

19 June 2023

## **Belarus: military obligations in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine**

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## Table of contents

|        |  |    |
|--------|--|----|
| 1.     | Armed forces in Belarus and military service .....   | 4  |
| 1.1.   | General state of armed forces in Belarus .....   | 4  |
| 1.2.   | Compulsory military service and other military obligations .....   | 4  |
| 2.     | February to September 2022.....  | 6  |
| 2.1.   | Belarus' role in Russia's act of aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022.....   | 6  |
| 2.2.   | Rumours and denials about the involvement of Belarusian soldiers in the war in Ukraine during the February-March 2022 phase.....         | 7  |
| 2.3.   | Autumn conscription from August 2022 .....   | 8  |
| 3.     | Following mobilisation in Russia in late September 2022 .....  | 9  |
| 3.1.   | New geopolitical environment in autumn 2022.....   | 9  |
| 3.2.   | Compulsory military censuses in Belarus from October 2022 to January 2023 .....  | 10 |
| 3.2.1. | October 2022: verifications of soldiers' combat ability and of data on men of fighting age .....   | 10 |
| 3.2.2. | 30 November 2022: general implementation of "data verification" .....  | 11 |
| 3.2.3. | 10 January 2023: end of the "data verification" process .....  | 12 |
| 3.2.4. | Repeated rumours about "hidden mobilisation" in Belarus between October 2022 and January 2023 .....                                      | 12 |
| 3.3.   | Possible penalties during "data verification" at military commissariats .....  | 14 |
| 3.3.1. | Generic obligations in relation to the military census in Belarus.....   | 14 |
| 3.3.2. | Situation in case of the absence of a written summons to the military commissariat. 14   |    |
| 3.3.3. | Obligations in case of the receipt of a written summons to the military commissariat14   |    |
| 3.3.4. | Situations of Belarusian citizens who are registered in Belarus but are located abroad for a long stay .....                             | 15 |
| 3.3.5. | Situations of Belarusian citizens who avoid living at the registered place of residence in order to evade the military commissariat..... | 15 |
| 3.4.   | Statement and denial concerning a ban on leaving the territory for failure to appear for "data verification" .....                       | 16 |
|        | Bibliography .....   | 17 |

**Résumé :** Cette note sur les obligations militaires en Biélorussie, dans le contexte de la guerre de grande ampleur de la Russie en Ukraine depuis février 2022, présente l'état général des forces armées en Biélorussie et les règles générales concernant le service militaire de conscription obligatoire et les autres obligations militaires. La note fait le point sur le positionnement géopolitique de la Biélorussie, Etat allié de la Russie dans l'attaque contre l'Ukraine et sur les conséquences qui en ont découlé pour l'armée biélorusse, d'une part lors de la première phase du conflit de février à septembre 2022, d'autre part dans la nouvelle phase depuis septembre 2022 et la mobilisation partielle en Russie. La Biélorussie a notamment mis en œuvre d'octobre 2022 à janvier 2023 une procédure particulière de recensement

militaire obligatoire de tous les hommes âgés de 18 à 65 ans « pour vérification des données », alimentant les craintes d'une « mobilisation cachée » dans le pays. Même s'il n'y a finalement pas eu d'envoi de troupes biélorusses en Ukraine sur la période de référence, la note évoque les sanctions encourues pour les personnes biélorusses qui ne se sont pas conformées à leurs obligations de recensement militaire depuis 2022.

**Abstract:** This note on military obligations in Belarus, in the context of Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine since February 2022, presents the general state of the armed forces in Belarus and the general rules concerning compulsory conscription military service and other military obligations. The note describes the geopolitical position of Belarus, Russia's ally in the attack on Ukraine, and the consequences for the Belarusian army, both during the first phase of the conflict from February to September 2022, and in the new phase since September 2022 and the partial mobilisation in Russia. From October 2022 to January 2023, Belarus implemented a special compulsory military census procedure for all men aged between 18 and 65 "for data verification", fuelling fears of "hidden mobilisation" in the country. Even though no Belarusian troops were sent to Ukraine during the reference period, the note refers to the penalties and prosecutions incurred by Belarusians who have not complied with their military census obligations since 2022.

**Note:** The translation of sources in foreign languages is provided by the DIDR.

## 1. Armed forces in Belarus and military service

### 1.1. General state of armed forces in Belarus

When the Soviet Union was dissolved in late 1991, the territory of Belarus contained 243,000 stationed troops and an additional 180,000 troops belonging to the strategic rocket forces<sup>1</sup>. In May 1992, the independent state of Belarus placed the troops on its soil under the command of its Ministry of Defence<sup>2</sup>.

In 2019-2021, according to several sources, the Belarusian army numbered between 48,000 and 50,000 soldiers and officers, as well as 15,000 other people registered as military personnel<sup>3</sup>. The number of reserve forces available to be called up in the event of a Belarusian mobilisation is estimated by the same sources to be 290,000<sup>4</sup>. Belarus' centralised military structure inherited from the Soviet era, which was formed of three army corps, was recently reorganised into decentralised operational commands on a territorial basis: west, northwest, and south<sup>5</sup>. The southern military command was created on 26 May 2022<sup>6</sup>.

