be noted that the legal basis for such a regionally significant agreement was the previously adopted documents.⁶

On January 26, 2000, after ratification by the parliaments of both countries, this Treaty entered into force. However, as practice has shown, this project never truly became a real united state entity, as the foreign and, more importantly, domestic political situations in Belarus and Russia changed.

⁶Declaration on the further unification of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation of December 25, 1998, Charter to the Treaty on the Union of Belarus and Russia of April 2, 1997 (ceased to be in force in accordance with Article 70, Part 1 of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State) of May 23, 1997, Treaty on the Union of Belarus and Russia (ceased to be in force in accordance with Article 70, Part 1 of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State) of April 2, 1997, Treaty on the Formation of the Community of Russia and Belarus (ceased to be in force in accordance with Article 70, Part 1 of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State) of April 2, 1996, Treaty on Friendship, Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus of February 21, 1995

It's worth noting that even though Belarusian representatives sometimes held leadership positions in the new association, this didn't actually increase their influence over processes within the Union State. For instance, Lukashenka became Chairman of the Supreme State Council, making him the formal head of the entire association. However, this didn't grant him any real additional powers.

Meanwhile, the apparatchik positions that provided the right to directly participate in shaping the agenda of bilateral negotiations, Union programs, budget preparation, and various normative documents were primarily concentrated in the hands of Russian representatives. Throughout the entire history of Russia-Belarus "integration," the most crucial position in this bilateral association—the State Secretary of the Union State—was consistently held only by representatives from the Russian Federation.

Thus, despite the formal equality of the parties in the "integration" process, a trend emerged where the key instruments of influence over the current agenda and even the policy of the newly formed two-country association became concentrated in the hands of the Russian bureaucracy.

Section 2. Contradiction of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State to the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus

When analyzing processes related to the Union State, it is crucial to note a key, one might even say fundamental, aspect: the conclusion of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State initially contradicted the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. As a result, not only the conclusion of such a Treaty itself, but also the subsequent structures for the creation and functioning of the Union State, became a violation of the Constitution of Belarus.

To conclude that the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State is unconstitutional, one should first turn to the foundations of Belarus's constitutional order. In particular, it should be noted that the second part of Article 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus establishes that "The Republic of Belarus possesses supremacy and full authority on its territory, independently exercising its internal and external policy."⁷

⁷ <https://pravo.by/pravovaya-informatsiya/normativnye-dokumenty/konstitutsiya-respubliki-belarus/>

Consequently, the conclusion of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State contradicts the sovereign national statehood established by the Constitution; and any entry into and/or creation by the Republic of Belarus of a supranational association must follow the introduction of corresponding amendments/additions to the Constitution.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State establishes a single territory, a single currency, a single security system, and citizenship of the Union State. These provisions also violate the Constitution of Belarus and affect the foundations of Belarus's sovereignty as a state.

Thus, the goals of the Union State, for example, such as "conducting a coordinated foreign policy and defense policy," "conducting a coordinated social policy," "ensuring the security of the Union State and combating crime"⁸ limit the fullness of Belarus's power and its independence in carrying out its internal and external policies.

Moreover, in continuation of the stated goals for ensuring the "security" of the Union State, special attention should be paid to the provision of Article 7 of the Treaty. According to paragraph 2 of the said article, "The participating states ensure the integrity and inviolability of the territory of the Union State."⁹

Such an obligation of Belarus as a participating state of the Union State contradicts the third part of Article 1 of the Constitution of Belarus, according to which "The Republic of Belarus protects its independence and territorial integrity, constitutional order, ensures legality and law and order."

¹⁰

Moreover, such obligations to protect the territory of the Union State, defined by "the borders of the participating states with other states," contradict the interests and security of Belarus.

According to Article 3 of the Constitution, the sole source of state power and the bearer of sovereignty in the Republic of Belarus is the people. The procedure for forming the bodies of the Union State, as defined in the Treaty, discriminates against the interests of Belarusian citizens compared to Russians.

⁸ <https://soyuz.by/dogovor-o-sozdanii-soyuznogo-gosudarstva>

⁹ <https://soyuz.by/dogovor-o-sozdanii-soyuznogo-gosudarstva>

¹⁰ <https://pravo.by/pravovaya-informatsiya/normativnye-dokumenty/konstitutsiya-respubliki-belarus/>

Namely, the House of Representatives the Union State Parliament, according to Part 3 of Article 39 of the Treaty, is formed by 75 deputies from the Russian Federation and 28 deputies from the Republic of Belarus.

¹¹

This means that even during the drafting of the treaty, a legal structure was established that allows Russia to completely disregard the interests of Belarusian citizens due to the unequal number of deputies.

According to Article 40 of the Treaty, the Union State Parliament, among other functions, adopts laws and legislative frameworks for the Union State; approves the budget and reviews annual and semi-annual reports on its execution; ratifies international treaties concluded on behalf of the Union State; and appoints judges of the Union State Court based on the recommendation of the Supreme State Council.

As evident from the above, under the Treaty, any laws of the Union State can be adopted by an absolute majority of deputies from Russia, which eliminates any possibility for Belarus to influence the legislative process within the Union State.¹²

Therefore, key issues concerning the functioning of the Union State, such as lawmaking, financial management, and the formation of judicial power, can be resolved without considering Belarus's interests.

An analysis of the provisions of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State and the Constitution of Belarus leads to the conclusion that the signing of such a Treaty contradicts the Constitution of Belarus.

Section 3. The Union State as a Justification for Russia's Imperial Policy

The idea of creating the Union State emerged back in the 1990s, but the process of uniting the two states dragged on for an entire decade. The main goal of this Union was, and remains, political and socio-economic reintegration within the territory of the former USSR.

¹¹ <https://soyuz.by/dogovor-o-sozdanii-soyuznogo-gosudarstva>

¹² <https://soyuz.by/dogovor-o-sozdanii-soyuznogo-gosudarstva>

However, the goals of creation were more openly declared in analytical notes and articles by pro-government Russian and Belarusian authors. For instance, A. Kosov, a lecturer at Vitebsk State University, noted that: "The Union State of Belarus and Russia represents an entity whose main geopolitical meaning and purpose is to resume reintegration processes in the post-Soviet space. <...> The geopolitical potential of the Union State lies precisely in <...> becoming that growth point which will allow the formation of its own center of development and power on its own cultural and civilizational basis."¹³

Along with this, a number of publications highlight the clear ideological basis of the Union State – primarily anti-liberalism: "Given the disarray of the Eurasian space after the collapse of the USSR, any project for its reintegration must, firstly, be mobilizational and centralized, and secondly, it cannot be liberal in its essence and ideological orientation."¹⁴

The key role of the Union State in Russia's integration, or more accurately, imperial projects, was also emphasized: "The Union State is a strategic resource for integration in the Eurasian space. Further integration from the perspective of Western countries and transnational corporations is a threat to their strategic interest: the promotion of a liberal human rights agenda."¹⁵

