

III. Regional context

MOST IMPORTANT VECTORS OF BELARUS' POLITICS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED

The Belarusian parliament refused to mark down Russian as a strategic partner of their country

Only 14 deputies voted for the proposal to make a corresponding entry into the law «On Approving the Fundamental Lines of Domestic and Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus», which was adopted on 5th October by the lower chamber of the National Assembly in the second (last) reading. 87 deputies opposed the proposal. The Chamber has 110 parliamentarians altogether.

When approving the wording of the new legislative act clause-by-clause, some deputies proposed to complement the clause on the fundamental objectives of Belarus' foreign policy with the following statement: «Development of strategic partnership with the Russian Federation pursuant to the Treaty on the Formation of a Union State of 8th December 1999.» Taking the floor to validate the proposal, Ms. Abramova, who is considered chief representative of Russia's Yabloko Party in Belarus, provided the following justification for the initiative:

«We believe that strategic partnership between Belarus and Russia is not a variable; it is a constant, a baseline value. And this is not only because we have a union treaty with Russia and do not have any with other foreign states. This should be anchored in the fundamental objectives for a single reason that Russia is our leading economic partner with a receptive market for our goods, as can be seen from the sales dynamics over the many years of this country's independence. And this is not only because the RF side always supports Belarus in foreign policy directions. I would like to remind you, dear colleagues, of the speech made by President of Belarus at the 60th session of the UN General Assembly. The political meaning, as they say now, of the Belarusian President's message to the international community lay in an appeal to respect a people's right to choose its own way of development. The political meaning for a single particular addressee was quite concrete — President of Belarus actually stated that what had happened to Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq could not and should not happen to Belarus under any circumstances. There are at least three reasons to this: first, in Belarus there are no

formal causes for external intervention in a concentrated form, as this country does not have internal conflicts on inter-ethnic or inter-denominational grounds; second, no one can create in this country an externally driven conflict that could provide such a cause. And, third, we are in union with Russia — a great friendly nation.» The deputy said, «I would like to add a personal comment that it is the latter that almost entirely rules out the scenario of Yugoslavia or other variant of any foreign intervention. Even if someone already does not like the future actual results of the presidential election of 2006 at the forecast level. I am asking for your support of the amendment.»

But this appeal did not inspire Olga Abramova's fellow parliamentarians. Anatoli Krastuski, deputy chair of the parliamentary committee for international affairs and liaisons with the New Independent States, who was presenting the draft law, opposed these arguments with some of his own:

«First, the level of the policy law does not imply such concrete definitions, which is indicated by the generalized wording of its provisions. Otherwise, such a fundamental principle of a regulatory legal act as stability will be violated. Second, the peculiarities of relations between the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation are well-known and have their political, economic, and legal basis, which is significantly broader than the cited treaty. Third, presence of a reference to a particular legal act will call for constant introduction of amendments into the policy law in the event of amendment or abolition of this treaty or appearance of a new legal act regulating the relations between the two states, in particular, for instance, a Constitutional Act of the Union State. In other words, the law will become dependent on concrete circumstances of development of relations between the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation. Fourth, anchoring the tenet of development of strategic partnership with a single particular country in the law runs counter to the principle of our multi-vector foreign policy, proclaimed by the Republic of Belarus, which was once again openly reiterated by the President of this country in his recent speech in the UNO. Considering the dynamism and concrete forms of Belarus' cooperation within other alliances in the post-Soviet realm, it seems inexpedient to anchor provisions for development of integration processes with regard to only one state in a policy law.»

After that one would have the impression that the deputies became prostrate. On the one hand, they had heard so much of strategic partnership with Russia from Alexander Lukashenko that it was difficult for them to understand the point of waiving this provision. On the other hand, Belarusian deputies, by virtue of their election specifics, are extremely obedient to their superiors. And the latter did not approve of the amendment. Hence the above-cited voting results.

Evaluating them, Andrey Sannikov, former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, accentuated three points:

«The vote has once again confirmed that amendments, which have not been coordinated with the administration, do not get adopted even if they are extrinsically in line with the administration's policy. Second, this bears evidence to the existence of Russian lobby in Belarus, which operates through some deputies and seeks to link Belarus to Russia still more, not only through Lukashenko but also by means of such provisions in most essential documents. And,

lastly, let us not be concerned with Belarus at the moment. But in case a similar clause appears in any country's strategy, it is indicative only of its unilateral orientation and cooperation only with one country or party.»