According to The Kyiv Independent, ground forces are the main component of the Belarusian army. However, according to the Russian think tank Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, mentioned in the same article, only 10,000 to 15,000 troops, serve day-to-day in peacetime: the rest may be called up on request<sup>7</sup>. Without mobilisation, the deployment capacity of Belarus' ground troops could even be as few as 6000 soldiers, according to Belarusian military expert Yavor Lebiadok<sup>8</sup>. In his opinion, the only part of the military in Belarus effectively able to engage in combat are the special operations forces, made up of three brigades of elite infantry<sup>9</sup>. Considered to be well trained in comparison with the rest of the Belarusian army, these troops report directly to the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Belarus. They have shown loyalty to the Belarusian regime, with two brigades having taken part in the repression of protests in 2020 that followed the fraudulent presidential election<sup>10</sup>. The special operations forces have participated in "peacekeeping" missions in Lebanon, worked with the mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the Donbas, and took part in putting down riots in Kazakhstan in January 2022<sup>11</sup>.

### 1.2. Compulsory military service and other military obligations

Belarus has maintained universal compulsory military service<sup>12</sup>.

Article 30 of Belarus' Law on Military Duty and Military Service sets out categories of citizens eligible to be conscripted and called up for service as reservists<sup>13</sup>:

- For fixed-term military service or service in the reserves: male citizens aged 18 to 27, who have been or are yet to be registered with the army and are not reserve members<sup>14</sup>;
- As reserve officers: male citizens aged under 27 who have followed a reserve officer training programme in military faculties or classes, have passed the final exams, have been enrolled in the reserves and hold the military rank of officer<sup>15</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#); The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#); The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> Republic of Belarus, Act No. 1914-XII of 5 November 1992, last update 11/05/2023, [url](#); UDF (Unity Democracy Freedom), (Vadzim Smok), 11/05/2015, [url](#); Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> Republic of Belarus, Act No. 1914-XII of 5 November 1992, last update 11/05/2023, [url](#)

<sup>14</sup> Republic of Belarus, Act No. 1914-XII of 5 November 1992, last update 11/05/2023, [url](#)

<sup>15</sup> Republic of Belarus, Act No. 1914-XII of 5 November 1992, last update 11/05/2023, [url](#)

- In the event of military mobilisation: citizens aged 18 to 65 who have been or are yet to be registered with the military authorities for military service as mobilised members of the armed forces<sup>16</sup>.

This means that all men aged 18 to 27 must serve in the army for between one and one-and-a-half years, unless they have a valid reason not to do so<sup>17</sup>. The term of service is 12 months for men with higher education and 18 months for other men<sup>18</sup>. However, for military personnel who have been trained in military faculties or departments in accordance with training programmes for junior commanders, who have passed the exams set by the training programmes and are in military service, the term is 6 months<sup>19</sup>. The call for conscription is made twice a year, in the spring and autumn<sup>20</sup>. Each year, around 10,000 young Belarusian conscripts carry out their compulsory military service<sup>21</sup>.

*Note:* In autumn 2022, a new law was passed in Belarus that limits the possibilities of deferment of conscription for studies abroad<sup>22</sup>. Deferment is now only granted to students who study abroad within the framework of a State programme<sup>23</sup> (see article 32 of the Law on Military Duty and Military Service<sup>24</sup>).

Following fixed-term military service, all men may be called back for an annual exercise as a reservist<sup>25</sup>. Since the 1990s, the number of reservists having completed their military service in the previous five years has stood at 290,000<sup>26</sup>. Service in the reserves involves the compulsory performance of exercises in military units, other organisations of the armed forces or transport troops of Belarus, in classes or training camps, in order to achieve a military specialisation without termination of employment<sup>27</sup>.

In the end of the 2000s, cases of politically motivated punitive conscription were reported: young male opposition activists who had been granted deferment for university studies or exemption for medical reasons were put through false medical examinations and forcibly sent to military service<sup>28</sup>.

There is an option for alternative service in Belarus<sup>29</sup>. Under the Alternative Service Act of 2015, which came into force on 1 July 2016, conscientious objection to military service may only be exercised on religious grounds and does not extend to people with non-religious, conscience-based beliefs<sup>30</sup>. The length of alternative service in comparison with military service differs between those with and without higher education: alternative service for the latter category is twice as long as ordinary military service (a service term of 36 months in general and 24 months for those who have higher education)<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore, those who perform alternative service receive a lower remuneration than those who perform military service<sup>32</sup>. Soldiers and conscripts who have already completed their fixed-term military service can no longer be recognised as conscientious objectors, in view of post-military service obligations<sup>33</sup>.