After the start of aggression against Ukraine, the intent of Russian elites regarding the Union State was declared in a programmatic article by the "RIA Novosti" agency – "The Offensive of Russia and the New World," which was prepared in advance and mistakenly published on the third day of the war, based on the assumption that Ukraine would no longer resist by then. This article notes that "The Union State of the Russian Federation and Belarus is one of the possible forms of solidifying Russia's alliance with a new Ukraine."¹⁶

¹³ <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/soyuznoe-gosudarstvo-belarusi-i-rossii-v-1999-2018-gg-geopoliticheskiy-aspekt/viewer>

¹⁴ <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/potentsial-soyuznogo-gosudarstva-v-sisteme-on/viewer>

¹⁵ <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/potentsial-soyuznogo-gosudarstva-v-sisteme-on/viewer>

¹⁶ <https://web.archive.org/web/20220226051154/https://ria.ru/20220226/rossiya-1775162336.html>

This is further confirmed by the narratives of Russian propagandists, who, while not real experts, nonetheless transmit the unofficial position of the Kremlin leadership based on methodological guidelines and are published on, among others, Belarusian state channels. The so-called "expert" Yakov Kedmi states: "But, in my opinion, the best solution is that even the Ukraine that might be created within its indigenous borders, together with Belarus, will be a member of the Union State. And then there will be no problems for anyone, because the Belarusian experience shows what political, economic, security, and international successes Belarus has achieved precisely because it is part of the Union State."¹⁷

The unrecognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia, controlled by Russia, have also repeatedly expressed a desire to join the Union State. This can be seen as another Russian initiative to accelerate the realization of its imperial aspirations regarding Belarus. In particular, Vyacheslav Gbozov, State Advisor of the unrecognized republic, stated: "We have a desire to join the Union State of Russia and Belarus; this is one of our priorities. Therefore, we speak about the importance of Belarus recognizing us, as this will open the way to the Union State and new horizons for the republic."¹⁸

Lukashenka himself has also repeatedly spoken about this: "Under the current circumstances, the experience of the union of Belarus and Russia – the Union State – can again act as a locomotive for integration processes, offering the best practices for the EAEU and CIS. I draw your attention to the multi-level integration that is taking shape in the post-Soviet space."¹⁹

The Union State is an association that preaches and implants the ideology of the "Russian World," which is clearly evident in the common information space filled with Russian and pro-Russian propaganda in Belarus. Russia, with the support of the Lukashenka regime, aims to spread the ideology of the "Russian World" to the occupied territories of Ukraine during the so-called special military operation.

¹⁷ <https://www.belta.by/society/view/nuzhen-polnyj-zapret-natsistskoj-propagandy-kedmi-o-chlenstve-ukrainy-v-sojuznom-gosudarstve-573192-2023/>

¹⁸ <https://reform-by.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/reform.by/v-juzhnoj-osetii-zajavili-o-zhelanii-voiti-v-sojuznoe-gosudarstvo-belarusi-i-rossii/amp>

¹⁹ https://xn--c1anqgbdpdf.xn--p1ai/expert_opinion/229861/

This is also evidenced by excerpts from reports by pro-Russian analysts. N. Stupakov's article notes: "The Union State and Eurasian integration as a whole will not possess due stability without serious development of the humanitarian sphere of interaction, which still remains secondary, hopelessly losing to economic issues. The common humanitarian space of the Union State must be built on a common Russian ideological basis."

Given how the functioning system of the Union State is structured, which is described in more detail in the appendix to the report, it can be stated that the state bodies of the Lukashenka regime are quite widely involved in processes related to both the surrender of Belarus's sovereignty and aggressive actions against Ukraine based on the Military Doctrine of the Union State.

²⁰ <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/soyuznoe-gosudarstvo-rossiyskoy-federatsii-i-respubliki-belarus-perspektivy-uglubleniya-soyuznoy-integratsii-i-obespecheniya/viewer>

Chapter 2. The Role of the Union State in the Preparation and Execution of Aggression against Ukraine

Section 1. Military-Political Cooperation and Aggression against Ukraine in the Context of the Union State

Within the framework of the Union State's activities, military-political integration holds a special place.

Before the adoption of the updated military doctrine of the Union State in 2021, the main mechanisms and directions of military cooperation were defined in the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on Military Cooperation of December 19, 1997. In accordance with this Treaty, military cooperation was carried out in the following main areas:

- defense policy and strategy
- rapprochement and unification of legislation in the areas of defense, military development, and social protection of military personnel,
- development of state defense orders, common programs for armaments, production and repair of military equipment
- creation of a regional grouping of forces (troops), planning for its application, operational and material support, unification of the regional grouping's command system, maintenance and use of military infrastructure facilities of both states
- training of military personnel, training of reserves and creation of material stockpiles.

At the level of secondary law, the Decision of the Supreme Council of the Union of Belarus and Russia No. 4 of January 22, 1998, approved the "Concept of Joint Defense Policy of Russia and Belarus," which developed and specified the provisions of the Treaty on Military Cooperation (in particular, it provided for the creation of a common defense).

An important regulatory block was the formation and application of regional troop groupings. In accordance with the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on Joint Provision of Regional Security in the Military Sphere of December 19, 1997, to ensure regional military security,

the Parties jointly determine the composition of the regional grouping, the procedure for its command in wartime, and the interaction of its constituent troops in peacetime.

Subsequently, the legal status and operational foundations of the grouping were developed within the framework of the secondary law of the Union State.²¹

In the military doctrine of the Union State, signed by Lukashenka on November 4, 2021, the system for the functioning of the Regional Grouping of Forces (Troops) was described in greater detail.

Another project in the sphere of joint use of armed forces is the creation of a unified regional air defense system of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation, for which a joint command of such a grouping was established. When deploying the regional grouping of forces during a threatened period, the assets of the Unified Regional Air Defense System must be included in the grouping. Issues concerning the formation and functioning of such a system are regulated by the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on the Joint Protection of the External Border of the Union State in Airspace and the Creation of a Unified Regional Air Defense System of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation of February 3, 2009.

The adoption of the Military Doctrine of the Union State was preceded by a meeting of the Ministries of Defense of Belarus and Russia, where Russian Defense Minister Shoigu stated: "NATO's forward presence near the borders of the Union State of Russia and Belarus is increasing <...> This permanent pressure exerted by Western forces forces the Union State to take retaliatory measures – in order to ensure the security of its citizens and the integrity of its borders. One such measure was the new military doctrine of the Union State."²²

21. In the Resolution of the Supreme State Council of the Union State No. 11 of July 27, 2000, "On the Creation of the Regional Grouping of Troops (Forces) of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation," as well as in the Resolution of the Supreme State Council of the Union State No. 5 of November 25, 2011, "On Planning the Use of the Regional Grouping of Troops (Forces) of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation."

A set of secret documents regulating the functioning of the regional grouping of troops (forces) was approved: the Directive of the Supreme State Council on Joint Actions, the Plan for the Use of the Regional Grouping of Troops (Forces) of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation, and the Regulations on the Joint Command of the Regional Grouping of Troops (Forces) of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation.