Sergey Martynov, current Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, is of a different opinion. According to him, the law «On Approving the Fundamental Lines of Domestic and Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus» is adopted «forever» and should not be changed. The Minister noted that the draft law is of a «framework, conceptual nature» and, «by definition, should not contain definitized tenets.» In particular, it may not reflect the prospects of Belarus' interaction with concrete nations, including Russia. According to him, this document will be given «practical contents» in the course of the foreign-policy line, pursued by the government of this country.

Some Belarusian experts are not prone to dramatizing the refusal of the deputies of the lower chamber to enter the provision of strategic partnership with Russia in the policy document. They believe there is no need to introduce the clause about Russia in the national legislation. Indeed, the union with Russia (or orientation towards it) was anchored at the referendum long ago (the referendum of May 1995 is meant). It is implemented in the framework of inter-governmental regulations. And in general, it seems somewhat surprising that the proposal put forward by some deputies was not coordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Among Belarus' foreign policy objectives, which made part of the new law, there is one of «gaining a neutral status». Belarus is known to officially steer for neutrality. For instance, in the current Constitution (Article 18) it is recorded that «... the Republic of Belarus aims at making its territory a nuclear-free zone and its state a neutral one.»

How can membership in an international military organization (Collective Security Treaty Organization — CSTO) go together with a neutral policy? In his time, Stanislav Shushkevich, speaker of the Belarusian parliament, for a long time resisted Belarus' entry into this newly created organization, precisely for the reason that, in his opinion, neutrality and the (CSTO) are incompatible. But in the early 1990s the majority of the deputies, on the initiative of the pro-government group of «Belarus», brought the corresponding resolution through the Supreme Council and virtually forced Shushkevich to endorse the document developed in Tashkent.

However, Yelena Gritsenko, head of department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, is of a different opinion:

«I do not think there is a contradiction here. The CSTO is the only organization in the territory of the NIS that aims to defend the interests of the CSTO member-countries. This does not run counter to neutral status for, in the absence of a threat, the organization's functions encompass only information exchange and taking measures with respect to the problems that may represent a potential hazard. Neither the by-laws of the CSTO nor its position embed aggressiveness, which would run counter to the neutral state status of each of the member-countries.»

The opinion of Mecheslav Grib, another former head of the Belarusian parliament, is quite noteworthy. By the way, at the time of the CSTO creation he headed the parliamentary committee for national security, defense, and crime control. At that time he was one of Stan-

islav Shushkevich's most ardent opponents and believed that Belarus needed to join the CSTO as a defense-only organization. However, at present he thinks somewhat differently:

«At large, these two lines (neutrality and the CSTO membership) are incompatible because we should remain neutral with respect to all nations. At present no one threatens us or claims our territory. Therefore, we should stick to neutrality and not join anyone. As for the CSTO, when this Treaty was signed, it was meant that this organization is of defense-only nature. But if someone attacks one of the Treaty member-countries, the rest of the CSTO nations must help it. How will it be reconciled with neutral status then? It will not. So much for the defense nature of the CSTO! This has nothing to do with neutrality. The international community will not accept or understand such neutrality.»

This law, as deputy Krasutski noted, was adopted «for the first time in the life of this country and in the history of the Belarusian parliamentary system.» In the deputy's opinion, «this is quite consistent, as the Belarusian development model proved its viability in the realm of the NIS». Moreover, he claimed that none of the NIS countries, including the Russian Federation, had got such a document so far.

The new law identifies most important vectors of the State's activities. In accordance with this regulatory act, this country will structure its foreign and domestic policies for the future. The document has been developed on the basis of the Constitution and consists of two sections. The first one identifies domestic policy spheres. In the field of economics, the strategic objective is defined as establishing an effective socially-oriented market economy. The need for activation of investment and innovation operations is emphasized. The domestic policy of Belarus is based upon the principles of stability of the constitutional system, secured rights and liberties of citizens, equality of all forms of ownership, and social justice. The draft law reflects budget and finance, taxation, monetary, and foreign exchange policies. There have appeared new standards concerning investment and structural policy, healthcare, art, and housing relations. The second section records long-term foreign-policy orientation. It is built on the principles of enhancing the effectiveness of instruments of state sovereignty protection, voluntary entry into and participation in intergovernmental formations. Emphasis is laid on the importance of international cooperation and interaction in the space field. The foreign policy priorities now include such areas as education and tourism.

Vladimir Glod. 10.10.05.

REACTION TO DEMOCRATIC CHOICE

While Moscow is having a gripe session with Kiev by means of «gas diplomacy», the allied Minsk is attempting to uncoil another spiral of tension with Warsaw

Aggravation of relations between Moscow and Kiev concurrently with the enunciation of the Democratic Choice Commonwealth does not appear a simple coincidence. It was joined by Russia's neighboring countries from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The idea of the new Com-