There is a significant issue related to the hazing of new recruits in the Belarusian army, including physical and psychological humiliation, known in Russian as '*dedovshchina*'<sup>34</sup>. In 2015, the website of the opposition coalition in Belarus – UDF – acknowledged that the Belarusian military authorities had brought down the number of criminal acts in the army from 11 per 1,000 in 1994 to 1.7 per 1,000 in 2014, and that the army no longer recorded nearly 100 annual deaths as it had done in the 1990s<sup>35</sup>. However, hazing can also take less visible forms of psychological harassment that still drive recruits to

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<sup>16</sup> Republic of Belarus, Act No. 1914-XII of 5 November 1992, last update 11/05/2023, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> Republic of Belarus, Act No. 1914-XII of 5 November 1992, last update 11/05/2023, [url](#); UDF (Unity Democracy Freedom), (Vadzim Smok), 11/05/2015, [url](#); Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#); Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>19</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#)

<sup>20</sup> Anchor FM, 29/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> Anchor FM, 29/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> Radio Svaboda (Radio Liberty's Belarusian service), 12/10/2022, [url](#); Sputnik Belarus, 12/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> Radio Svaboda (Radio Liberty's Belarusian service), 12/10/2022, [url](#); Sputnik Belarus, 12/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> Republic of Belarus, Act No. 1914-XII of 5 November 1992, last update 11/05/2023, [url](#)

<sup>25</sup> Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>26</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#)

<sup>27</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#)

<sup>28</sup> UDF (Unity Democracy Freedom), (Vadzim Smok), 11/05/2015, [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#); Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#); Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#); Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#); UDF (Unity Democracy Freedom), (Vadzim Smok), 11/05/2015, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> UDF (Unity Democracy Freedom), (Vadzim Smok), 11/05/2015, [url](#)

suicide<sup>36</sup>. In 2019, the think tank Global Security still listed various acts of physical violence committed by superiors against young recruits in 2016-2017, which gave rise to criminal prosecution<sup>37</sup>. In 2022, cases of suicide, attempted suicide and extrajudicial killing in the Belarusian army continued to be reported<sup>38</sup>.

According to the opposition website UDF, in 2015, evasion of military service was common, due to the army's loss of prestige, despite the fact that it is punishable as a criminal offence<sup>39</sup>. Several articles of the Criminal Code of Belarus punish military service evasion by a fine or imprisonment of up to 3 months in general cases<sup>40</sup>. The prison sentence can be up to 2 years if evasion is committed following the imposition of an administrative penalty<sup>41</sup> and up to 7 years in cases of desertion or intentional mutilation<sup>42</sup>. In 2015, the fine for evasion could be up to 12,000 USD (approximately 10,800 EUR at exchange rates in May 2015)<sup>43</sup>.

## 2. February to September 2022

### 2.1. Belarus' role in Russia's act of aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation launched a large-scale attack on Ukraine through the north-west of the country, advancing towards Kiev from Belarus, where Russian troops had been deployed since late 2021, under the guise of bilateral joint military exercises<sup>44</sup>. These exercises were conducted within the framework of the regional forces group of Russia and Belarus, which was formed in 1999-2000, following the foundation of a bilateral Union State between the two countries<sup>45</sup>. The regional forces group includes the entire Belarusian army and some units of the Russian armed forces<sup>46</sup>. Bilateral military cooperation includes an interoperable joint command for the two armies, training exchanges in the two countries' military schools, a unified intelligence, communications and logistical support system, and the designation of facilities located in Belarus for joint use by the armed forces of both countries<sup>47</sup>. Joint military exercises are scheduled each year in both countries<sup>48</sup>. In addition, in February 2022, Belarus amended its constitution to allow the country to permanently host both Russian forces and nuclear weapons<sup>49</sup>. In the days leading up to the invasion on 24 February 2022, the Belarusian government continued to state that Russian troops deployed on its territory for the exercises would leave as soon as they ended<sup>50</sup>. Belarus' territory was also used by Russia to launch airstrikes and surface-to-surface and air-to-surface missile strikes on Ukrainian soil<sup>51</sup>. Belarusian hospitals were used to treat wounded Russian soldiers during this first phase of Russia's offensive in spring 2022<sup>52</sup>.

After April 2022, Russia's troops withdrew entirely from northern Ukraine, retreating through the territory of Belarus<sup>53</sup>. Following this, Russian missile strikes against Ukraine from Belarus continued to be reported sporadically over the course of 2022<sup>54</sup>. However, according to Yauheni Preiherman of the Jamestown Foundation, a Ukrainian diplomat in Minsk revealed to him in private that certain statements from the Ukrainian authorities concerning missile strikes launched from Belarus had turned out to be false<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> UDF (Unity Democracy Freedom), (Vadzim Smok), 11/05/2015, [url](#)

<sup>37</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> Anchor FM, 29/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> UDF (Unity Democracy Freedom), (Vadzim Smok), 11/05/2015, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> UDF (Unity Democracy Freedom), (Vadzim Smok), 11/05/2015, [url](#); Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>42</sup> Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> UDF (Unity Democracy Freedom), (Vadzim Smok), 11/05/2015, [url](#)

<sup>44</sup> CNN World, 22/03/22, [url](#); The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#); The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#); Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#); Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#)

<sup>48</sup> Global Security, 20/04/2019, [url](#)

<sup>49</sup> CNN World, 22/03/22, [url](#)

<sup>50</sup> Nasha Niva, 29/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#); Our House (International Centre for Civil Initiatives), 04/10/2022, [url](#); Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#); The Kyiv Independent, 14/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>52</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>53</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>55</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#)

## 2.2. Rumours and denials about the involvement of Belarusian soldiers in the war in Ukraine during the February-March 2022 phase

As early as the first phase of Russia's large-scale offensive against Ukraine, rumours circulated that President Lukashenko might have been forced by the Kremlin to send Belarusian troops to fight in Ukraine in support of Russian troops in difficulty<sup>56</sup>. On the 6 March 2022, the Lithuanian-based Belarusian non-governmental organisation Nash Dom stated that all men aged 18 to 58 were required to report to the authorities as President Lukashenko was planning to call up between 35,000 and 40,000 men, as a prelude to entering the war against Ukraine<sup>57</sup>. These rumours continued throughout March 2022, repeated by a member of the Belarusian opposition, who announced that the involvement of Belarus' troops alongside those of Russia was imminent<sup>58</sup>. In March 2022, Connection e.V., a non-governmental organisation supporting conscientious objectors, estimated that 3,000 Belarusian conscripts had fled to Lithuania<sup>59</sup>.