²² https://xn--c1anggbdpdf.xn--p1ai/expert_opinion/229968/

A month after the adoption of the Union State's Military Doctrine, in December 2021, Putin and Lukashenka decided to conduct the joint "Union Resolve-2022" exercises. "As you know, in this difficult situation, the President of the Russian Federation and I agreed back in December last year to jointly conduct unscheduled specific measures on the western borders of the Union State and on the southern flank of Belarus – which is also a border of the Union State," Lukashenka stated.²³

On January 18, 2022, at a briefing for foreign military attachés, Russian Deputy Minister of Defense A. Fomin announced that "as part of the inspection of the Union State's rapid reaction forces, it is planned to prepare troops and forces for actions not only within their areas of responsibility but also for resolving suddenly emerging tasks to localize crisis situations in any threatened directions."²⁴

On February 18, 2022, at a meeting with Putin, Lukashenka commented on the exercises: "Yesterday I was at the Belarusian-Russian exercises, I saw both Russian and Belarusian units. There were many foreigners, journalists, very impressive. As you said, tomorrow, if all goes well, we will be at an interesting event with you." In response, Putin clarified: "We'll participate! Not just be present! Active participation..."²⁵

The exercises were scheduled to end on February 20. However, V. Putin and A. Lukashenka decided to continue inspecting the rapid reaction forces within the framework of the "Union Resolve-2022" exercises. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense announced this: "Due to the increasing military activity near the external borders of the Union State and the escalating situation in Donbas, the Presidents of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation have decided to continue the inspection of the Union State's rapid reaction forces."²⁶

Thus, it was under the guise of these exercises that the deployment of the Russian offensive grouping in Belarus occurred, and after four days after their conclusion, the invasion of Ukraine from the territory of the Union State took place.

²³ https://xn--c1anggbdpdf.xn--p1ai/expert_opinion/229968/

²⁴ https://xn--c1anggbdpdf.xn--p1ai/expert_opinion/229968/

²⁵ <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5227061>

²⁶ https://xn--c1anggbdpdf.xn--p1ai/actual_comment/230826/?fbclid=IwAR34mLfUqSjgvV6iBHRJ5iszWYWsq7zyBpYdiotcKnkP3H8R_j9kq6BeUCs

Despite the failure of Putin's and Lukashenka's plans to "take Kyiv in 3 days," they did not abandon their main goal – the destruction of Ukrainian statehood and the prospective inclusion of its territories into the Union State. Lukashenka's further actions in complicity with the aggression against Ukraine were carried out within the framework of the Union State's military doctrine.

The transfer of military equipment and ammunition by Belarus to Russia, the training of Russian mobilized personnel, and the expansion of cooperation in the military-industrial complex with Russia's allies also occurred within the framework of contacts along the Union State line.²⁷

Thus, on October 10, 2022, Lukashenka announced the creation of a Regional Grouping of Troops based on the Belarusian armed forces: "In connection with the escalation on the western borders of the Union State, we agreed on the deployment of a regional grouping of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus. <...> My order was given for us to begin forming this grouping."²⁸

In accordance with the military doctrine, during a period of increasing military threat (a period of direct threat of aggression), a Joint Command of the Regional Grouping of Troops (Forces) is formed, which, in accordance with the prevailing situation, clarifies adopted decisions (developed plans) and manages the RGF.

²⁷ For example, the following directions are outlined among the foundations of the Union State's military policy:

- Coordination of plans for research and development work, production, and supply of armaments, military, and special equipment for the armed forces of the participating states, as well as conducting joint fundamental and applied research in the creation of the latest military technologies, promising models of armaments, military, and special equipment.
- Development and deepening of production and scientific-technical ties between enterprises of the participating states in the areas of development, production, and supply of military-purpose products, provision of military services, and also in the supply of necessary materials, samples, components, training, and auxiliary property for this purpose.
- Joint training of military personnel.
- Expansion of cooperation with international organizations and other states.
- Development of military and military-technical cooperation with CSTO member states.

²⁸ https://xn--c1anggbdpdf.xn--p1ai/actual_comment/231031/?fbclid=IwAR0ckmYgmsbta6OggOgdMFTAla6hHtU-hO-Z6OEU5p1DbLaWByiPWu08LA

The main principles for the construction and development of the Regional Grouping of Forces (RGF) are:

- conformity of the goals, tasks, and content of the building and development of national armed forces, other troops and military formations with the objective needs of ensuring military security;
- unity of requirements for the development of the armed forces of the participating states;
- coordinated planning of joint measures to ensure the functioning of the RGF.

On October 16, aviation elements of the regional grouping of forces from Russia began arriving in Belarus. It was specified that this decision was due to military activity in the border areas of neighboring countries.²⁹

On December 3, actions to develop the RGF progressed: the Ministers of Defense of Belarus and Russia signed a protocol on amendments to the Agreement between the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation on Joint Provision of Regional Security in the Military Sphere of December 19, 1997.³⁰

Oleg Belokonev, Chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly Commission on Security and Defense of the Union State, commented on this as follows: "We see that large-scale infrastructure preparations are underway near our western borders for receiving a large number of aircraft and equipment, and pipelines are being laid for their rapid refueling. Naturally, the Union State must adequately respond and take measures that will allow us to quickly implement strategic deterrence measures. The operational equipping of territories for the regional grouping of troops, which is currently deployed in Belarus, is on the agenda. I note that the numerical strength of this allied grouping is not stipulated, and we can increase it as much as we deem sufficient to cool some hotheads in the West."³¹

²⁹ <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-i-putin-dogovorilis-o-razvertyvanii-sovmestnoj-regionalnoj-gruppirovki-vojsk-528286-2022/>

³⁰ <https://www.belta.by/society/view/v-belarus-nachala-pribyvat-aviatsionnaja-sostavljajuschaja-regionalnoj-gruppirovki-vojsk-iz-rossii-529584-2022/>

³¹ <https://www.belta.by/society/view/hrenin-i-shojgu-podpisali-protokol-ob-izmenenijah-v-soglashenie-o-sovmestnom-obespechenii-regionalnoj-538172-2022/>

It is particularly noteworthy that among the measures to ensure the military security of the Union State, its military doctrine states that "the nuclear weapons of the Russian Federation will remain an important factor in preventing the outbreak of nuclear military conflicts and military conflicts using conventional weapons."

This is further confirmed by Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson M. Zakharova, who stated: "As for the interaction between Russia and Belarus in the military-nuclear sphere, it is carried out strictly within the borders of the Union State, whose territory forms a single defense space."³²

It is precisely based on the aforementioned point of the Union State's Military Doctrine that Lukashenka initiated the deployment of nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory, which he considers a guarantee of his personal security. It can be stated that with the increasing successes of the Ukrainian army on the front lines, the dictator began especially intensely to promote the topic of nuclear weapon deployment in Belarus, aiming to use it for nuclear blackmail against both Ukraine and NATO countries.