These rumours did not materialise, however, as the Belarusian authorities repeated their desire to avoid a direct military confrontation<sup>60</sup>. On 1 and 4 March 2022, President Lukashenko stated and repeated that Belarus was not involved in the war in Ukraine, while at the same time acknowledging the stationing of Belarusian troops alongside Russian troops near the border with Ukraine<sup>61</sup>, to protect the country's southern border<sup>62</sup>. In March 2022, the Minsk regime used the possibility of a NATO attack as a pretext to focus on its role of defending the Russia-Belarus Union State against a military threat coming from its western border, making deployment in Ukraine impossible<sup>63</sup>. At the same time, sources from the United States military authorities at NATO agreed there was no indication that Belarusian troops were involved in fighting in Ukraine<sup>64</sup>. One of the reasons put forward by these sources was that such an engagement would have destabilised Belarus, which neither Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko, nor Russian president Vladimir Putin, would have wanted<sup>65</sup>. In the view of Nadja Douglas, an expert on Belarus, quoted by the news television network France 24, Alexander Lukashenko did not want to send soldiers into Ukraine because he knew that the majority of Belarusians were opposed to their country entering the war<sup>66</sup>. According to her also, "his reluctance was not only linked to popular opposition"<sup>67</sup> but also to a possible lack of loyalty to him in the army, given that during his years in power, he had relied primarily on the internal security forces, to the detriment of the army's troops<sup>68</sup>.

In April 2022, Russian troops fully withdrew from northern Ukraine, in particular through Belarus, and no troop movements have since been observed across the border between Belarus and Ukraine<sup>69</sup>.

However, one person's account, published in April 2022 by the platform Gordon and taken up by the non-governmental organisation Charter'97 on the topic of the occupation of the north of the Kyiv region in March 2022, mentioned the presence of Belarusians<sup>70</sup>. According to this account, the person had recognised Belarusians among the occupying troops in Vorzel, between Bucha and Hostomel, in Kyiv's suburbs<sup>71</sup>. This person mentioned the presence of a Belarusian army "brigade" with Belarusian flags among the occupiers and described the Belarusian regime's official statements regarding Belarus' non-involvement in the conflict as untrue<sup>72</sup>. In December 2022, the secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, Oleksiy Danilov, refuted this oral account, stating that he considered the claim that someone had seen Belarusian troops in the region of Kyiv in spring 2022 to be a "rumour".

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<sup>56</sup> Belarus Security Blog, 16/03/2022, [url](#); CNN World, 22/03/22, [url](#); The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>57</sup> Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>58</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#); CNN World, 22/03/22, [url](#); Belarus Security Blog, 16/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>59</sup> Connection e.V., Rudi Friedrich, 24/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>60</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>61</sup> Belarus Security Blog, 16/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>62</sup> Gazeta.ru, 04/03/2022, [url](#); The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, IOFFE Grigory, 08/03/2022, [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> Belarus Security Blog, 16/03/2022, [url](#); The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>64</sup> CNN World, 22/03/22, [url](#)

<sup>65</sup> CNN World, 22/03/22, [url](#)

<sup>66</sup> France 24, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>67</sup> France 24, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>68</sup> France 24, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>69</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>70</sup> Gordon, 11/04/2022, [url](#); Charter'97, 12/04/2022, [url](#)

<sup>71</sup> Gordon, 11/04/2022, [url](#); Charter'97, 12/04/2022, [url](#)

<sup>72</sup> Gordon, 11/04/2022, [url](#); Charter'97, 12/04/2022, [url](#)



According to him, there was nobody wearing a Belarusian military uniform, otherwise there would have been photographs to prove it<sup>73</sup>.

In July 2022, Belarus continued to conduct major military exercises on its territory to keep Ukrainian troops on alert along Ukraine's northern border<sup>74</sup>. However, Alexander Lukashenko still sent no Belarusian soldiers to fight in Ukraine, because, according to the Main Directorate of Intelligence of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine and other military analysts, this prospect was deeply unpopular in Belarus and carried risks of internal civil disorder, and in any case Belarus' capacity for military action was limited<sup>75</sup>. An official from Ukraine's General Staff stated that the possibility of military equipment being transferred from Belarus' Zhyabrouka airport (near Homyel) was more alarming than an intervention by Belarusian troops<sup>76</sup>.

### **2.3. Autumn conscription from August 2022**

A regular conscription period for military service and recruitment of reservists in the Belarusian army took place from August to November 2022<sup>77</sup>. Prior to this, on 4 July 2022, Alexander Lukashenko signed the Decree No. 227 "On discharge from active duty, on conscription and recruitment to the reserve force" designed to help central and local government bodies recruit young men aged 18 to 27 for the armed forces<sup>78</sup>. The term of military service remained unchanged: 18 months for conscripts with no higher education and 6 months for graduates of higher educational and military institutions<sup>79</sup>. The only men able to avoid conscription are students of agricultural higher educational institutions, those with a serious illness and parents of at least 3 children<sup>80</sup>. In August 2022, the plan was to conscript 10,000 men from all parts of the country, including 2,000 from the administrative region of Minsk alone<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> Kyiv Post, 29/12/2022, [url](#); Nasha Niva, 30/12/2022, [url](#)

<sup>74</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>75</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>76</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 12/07/2022, [url](#)

<sup>77</sup> Republic of Belarus, President of the Republic of Belarus, 04/07/2022, [url](#); Our House (International Centre for Civil Initiatives), 23/08/2022, [url](#); Our House (International Centre for Civil Initiatives), 04/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>78</sup> Republic of Belarus, President of the Republic of Belarus, 04/07/2022, [url](#); Our House (International Centre for Civil Initiatives), 23/08/2022, [url](#)

<sup>79</sup> Our House (International Centre for Civil Initiatives), 23/08/2022, [url](#)

<sup>80</sup> Our House (International Centre for Civil Initiatives), 23/08/2022, [url](#)

<sup>81</sup> Our House (International Centre for Civil Initiatives), 23/08/2022, [url](#)



### 3. Following mobilisation in Russia in late September 2022

On 21 September 2022, Russian president Vladimir Putin announced the partial mobilisation of Russian reservists to fight in Ukraine<sup>82</sup>. On 23 September 2022, Alexander Lukashenko declared that there would be no mobilisation in Belarus<sup>83</sup>. However, the meeting between the two leaders in Sochi on the 26 September 2022 appeared to be a means for Putin to put pressure on Lukashenko to fully enter the war on his side<sup>84</sup>.

On the 4 October 2022, Lukashenko called the Prime Minister, the Head of the Administration of the President, the heads of key ministries and the heads of security agencies to a meeting devoted to military security issues within the context of the war in Ukraine<sup>85</sup>. He declared that in the event of an external aggression against Russia, Belarus would enter the war to support its ally<sup>86</sup>. According to the joint military doctrine of Russia and Belarus, any act directed against one of the two states is considered to be an attack on the Union State that joins the two countries<sup>87</sup>. Lukashenko has admitted that Belarus is taking part in the “special military operation in Ukraine,” while adding that “we do not kill anyone” and “we do not send our military anywhere”<sup>88</sup>. The secretary of the Security Council of Belarus, on the other hand, stated that Belarus was taking “an active part” in Russia’s war against Ukraine by “performing some duties”<sup>89</sup>. Different sources reasserted that there had been no intervention by Belarusian soldiers in Ukraine, as Belarus had not formally entered into the war against that country<sup>90</sup>.

#### 3.1. New geopolitical environment in autumn 2022

On the 10 October 2022, Alexander Lukashenko announced that Belarus would more actively support its Russian ally’s war effort in Ukraine and that deployment of the joint grouping of Russian and Belarusian armed forces had already begun<sup>91</sup>. According to the analyst Yauheni Preiherman of The Jamestown Foundation, the Belarusian authorities emphasized that deployment of the joint regional grouping had been activated in accordance with the Union State’s military doctrine<sup>92</sup>. While claiming that Ukraine was planning to attack the territory of Belarus, Lukashenko justified deployment of the joint regional grouping, in his usual rhetoric, as “a response to military escalation on the western borders of the Union State by NATO member countries.”<sup>93</sup>. In addition, according to point 11 of the military doctrine of the Russia-Belarus Union State quoted by Nasha Niva, Belarus reserves the right to take “preventive measures of strategic deterrence”<sup>94</sup>. On the 11 October 2022, the Belarusian Ministry of Defence commented on the joint regional grouping’s deployment, maintaining that it was purely defensive in nature<sup>95</sup>. Radio Svaboda stressed that the regional grouping was not planning joint military activities outside of Belarus’ borders<sup>96</sup>.

On the 14 October 2022, Lukashenko announced that 15,000 Russian troops were expected in Belarus to join the joint grouping, near the southern border with Ukraine<sup>97</sup> and, the next day, the Belarusian Ministry of Defence added that the first Russian soldiers were arriving<sup>98</sup>. On the 17 October 2022, the head of Belarus’ Department of International Military Cooperation stated that the Russian troops would be positioned on four sites in eastern and central Belarus, i.e. in areas not immediately bordering

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<sup>82</sup> Our House (International Centre for Civil Initiatives), 04/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>83</sup> Zerkalo, 04/10/2022, [url](#); Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>84</sup> Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>85</sup> BelTA (news agency), (1) 04/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>86</sup> Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>87</sup> Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>88</sup> Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>89</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 14/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>90</sup> Our House (International Centre for Civil Initiatives), 04/10/2022, [url](#); Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 05/10/2022, [url](#); Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>91</sup> Devby, 10/10/2022, [url](#); Radio Svaboda (Radio Liberty’s Belarusian service), (2) 11/10/2022, [url](#); France 24, 11/10/2022, [url](#); Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#); Nasha Niva (Russian version), 13/10/2022, [url](#); The Kyiv Independent, 14/10/2022, [url](#); Belarus Security Blog, 14/11/2022, [url](#); The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, (1) 16/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>92</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, (1) 16/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>93</sup> Devby, 10/10/2022, [url](#); Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#); Belarus Security Blog, 14/11/2022, [url](#); The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, (1) 16/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>94</sup> Nasha Niva, 17/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>95</sup> Radio Svaboda (Radio Liberty’s Belarusian service), 11/10/2022, [url](#); Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 15/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>96</sup> Radio Svaboda (Radio Liberty’s Belarusian service), (2) 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>97</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 15/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>98</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 15/10/2022, [url](#)