Given that the command of the regional grouping of forces is jointly determined by the defense ministries of Belarus and Russia, the risks increase that, with its greatly diminishing military sovereignty after February 2022, the RGF will be directly subordinate to Moscow. This fundamentally changes the regional security system, considering Russia's aggression against Ukraine. In fact, conditions have been created not only for a repeat of aggression from Belarusian territory against Ukraine but also preliminary conditions for possible aggression against NATO countries.

Beyond the increased risks of Belarusian military personnel being involved in Russian aggressive actions, there are also growing risks to the independence of the Republic of Belarus, as Belarus becomes part of a unified military architecture with the Russian Federation, including part of the air defense architecture. These processes are occurring under the guise of the Union State, despite Belarus being a member of the CSTO. This indicates a significant reduction in Belarus's military sovereignty.

³²https://xn--c1angqbdpdf.xn--p1ai/actual_comment/234667/

Section 2. Military-Economic and Military-Technical Cooperation within the Framework of the Union State

In recent years, besides military cooperation, military-economic and military-technical cooperation between Belarus and Russia has also intensified, including within the framework of the Union State.

Historically, the first bilateral document in this area was the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Russian Federation on Military-Technical Cooperation of October 29, 1993. This agreement provides for the possibility of mutual development and supply of armaments, ammunition, and military equipment.

Issues of intellectual property protection were regulated by the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Russian Federation on Mutual Protection of Rights to Intellectual Property Results Used and Obtained During Bilateral Military-Technical Cooperation, of April 21, 2005. The procedure for supplying military products was specified in the Treaty between the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation on the Development of Military-Technical Cooperation of December 10, 2009.

"Military products" are understood to mean armaments, military equipment, work, services, intellectual property results, including exclusive rights thereto (intellectual property), and information in the military-technical field, as well as any other products, works, and services that, in accordance with the legislation of either Party, are classified as military products.

Issues of control over the use of military products were regulated by the Agreement between the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation of November 25, 2011, on the procedure for monitoring the presence and targeted use of military products supplied under the Treaty between the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation on the Development of Military-Technical Cooperation of December 10, 2009. This agreement grants the supplying party the right to monitor the presence and targeted use of its military products and obliges the other Party to provide the necessary conditions for such control (including not refusing to accept control groups from the supplying party).

Today, the Belarusian military-industrial complex is a crucial element in the uninterrupted functioning of the Russian war machine. The Lukashenka regime fully supports Russia's systematic efforts to modernize its army, create new models of weapons and military equipment, localize defense production, and strengthen its human and industrial potential.

Even before the start of Russian aggression, according to the State Military-Industrial Committee of the Republic of Belarus, over 90 Belarusian enterprises supplied about 1,800 types of components and weapon elements to more than 200 enterprises of Russia's defense-industrial complex. Until recently, the share of supplies from Belarus in Russia's defense orders was around 15%.³³

The State Military-Industrial Committee of Belarus has established cooperation with the authorities of the Russian Federation, organized collaboration within the framework of the Belarusian-Russian Intergovernmental Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation, various working groups on cooperation between enterprises of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation, and interaction at the governmental level.

Military-technical cooperation between Minsk and Moscow is currently developing in various directions: duty-free supplies of components and elements for armaments, joint development and production of weapons and military equipment, modernization and repair of previously manufactured equipment, and the execution of research and development work.

Cooperation between Belarus and Russia in the military-industrial complex also occurs through the creation of interstate military-industrial groups (e.g., "Defense Systems," "Precision," "Electronic Technologies," which include enterprises from both Belarus and Russia), as well as joint ventures (JV "Vizir," JV "Soelis," JV "REB Technology").³⁴

Even after the start of the war in Ukraine, despite the threat of sanctions, military-economic cooperation with Russian companies continues. Supplies of components for various types of weapons used by the Russian army and other illegal formations fighting in Ukraine on Russia's side continue. In May 2022, Lukashenka's Prime Minister R. Golovchenko confirmed on the "Belarus-1" TV channel that Belarus supplies its weapons to Russia.³⁵

³³ <https://eurasia.expert/voenno-tekhnicheskoe-sotrudnichestvo-rossii-i-belarusi-perspektivy-i-riski>

³⁴ <https://elib.bsu.by/bitstream/123456789/210345/1/%D0%A2%D0%B8%D1%85%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87%20%D0%92%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F%20%D1%8D%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0.pdf>

According to the Office of the President of Ukraine, an analysis of the Russian army's weaponry in Ukraine shows widespread use of technological components produced by a number of Belarusian companies, including JSC "Planar," JSC "Integral," JSC "Peleng," CJSC "Professional Network Systems," JSC "KB Display," LLC "Itelsis Bel," JSC "NIIEVM."³⁶

After the completely falsified "elections" in Belarus in 2020, on September 14, 2020, Russian President V. Putin, at a meeting with A. Lukashenka, promised to provide the latter with a state loan of 1.5 billion US dollars. And in September 2021, Lukashenka agreed with Moscow on a list of Russian weaponry that Belarus would purchase from Russia by 2025 for more than 1 billion US dollars.³⁸

Already after the start of the war in Ukraine, the leadership of Russia and Belarus initiated an extensive import substitution program in 2022, for which Russia is allocating another loan of 1.5 billion US dollars to the Lukashenka regime, of which at least 200 million US dollars will be directed specifically to the implementation of projects in the military-industrial sphere.³⁹

In particular, the production of microelectronic components for the Russian military-industrial complex is planned to be carried out at JSC "Integral." Projects are also planned at JSC "Gomselmash," to which the military-industrial enterprise JSC "Gomel Radio Plant" was recently merged.⁴⁰ Presumably, these Gomel enterprises were responsible for the assembly of Iranian kamikaze drones.

³⁵ <https://newizv.ru/news/2022-05-25/premier-belorussii-podtverdil-postavki-oruzhiya-v-rf-360060>

³⁶ <https://www.president.gov.ua/ru/news/sankcijna-grupa-yermaka-makfoli-na-pracyuvala-novij-dokument-79393>

³⁷ <https://soyuz.by/ekonomika/rossiya-predostavit-belarusi-kredit-v-1-5-mlrd>

³⁸ <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/905994-lukashenko-belorussiya-rossiya-zakupka-vooruzhenie>

³⁹ <https://reform.by/337495-pantus-rossijskie-200-mln-dollarov-na-voennoe-importozameshhenija-vlozhat-v-mikroelektroniku>

⁴⁰ <https://reform.by/gomelskij-radiozavod-prisoedinjajut-k-gomselmashu>

Moreover, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine reported that Belarus, with Iran's help, plans to establish the production of shells for barrel artillery and multiple launch rocket systems. The possibility of assembling rocket-propelled grenades from imported components is also being explored.⁴¹

As part of the so-called 28 integration programs of the Union State, the threat of partial or complete loss of Belarus's economic sovereignty has increased. Macroeconomic and monetary policies are being harmonized, as are customs and tax legislation. A unified information system for regulatory bodies is being created, which allows Moscow not only to manage the Belarusian economy but also to monitor it, controlling every step of Belarusian economic entities.