Ukraine, for defensive and preventive purposes<sup>99</sup>. On 4 November 2022, *Radio Svaboda* disseminated a map and aerial photographs of the four ranges receiving Russian troops: Machulishchy air base near Minsk; the Obuz-Lesnovsky training range near Baranovichi; the Repische training range near Asipovichy; and the Losvida training range near Vitsebsk<sup>100</sup>. At the end of October 2022, *Nasha Niva* had already reported that the training range near Asipovichy was being used to prepare Russian artillery personnel and that the local population was complaining of various conflicts arising from the behaviour of many mobilised Russian soldiers deployed there<sup>101</sup>.

Belarus was once again used for the deployment of Russian military equipment: Iskander-M tactical missiles<sup>102</sup>, Sukhoi Su-25 fighter jets upgraded to be able to carry nuclear missiles<sup>103</sup>, T-72A tanks and Ural military trucks<sup>104</sup>, and Iranian Shahed-136-type kamikaze drones<sup>105</sup>. According to the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Russia once again used Belarus to launch ballistic rockets, missiles and drones on Ukrainian towns in Autumn 2022<sup>106</sup>. According to information provided on the 4 November 2022 by *Radio Svaboda*, ground or aerial observations identified transfers of tanks from Belarus to the Russian region of Rostov-on-Don in Autumn 2022<sup>107</sup>, as well as the presence of three MiG-31K fighter jets at Machulishchy air base, which could be used for air-launched ballistic missile strikes on Ukraine, and, at the same air base, storage containers for Kinzhal-type hypersonic missiles<sup>108</sup>.

### 3.2. Compulsory military censuses in Belarus from October 2022 to January 2023

The Belarusian authorities implemented extraordinary procedures for compulsory military censuses of the country's male population from October 2022 to January 2023 (see 3.2.1 and 3.2.2), creating a climate of fear and rumours of a "hidden mobilisation" (see 3.2.4).

#### 3.2.1. October 2022: verifications of soldiers' combat ability and of data on men of fighting age

*Note:* In this section, we outline various events reported in consulted sources related to various military inspection and census activities carried out by the Belarusian authorities in October 2022, for illustrative purposes, without claiming to exhaustively cover the situations encountered.

Following Vladimir Putin's announcement of a partial mobilisation of Russian reservists on the 21 September 2022, the Belarusian defence ministry announced a "check of combat and mobilisation readiness" at Machulishchy air base, including a call up of reservists<sup>109</sup>.

On the 4 October 2022, during an extraordinary meeting on military security, Alexander Lukashenko stated that there was no need to mobilise reservists in Belarus given that there was no war within the national territory<sup>110</sup>. At the same time, he said that he wanted to continuously train reservists through the territorial defence system and ensure that each citizen, man or woman, knows how to handle weapons<sup>111</sup>. He then announced a campaign to check the state of Belarusian troops through military commissariats in each district, mainly involving verification of personal data for each person falling under the military census obligation<sup>112</sup>.

On the 11 October 2022, the defence ministry communicated about an ongoing armed forces inspection procedure ordered by the president and conducted by the secretary of the State Security Council,

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<sup>99</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, (1) 16/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>100</sup> Radio Svaboda (Radio Liberty's Belarusian service), 04/11/2022, [url](#). Note: This same list of the four ranges was given by the news outlet *Zerkalo* on 17 November 2022. Cf. *Zerkalo*, 17/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>101</sup> *Nasha Niva*, 29/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>102</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>103</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Yauheni Preiherman, 27/09/2022, [url](#)

<sup>104</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 14/10/2022, [url](#); Libération, 19/12/2022, [url](#)

<sup>105</sup> The Kyiv Independent, 14/10/2022, [url](#); Hromadske, 18/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>106</sup> Charter'97, 22/10/2022, [url](#); Kyiv Independent, 02/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> *Zerkalo*, 17/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>108</sup> Radio Svaboda (Radio Liberty's Belarusian service), 04/11/2022, [url](#); *Zerkalo*, 17/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>109</sup> Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>110</sup> BelTA (news agency), (2) 04/10/2022, [url](#); *Zerkalo*, 04/10/2022, [url](#); Belarus Security Blog, 14/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>111</sup> BelTA (news agency), (2) 04/10/2022, [url](#); *Zerkalo*, 04/10/2022, [url](#); Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>112</sup> *Zerkalo*, 04/10/2022, [url](#)

Alexander Volfovich<sup>113</sup>. This was a different operation to the data verification campaign announced on 4 October, because, according to the ministry, the purpose of the inspection was to assess the combat readiness of various military units<sup>114</sup>.

On 18 October 2022, the website *devby.io*, specialised in the Belarusian high-tech industry since 2008<sup>115</sup>, suggested that two men working in high-tech and holding the status of reserve officer had received a letter of summoning from military commissariats for the stated purpose of “clarifying data”<sup>116</sup>. The news portal *Zerkalo* reported that the authorities had requested lists of people subject to military obligations from the heads of state-owned companies, and that former members of the special operations forces and airborne forces, as well as former police officers, had been called up for military training at the same time<sup>117</sup>.

Beginning on the 19 October 2022, the Belarusian defence ministry began using the official terms “verification of the data of people with military duties” (which covers all men aged 18 to 65, according to article 30 of Belarus’ law “on Military Duty and Military Service”, which details categories of citizens subject to being called up for conscription and service as reservists<sup>118</sup> – see 1.2) and described this procedure as “routine”<sup>119</sup>. According to the ministry, this “verification of data” stemmed from the president’s directive, and its purpose was to be able to talk to citizens in person to check their place of work or study, and their place of residence, as well as to establish which local authorities and military commissariats they fell under<sup>120</sup>. It was therefore in no way a means of “mobilisation”<sup>121</sup>.

On the 22 November 2022, the defence ministry explained that summoning for the “data verification” procedure was done by written notification, by telephone or by SMS<sup>122</sup>. Once summoned for an interview, citizens subject to military duties were required to clarify personal data identified and were informed of the procedures to follow in the event of an emergency military service duty<sup>123</sup>.

While the ministry of defence described this as a “routine” annual process, the Belarusian people summoned stated that they had not been required to go to the military commissariat for a long time and that, among them, some were aged over 50 or had serious illnesses<sup>124</sup>. During their “verification” summoning, they received a notification of the location they were required to go to in the event of an actual mobilisation<sup>125</sup>.

### 3.2.2. 30 November 2022: general implementation of “data verification”

*Note:* In this section, we outline various events reported in consulted sources related to general implementation of “data verification” by the Belarusian authorities, for illustrative purposes, without claiming to exhaustively cover the situations encountered.

On 30 November 2022, the Belarusian defence ministry announced that 70% of people bound by military duties had reported to their military commissariat to carry out verification of their data<sup>126</sup>. While companies and organisations serving as the workplaces of people bound by military duties had been required to participate in this first phase of the census<sup>127</sup>, the ministry announced that the data verification process was now entering a second phase that would be conducted directly in villages’ police stations and executive committees<sup>128</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> Radio Svboda (Radio Liberty’s Belarusian service), (2) 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>114</sup> Radio Svboda (Radio Liberty’s Belarusian service), (2) 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>115</sup> Devby, “О проекте” (about the project), s. d., [url](#)

<sup>116</sup> Devby, 18/10/2022, [url](#); Zerkalo, (1) 19/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>117</sup> Zerkalo, (1) 19/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>118</sup> Republic of Belarus, Act No. 1914-XII of 5 November 1992, last update 11/05/2023, [url](#)

<sup>119</sup> Republic of Belarus, Ministry of Defence, 19/10/2022, [url](#); Reuters, 19/10/2022, [url](#); Zerkalo, (2) 19/10/2022, [url](#); Fakty.ua, 22/10/2022, [url](#); The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, IOFFE Grigory, (2) 16/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>120</sup> Republic of Belarus, Ministry of Defence, 19/10/2022, [url](#); Zerkalo, (2) 19/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>121</sup> Republic of Belarus, Ministry of Defence, 19/10/2022, [url](#); Zerkalo, (2) 19/10/2022, [url](#); Fakty.ua, 22/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>122</sup> BelTA (news agency), 22/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>123</sup> BelTA (news agency), 22/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>124</sup> Fakty.UA, 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>125</sup> Fakty.UA, 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>126</sup> Republic of Belarus, Ministry of Defence, 30/11/2022, [url](#); Zerkalo, 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>127</sup> Zerkalo, 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>128</sup> Zerkalo, 30/11/2022, [url](#)

On the 1 December 2022, the Belarusian news portal *Zerkalo* reported cases of people being summoned for data verification by telephone, in the administrative region of Minsk<sup>129</sup>. This news portal also reported that, in the two districts of Barysaw and Krupki of the same region, the local district newspaper had itself indicated the locations where reservists should make their way depending on their place of residence: to the military commissariat authorities for those living in the two district administrative centres; or the local executive authorities for those living in villages<sup>130</sup>.

On the 13 December 2022, *Zerkalo* quoted a local newspaper from the town of Baranavichy, *Intex-Press*, according to which a man from the area who had gone to a military commissariat after being summoned "for data verification", was notified of instructions to follow, glued to a page of his military booklet, in the event that the country's mobilisation was announced: to make his way, within 38 hours, to the mobilisation point declared by his military commissariat, without waiting to receive an *ad hoc* call-up, bringing with him his passport, military booklet, and enough supplies and food to last several days<sup>131</sup>. The written instruction contained a reminder that conscription evasion is punishable by administrative or criminal proceedings according to the law<sup>132</sup>.