Russian companies will also gain access to Belarusian state orders and public procurement. Unification will affect industry, agriculture, trade, and the communications and information sector. Russian capital already controls a significant portion of Belarus's economy. For example, 6 out of 11 of Belarus's largest banks are owned by Russian investors.⁴² And this dependence existed and began to strengthen long before the large-scale Western sanctions.

Chapter 3. Actions of the Regime Accelerating the Integration of Belarus and Russia

Section 1. Destruction of Civil Society in Belarus and Creation of a Simulation of Pro-Russian Pseudo-Civil Structures in its Place

Considering the fact that Lukashenka in 2019 sought to resist the deepening of integration processes within the Union State, the Russian side sought to use a variety of tools to deepen and accelerate integration. One of the factors slowing this process was the developed civil society in Belarus, which was largely oriented towards preserving Belarus's independence.

The activities of civil society organizations in Belarus were even interpreted in some articles as a threat to the Union State, since "their activities in the future could lead to the denunciation of the Union Treaty or its transformation towards a "soft confederation."⁴³

Or they were even linked to the activities of neighboring states: "Preparing for a coup d'état, Poland, the USA, and the European Union literally entangled Belarus with an impressive network of Western-funded non-governmental organizations (cultural, educational, leisure, sports, youth, etc.), which, regardless of their formal focus, acted as conduits of Western, primarily Polish, influence, breeding grounds for hostility towards the Russian World, Russia, and the Union State."⁴⁴

In order to avert this threat and accelerate integration processes, the Lukashenka regime actively began to dismantle civil society starting in 2021.

During his visit to Minsk in June 2021, Russian Security Council Secretary N. Patrushev stated that "attention must be paid to <...> the activities of non-governmental and non-profit organizations <...> If we talk about Belarus, their ultimate goal is to change the system and power in your country. In fact, we have been observing this recently, and you, who live in Belarus, see it best of all."⁴⁵

Following N. Patrushev, A. Lukashenka in July 2021, speaking about non-governmental organizations, admitted that "a cleanup is underway." And already in December, he accused civil society structures of foreign funding, attempting to organize a coup and rebellion, and declared their liquidation. According to Lukashenka, "The Collective West does not abandon attempts to reduce the level of integration interaction in Eurasia, including through civil society institutions."⁴⁶

⁴¹ <https://www.unian.net/war/bilorus-planuye-nalagoditi-virobnictvo-snaryadiv-dlya-stvolnoji-artileriji-ta-rszv-rozvidka-12048621.html>

⁴² <https://ilex.by/komu-prinadlezhat-belorusskie-banki/>

⁴³ <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/rol-institutov-grazhdanskogo-obschestva-v-protsessah-vzaimointegratsii-rossii-i-belorussii/viewer>

⁴⁴ <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/soyuznoe-qosudarstvo-v-sovremennyh-geopoliticheskikh-realiyah/viewer>

⁴⁵ <https://www.sb.by/articles/patrushev-rasskazal-na-kakie-ugrozy-sleduet-obratit-vnimanie-belorusam.html>

⁴⁶ <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/soveshchanie-o-protivodeystvii-sankcionnym-meram-1639641613>

According to human rights defenders, over 1200 public organizations have been shut down since 2020. Official data from the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus shows that from January 1, 2021, to January 1, 2023, the number of registered public associations decreased by 477 (from 3021 to 2544)⁴⁷, but this does not account for a significant portion of associations still in the process of liquidation.

At the same time, the illegitimate authorities, in contrast to real NGOs, are creating so-called GONGOs – non-governmental organizations effectively created by the state. Examples include Yuri Voskresensky's "Round Table of Democratic Forces" or Dmitry Belyakov's "Systemic Human Rights Protection." The latter also established the International Charitable Foundation named after Emil Czeczko, named after the Polish defector who made unsubstantiated claims in state media about crimes committed by Polish military and border guards during the 2021 migration crisis.

Many of these so-called GONGOs have united into "patriotic forces" (their first forum took place on August 9, 2022, and a year later, a meeting of the Staff of Patriotic Forces of the Republic of Belarus was held). These so-called "patriotic" organizations have a pronounced pro-Russian orientation, as evidenced by their declaration adopted on August 9, 2023, which states that "Belarus remains true to its obligations within the Union State, based on an understanding of the common path of the East Slavic peoples, despite all adversities and trials."⁴⁸

More detailed information on the structure of the pro-Russian pseudo-civil society is presented in the study by iSANS expert Yan Avseyushkin, who conditionally identifies 5 categories of this phenomenon.⁴⁹

It is important to note that special forms of interaction with the state are provided for the largest GONGOs (Bral, Belarusian Women's Union, veterans' association). These are related to participation in the so-called "All-Belarusian People's Assembly," which gained the status of a state body and whose powers were significantly expanded during the "constitutional reform" of 2022.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ <https://minjust.gov.by/>

⁴⁸ <https://soyuz.by/aktualno/v-belarusi-prinyata-deklaraciya-patrioticheskikh-sil>

⁴⁹ <https://www.svaboda.org/a/32633365.html>

At present, a significant portion of national minority public organizations in Belarus has been liquidated. The Lukashenka regime is liquidating the Lithuanian public association "Gimtine," the Ukrainian cultural center "Sich," and the Polish cultural and educational association "Polonichka" has already been liquidated. The Grodno Regional Prosecutor's Office has filed a lawsuit with the Economic Court for the liquidation of LLC "Klerigata," which effectively carried out the activities of the unregistered public association Union of Poles in Belarus. The Minsk Regional Court is considering the liquidation of the Belarusian Association of Roma "Roma." Against this backdrop, organizations associated with Russia continue to operate peacefully on Belarusian territory.

In January 2022, a new version of the Education Code was approved. In accordance with it, national minorities were deprived of the opportunity to organize the educational process in their native language starting from the 2022/2023 academic year.⁵¹ In fact, the Polish and Lithuanian national minorities (previously, there were 2 schools with Polish as the language of instruction and 2 with Lithuanian in Belarus) lost the opportunity to study in their native language. At the same time, the dominant language of instruction in Belarus is not the indigenous Belarusian, but the Russian language (90% of schoolchildren in Belarus receive education in Russian).

Against the backdrop of the liquidation of independent NGOs in Belarus, large Russian public associations and foundations funded by the Kremlin have become more active, including Rossotrudnichestvo, the Gorchakov Fund, the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation, and the Compatriots Support Fund.

Furthermore, within the framework of the Union State's integration processes, pseudo-civil society institutions have also been created and are operating. For example, in 2017, the Public Chamber of the Union State was established, aiming to popularize the Union project and discuss the effectiveness of bilateral programs and events. There is also the SOYUZ civil initiative, which aims to popularize the ideas of Belarusian-Russian integration within the Union State. Since 2013, the Association of Trade Unions of the Union State has existed.

⁵⁰ <https://pravo.by/novosti/obshchestvenno-politicheskie-i-v-oblasti-prava/2022/august/71316/>

⁵¹ <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12200154&p1=1>

The destruction of independent Belarusian NGOs and the emergence of a network of pro-Russian pseudo-civil society organizations, combined with their close interaction with Russian public associations and foundations, create conditions for the rise of a "Union State pseudo-civil society." This phenomenon could pave the way for accelerated political "integration" between Belarus and Russia within the framework of the Union State project.

Section 2. Creation of Conditions for Further Political Integration of Belarus and Russia

In addition to creating a pseudo-civil society of the Union State, steps are being taken to form an updated political system in Belarus that would lay the groundwork for subsequent, closer "integration" within the framework of the reanimated Union State project.

The possibility that Russia may have concrete plans for transforming the political system in Belarus and creating a "full-fledged" Union State can be inferred from a document obtained by Yahoo News. This document was allegedly provided to the publication by a source from Vladimir Putin's administration.

Information provided in this document should be viewed with a high degree of skepticism, as the authenticity of the document has not been proven. At the same time, the actions undertaken by the Lukashenka regime to deepen integration within the Union State largely correspond to the plans described in the document, allegedly developed by the Department of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation for Cross-Border Cooperation.

According to its provisions, Russia's main strategic goal in Belarus is the creation of a full-fledged Union State by 2030. The 10-page text, voiced by journalists, also proposes concrete steps in this direction.

Among these steps in the political sphere, the formation of stable pro-Russian influence groups within the Belarusian political elite is planned, alongside "limiting the influence" of local "nationalist and pro-Western forces." It also envisages the completion of constitutional reform in Belarus on Russian terms and, as a consequence, the exertion of a formative influence on the Belarusian party-political system.⁵²

Thus, the logical culmination and political formalization of the Russian imperial project should be the political integration of Belarus and Russia within the framework of the Union State. A key element for achieving this goal will most likely be the reformatting of Belarus's party-political system and the subsequent creation of a Parliament of the Union State.

Currently, a single functioning representative and legislative body of the Union State – the Parliament of the Union State – is absent. Nevertheless, this body is envisioned by the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State of December 8, 1999. At present, its function is performed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union State, but it cannot be considered a full-fledged political body at this stage.

The emergence of a pseudo-civil society of the Union State creates conditions for the transformation of the public demand of pro-Russian forces into the formation of political structures and parties along the Russian model. This process is already occurring with the full support of the Lukashenka regime and its vertical power structure. To ensure control over political parties, the Republic of Belarus adopted the Law "On Amending Laws on the Activities of Political Parties and Other Public Associations" in February 2023.⁵³ The law stipulates the need for re-registration of existing political parties, which will be carried out by the Ministry of Justice. Currently, the Ministry of Justice has decided to re-register four political parties: "Belaya Rus," "Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus," "Communist Party of Belarus," and "Republican Party of Labor and Justice."⁵⁴ Each of these parties is, as it were, a copy of Russian political parties represented in the State Duma of the Russian Federation and has close ties with them.

For example, the public association "Belaya Rus" existed since 2007, but only in 2023 was it transformed into a political party. It is "Belaya Rus" that is assigned the role of the ruling party in Belarus's newly created party system.

⁵² <https://investigatebel.org/ru/investigations/leaked-kremlin-set-to-subjugate-belarus>

⁵³ <https://pravo.by/novosti/obshchestvenno-politicheskie-i-v-oblasti-prava/2023/february/73351/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/crgjdmdn9edo>

Andrei Klimov, Deputy Chairman of the Committee of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation on International Affairs and a member of "United Russia," reacted to the emergence of the "Belaya Rus" party by stating: "We now have a powerful partner within our Union State."⁵⁵

Previously, "United Russia" had partnership relations with "Belaya Rus" as a public association, but now the parties plan to sign a full-fledged inter-party cooperation agreement.

The Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus (LDPB) was established in 1994, based on the Belarusian branch of the Liberal Democratic Party of the Soviet Union. At this stage, this party is clearly personalized, and its policy is entirely determined by its leader, O. Gaidukevich. It's important to note that the LDPB has always advocated for closer ties and integration with "brotherly" Russia, including all sorts of unions, encompassing military and state systems. The LDPB has a cooperation agreement with the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia.

Another party that managed to undergo re-registration is the Republican Party of Labor and Justice (RPTS). It's significant that the RPTS advocates for the recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Its political-executive committee unanimously recognized the results of the March 16, 2014, referendum in Crimea. The RPTS, in turn, is allied with another Russian party represented in the State Duma – "A Just Russia."

The fourth party approved for re-registration is the Communist Party of Belarus, which is consequently allied with the communists in Russia. Meanwhile, all genuinely opposition political parties were liquidated during the so-called re-registration process.

Thus, prerequisites are being created for embedding Belarus's party-political system into Russia's party system, leading to a unique unification of party representation in the parliaments of Russia and Belarus. This process will most likely be completed after the parliamentary elections in Belarus and Russia.

This could open a direct path to the start of political "integration" within the framework of the Union State by creating a Parliament of the Union State, which fully aligns with the statements made in the media by representatives of the regime, who can be considered, to some extent, ideologues of the Union State.

⁵⁵ <https://sputnik.by/20230318/edinaya-rossiya-podpishet-soglashenie-s-partiey-belaya-rus-vesnoy-1073363284.html>

For instance, pro-government philosopher Lev Krishtapovich, a lecturer at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Belarus, when asked, "What do you see as the paths for the future development of the Union State and cooperation between our two peoples?" gave the following answer: "In my opinion, we should not talk about modernization, but about fulfilling the Treaty on the Union State. That is, creating union government bodies, union currency, union citizenship, making the Union State a subject of the world community—in short, building a full-fledged Union State."⁵⁶

Section 3. Belarusian Society's Attitude Towards Close Integration Between Belarus and Russia

Unfortunately, no current independent sociological studies have been conducted on the attitude towards the Union State and the desire for deeper integration with Russia. However, recent studies on the geopolitical choice of Belarusian society, conducted by Andrei Vardomatsky's Analytical Workshop and Chatham House, allow for certain conclusions to be drawn. According to Chatham House data, 14% of respondents advocate for a geopolitical alliance with the EU, while 38% support an alliance with the Russian Federation. 23% are convinced that Belarus is better off outside of any geopolitical alliances.

However, if we examine in more detail which alliance option is acceptable to the respondents, it becomes clear that the ambitious plans of the Union State's ideologues for maximum "integration" of Belarus and Russia within the Union State are not supported by Belarusian society. Supporters of Belarus's full entry into the Russian Federation are few, not exceeding 4%. The majority of those who support the development of cooperation with Russia prefer only forms of economic integration, not political. Thus, 34% of respondents advocated only for a free trade zone between the countries. Slightly more than a third of respondents support the idea of a single economic space without political unification.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ <https://eurasia.expert/authors/lev-krishtapovich/>

According to the Belarusian Analytical Workshop, since the war in Ukraine began, there's been a slight decline in Belarusians' pro-Russian sentiments and a rise in pro-European attitudes. This explains the decreased influence of propaganda; as Andrei Vardomatsky notes, there's been a "saturation of Belarusian mass geopolitical consciousness with pro-Russian orientations."⁵⁸ It's important to understand this saturation happened even though the Belarusian media landscape is completely controlled by regime and pro-Russian media, and it's thoroughly permeated by pro-Russian, and to some extent pro-Union State, narratives.

This topic is thoroughly explored in the study "Propaganda of Deepening Belarusian-Russian Integration in Pro-Russian Internet Media of Belarus" by political science candidate Taras Polovoy. The main conclusion of the study is that the rhetoric used by Russian and pro-Russian Belarusian internet media is virtually identical, with no significant differences regardless of the propaganda source. It found that informational influence is achieved through a set of identical theses, techniques, and formulations that justify the common history, culture, and the necessity of unity between the Belarusian and Russian peoples. It's noted that the factual identification of Belarusian national interests with Russian interests is used to justify the necessity and inevitability of Belarus's civilizational choice in favor of Russia.⁵⁹

One of the main roles in asserting these narratives is assigned to the media holding being created within the Union State. This media holding's tasks will also include preventing any attempts to change the character and landscape of the media space in Belarus, and eliminating narratives from the Belarusian media field that differ from those produced by Kremlin propaganda.

Already, pro-Russian activists and propagandists in Belarus are actively attacking cultural elements (for example, the Latin alphabet, the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) that relate to a broader European context and are not connected to the Russian imperial ideological narrative.

⁵⁷ <https://eurasia.expert/authors/lev-krishtapovich/>

⁵⁸ <https://euroradio.fm/ru/vliyanie-rossii-padaet-no-tret-belorusov-ne-pugaet-yadernoe-oruzhie-socopros>

⁵⁹ <http://www.studiapolitologiczne.pl/pdf-145018-70558?filename=%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20.pdf>

Despite massive propaganda efforts, there hasn't been a significant increase in support among Belarusians for deeper integration with Russia. This is confirmed by A. Vardomatsky's research, which shows only 4.4% of respondents support joining Russia. Belarusian society isn't ready to enter the Union State as it's being imposed by Moscow.

Nevertheless, the regime is using administrative methods and creating simulacra of civil society and political parties to justify "integration." These fabricated entities, much like the dictator himself, do not represent the opinion of the Belarusian people.

⁶⁰ <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/14-07-2023-andrej-var-domatskij-v-belarusi-ostanilsya-rost-prorossijskoj-orientatsii>

CONCLUSION

Under Lukashenka's leadership, Belarus poses a direct security threat to at least four European countries (Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia) due to its position within Russia's sphere of influence.

Despite this, the Union State has not provided significant economic benefits for the Republic of Belarus. On the contrary, bilateral relations between Russia and Belarus have seen numerous economic conflicts.

However, the Russian Federation has used the Union State as a facade to achieve its military-political, and now even domestic political, objectives.¹

The Union State is currently not a subject of international law, yet it serves as a pretext for increasing Russia's influence in Belarus and justifying the Russian Federation's aggressive imperial policy. It can also be assumed that Vladimir Putin plans to win the 2024 Russian presidential elections by campaigning as a "gatherer of lands," leveraging the rhetoric surrounding the Union State.

From a strategic perspective, the denunciation of the Union State treaty will not lead to negative consequences for the Republic of Belarus. The Union State project itself has not yielded any significant results for its participants over its 25 years of existence.

Instead, Russia is using the Union State project as an instrument of its imperial policy, aimed at destroying the independence of the Republic of Belarus, which represents an existential challenge to Belarusian statehood.²

Therefore, it is critically important for Belarusian democratic forces and their international partners to create conditions to detach Belarus from the Russian center of influence. At the same time, it is essential to clearly define Belarus's geopolitical choice, offering and justifying a European alternative to the so-called Union State to the public.

APPENDIX

Working Bodies of the Union State and their Functions

The supreme body of the Union State is the Supreme State Council. It comprises the heads of state, heads of government, and heads of the parliamentary chambers of both the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation. Prime Ministers and heads of parliamentary chambers participate in the meetings of the Supreme State Council.

The main tasks of the Supreme State Council are:

- Determines the most important issues for the development of the Union State;
- Forms the bodies of the Union State within its competence, including sectoral and functional management bodies.
- Appoints elections to the House of Representatives of the Union State Parliament.
- Approves the budget of the Union State, adopted by the Union State Parliament, and annual reports on its execution.
- Approves international treaties of the Union State ratified by the Parliament.
- Approves the state symbols of the Union State.
- Determines the location of the Union State bodies.
- Hears the annual report of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Union State on the implementation of adopted decisions.

The Supreme State Council also performs other functions assigned to its purview by the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State, or those submitted for its consideration by the member states.

Within its powers, the Supreme State Council issues decrees, resolutions, and directives. Acts of the Supreme State Council are adopted unanimously by the member states. An act is not adopted if one of the member states votes against it. Voting at the meetings of the Supreme State Council on behalf of a member state is carried out by the head of state or a person authorized by them.

The Chairman of the Supreme State Council is one of the heads of the member states on a rotational basis, unless they agree otherwise. Currently, A. Lukashenka serves as the Chairman of the Supreme State Council. He has held this position since 2000.

Chairman of the Supreme State Council:

Organizes the work of the Supreme State Council, presides over its meetings, and signs acts adopted by the Supreme State Council, as well as laws of the Union State.

Addresses the Parliament with annual messages on the state of the Union State and its main directions of development.

By instruction of the Supreme State Council, conducts international negotiations and signs international treaties on behalf of the Union State, representing the Union State in relations with foreign states and international organizations.

Organizes control over the implementation of this Treaty and decisions adopted by the Supreme State Council.

Within their powers, gives instructions to the Council of Ministers of the Union State.

By instruction of the Supreme State Council, performs other functions.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Union State of Belarus and Russia

On April 2, 1996, the Treaty on the Formation of the Community of Belarus and Russia was signed. This document established the Parliamentary Assembly as the Community's representative body, to be formed with equal representation from the national parliaments of Russia and Belarus.

At a meeting of Belarusian and Russian parliamentary leaders on April 29, 1996, in St. Petersburg, the Agreement on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Community was signed. The Parliamentary Assembly was tasked with drafting legislative acts and submitting relevant proposals to bodies with legislative initiative.

Since the Community's formation in April 1996 (which became the Union of Belarus and Russia in April 1997, and the Union State in December 1999), the Parliamentary Assembly's deputies have laid the groundwork for the Union State's legal system.

The powers, composition, and operational procedures of the Parliamentary Assembly are defined in its Rules of Procedure, approved on June 13, 1997. The most recent amendments and additions were made on September 16, 2003.

Council of Ministers of the Union State

The Council of Ministers is the executive body of the Union State. It includes the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Union State, the heads of government of Belarus and Russia, the ministers of foreign affairs, economy, and finance of the member states, the heads of the main sectoral and functional governing bodies of the Union State, and the State Secretary of the Union State.

The Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Union State is appointed by the Supreme State Council of the Union State. This position can be held by the head of government of one of the member states on a rotational basis.

In accordance with its competence, as defined by this Treaty and decisions of the Supreme State Council, the Council of Ministers:

- Develops the main directions of common policy on issues concerning the development of the Union State and submits them to the Supreme State Council for consideration.

- Submits drafts of union laws and fundamental legislative acts to the Parliament of the Union State.

- Ensures control over the implementation of the provisions of the Union Treaty and acts of the Union State, and, if necessary, submits reasoned representations to the member states in case of non-fulfillment of obligations arising therefrom.

- Develops and submits the draft budget of the Union State to the Parliament of the Union State, ensures budget execution, and presents annual and semi-annual reports on budget execution to the Parliament.

- Ensures the creation and development of a single economic space, and the implementation of a single financial, tax, credit, monetary, currency, pricing, and trade policy.

Promotes a coordinated policy of the member states in international affairs, in the sphere of defense, security, ensuring legality, rights and freedoms of citizens, ensuring public order and combating crime, as well as in the fields of culture, science, education, healthcare, social security, and environmental protection.

The Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Union State:

Directs the activities of the Council of Ministers and organizes its work.

Submits annual reports on the Council of Ministers' activities to the Supreme State Council and the Parliament of the Union State.

Signs acts of the Council of Ministers.

By instruction of the Supreme State Council and within the powers granted, conducts negotiations and signs international treaties on behalf of the Union State.

High-Level Group of the Council of Ministers of the Union State

The High-Level Group of the Council of Ministers of the Union State (hereinafter — HLG) was established in accordance with Resolution No. 26 of the Council of Ministers of the Union State dated July 18, 2012.

The HLG performs the following functions:

- Discusses current issues of Russian-Belarusian cooperation and Union State development.
- Reviews draft agendas for meetings of the Council of Ministers and the Supreme State Council of the Union State, and the progress of preparing agreed materials on agenda items.
- Performs other functions in accordance with the instructions of the Council of Ministers of the Union State.

The Co-Chairs of the HLG are appointed by the Council of Ministers of the Union State from among the deputy (first deputy) heads of government of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation, upon the recommendation of the heads of government of the member states.

The HLG, in addition to its Co-Chairs, includes the State Secretary of the Union State.

Representatives of ministries and departments of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation, as well as bodies of the Union State, are invited to the meetings.

Currently, the HLG serves as a working body for synchronizing the legislation of Belarus and Russia within the framework of implementing integration programs.

Standing Committee of the Union State

The Standing Committee of the Union State is the working apparatus of the Supreme State Council of the Union State and the Council of Ministers of the Union State. It was established in accordance with the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State and Resolution No. 13 of the Supreme State Council of the Union State dated June 27, 2000.

In its activities, the Standing Committee is guided by the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State, signed on December 8, 1999, as well as the Action Program for implementing the Treaty's provisions, the Statute of the Supreme State Council of the Union State, the Regulation on the Council of Ministers of the Union State, other normative legal acts, and the national legislations of the member states.

The Standing Committee organizes the implementation of the Treaty's provisions, develops proposals for the Union State's development strategy, and coordinates the work of the Union State's sectoral and functional bodies. In cooperation with the relevant bodies of the Union State's member states, it conducts preliminary reviews of Union State programs, projects, and activities, submits conclusions on them to the Council of Ministers, and informs it about their progress. It prepares proposals for the Council of Ministers of the Union State regarding draft laws of the Union State and the harmonization of member states' legislation. It forms and submits draft agendas for the Supreme State Council and Council of Ministers meetings, as well as work plans, for their consideration. The Standing Committee ensures interaction between the Council of Ministers of the Union State and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union of Belarus and Russia.

The work of the Standing Committee is led by the State Secretary of the Union State. The Standing Committee also includes four members who serve as his deputies by virtue of their positions. Two members of the Standing Committee represent the Belarusian side, and two represent the Russian side. The Standing Committee is accountable to the Council of Ministers.

The supreme body of the Union State is the Supreme State Council of the Union State. It is a high-level political structure.

In its operations, it can address any fundamental issues regarding the development and activities of the Union State, establish new bodies, abolish existing ones, approve a unified budget, international treaties, and more. The Chairman organizes the work of the Supreme State Council. A. Lukashenko has held this position continuously since 2000, although rotation is possible if the heads of the two states decide to implement it.

A distinct place in the Union State's institutional structure belongs to its parliamentary component, whose role is carried out by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union of Belarus and Russia. Its institutionalization occurred after the signing of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State, which gave the body its modern name. This body has its own regulations, adopted on June 13, 1997. The Parliamentary Assembly's work provides observer status to the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, the Parliament of the Republic of South Ossetia, the People's Assembly—Parliament of the Republic of Abkhazia, and the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy. This representative body comprises delegations from the chambers of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus, with 36 deputies from each. The primary function of the Parliamentary Assembly is to develop draft legislative acts falling within the Union State's jurisdiction. Additionally, it ratifies international treaties concluded on behalf of the Union State, approves its budget, and facilitates the creation of a unified information and legal system for the Union State.

The executive functions within the Union State are assigned to the Council of Ministers. This body includes the Chairman, the heads of government, the ministers of foreign affairs, economy, and finance from both states, the heads of the Union State's sectoral and functional bodies, and the State Secretary. The Chairman is appointed by the Supreme State Council on a rotational basis, serving as one of the heads of government. The Council of Ministers performs crucial work in organizing the Union State's activities and fulfilling its designated tasks.

Specifically, the Council of Ministers of the Union State develops the main directions for implementing policies for the development of the Union State; submits the main draft laws to the Parliament of the Union State; monitors the implementation of decisions adopted within its framework; develops and submits the draft budget to the Parliament of the Union State, ensures its execution, and prepares a report on budget execution; deals with the creation and development of a single economic space; promotes a unified and coordinated policy in the sphere of international relations.

The Standing Committee is the main permanent working body of the Union State, performing the functions of the working apparatus for the Supreme State Council and the Council of Ministers of the Union State. The functions of the Standing Committee of the Union State are mainly technical in nature. For instance, the Standing Committee practically implements the provisions of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State, develops proposals for development strategy, coordinates the work of sectoral and functional bodies, prepares agendas for meetings of the supreme bodies of the Union State, and so on. In its activities, the Standing Committee is directly accountable to the Council of Ministers of the Union State. The Standing Committee consists of four members who, by virtue of their positions, are deputies to the State Secretary (two from Belarus, two from Russia).

If we speak generally about the institutional structure of the Union State, initially, based on the text of the 1999 Treaty, it was planned to create 8 structures: the Supreme State Council, the Parliament, the Council of Ministers, the Standing Committee, the Court, the Accounts Chamber, a Unified Emission Center, and a Human Rights Commission.



You can find projects by the NAM team at the following link:

- **Accountability of the Lukashenka Regime for the Illegal Transfer of Ukrainian Children**
- **Accountability of the Lukashenka Regime for Crimes Against Humanity**
- **And other projects by our team.**