On the 26 December 2022, the Belarusian news portal *Zerkalo* reported a video-recorded account according to which an advertisement displayed on a screen in the coach station of Barysaw instructed all men aged 18 to 60 to make their way to the military commissariat or village executive committee they fell under, in order to carry out verification of their data, implying that they should do so even without having been personally summoned through the post<sup>133</sup>. *Zerkalo* also quoted as a source the head of a military commissariat in the region of Minsk, who shared similar information on the subject of the data verification operation<sup>134</sup>, adding that there would be no fines for those who were late<sup>135</sup>. According to the same source, it would not be until later that those who had not made their way to military commissariats would be liable to proceedings<sup>136</sup>.

### 3.2.3. 10 January 2023: end of the "data verification" process

On the 10 January 2023, the Belarusian defence ministry communicated that the military commissariats and local authorities had fully completed the "data verification" work undertaken since October 2022 and that 95% of people with military duties had complied with this work<sup>137</sup>.

### 3.2.4. Repeated rumours about "hidden mobilisation" in Belarus between October 2022 and January 2023

The new geopolitical and military environment in autumn 2022 gave rise to fears, circulated by non-governmental organisations, Belarusian opposition figures and Ukrainian military authorities, of a possible mobilisation of Belarusian men, whether they were reservists or conscripts called up during the conscription of August-November 2022<sup>138</sup>. In early October 2022, the Belarusian non-governmental organisation Our House considered that all Belarusian men were then in danger because they could be called up to serve in the army at any time, as the country was occupied by Russian troops<sup>139</sup>, while at the same time the non-governmental organisation Open Democracy considered that the Kremlin's decision threatened to lead Belarus into a direct engagement in the war against Ukraine<sup>140</sup>. On 13 October 2022, speculation about a "hidden mobilisation" carried out by Lukashenko, under the guise of checking combat ability in order to replenish undermanned military units, was reported by the opposition news outlet *Nasha Niva*<sup>141</sup>. This news outlet stated that it had information according to which the decision for military mobilisation in Belarus had been taken by the country's president and that it would not initially

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<sup>129</sup> *Zerkalo*, 01/12/2022, [url](#)

<sup>130</sup> *Zerkalo*, 01/12/2022, [url](#)

<sup>131</sup> *Zerkalo*, 13/12/2022, [url](#)

<sup>132</sup> *Zerkalo*, 13/12/2022, [url](#)

<sup>133</sup> *Zerkalo*, 05/01/2023, [url](#); Charter'97, 05/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> *Zerkalo*, 05/01/2023, [url](#); Charter'97, 05/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>135</sup> *Zerkalo*, 05/01/2023, [url](#); Charter'97, 05/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>136</sup> *Zerkalo*, 05/01/2023, [url](#); Charter'97, 05/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>137</sup> Republic of Belarus, Ministry of Defence, 10/01/2023, [url](#); Charter'97, 10/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>138</sup> Our House (International Centre for Civil Initiatives), 04/10/2022, [url](#); Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>139</sup> Our House (International Centre for Civil Initiatives), 04/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>140</sup> Open Democracy, 11/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>141</sup> *Nasha Niva* (Russian version), 13/10/2022, [url](#)

concern men in large towns, but those living in rural areas<sup>142</sup>. At the same time, rumours were circulating about mobilisation of young army conscripts following the adoption of a legislative amendment on 12 October that cancelled the possibility of deferring compulsory military service for Belarusian students studying abroad, except for university exchanges managed by the State (see 1.2.)<sup>143</sup>. On the 18 October 2022, the Belarusian authorities, through the Secretary of the State Security Council, once again guaranteed that no mobilisation and no military intervention were planned by the country, but that should its borders be breached, there would be a defensive mobilisation<sup>144</sup>. According to the analysis of the Ukrainian news outlet *Hromadske* at the time, this position indicated that a “hidden mobilisation” was underway in Belarus<sup>145</sup>.

Also in the same period, according to *Zerkalo*, young people received letters informing them of an obligation to attend a medical examination for the military commissariat, whereas the medical institutions rejected such a sending of letters, arguing that computer piracy was involved<sup>146</sup>. On the 22 October 2022, via Telegram Messenger, the opposition channel Basta announced a “roundup in view of the hidden mobilisation”, based on the account of an agricultural factory worker from the region of Gomel, according to whom all the men aged up to 50 and holding a driving licence had been summoned to the personnel office, a report that was taken up by the Ukrainian news outlet *Fakty*<sup>147</sup>. On the same day, the website of Charter'97, the opposition non-governmental organisation, spoke of “mass conscription under the guise of verification of citizens with military duties”<sup>148</sup> and an official from the Ukrainian General Staff also used the expression “hidden mobilisation” in relation to Belarus<sup>149</sup>. Another study published in late October 2022 for the think tank European Council on Foreign Relations took up the topic of “hidden mobilisation”, mentioning that retired military and police officers were being summoned, that military doctors were preparing themselves and that civilians were receiving the order to be ready to join the first wave in the event of mobilisation for war<sup>150</sup>. According to the same source, the head of the State Security Committee (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* – KGB) of Belarus was personally visiting state-owned companies to circulate the idea of an imminent attack by Ukraine on Belarus<sup>151</sup>. A Belarusian expert on military matters, quoted by the non-governmental organisation Charter'97, considered on the 22 October 2022 that the process conducted by police stations to verify data concerning people with military duties was a cover for a more targeted operation to recruit for three undermanned brigades belonging to the Belarusian special operations forces of Brest, Maryina Horka and Vitebsk<sup>152</sup>.

On the 22 November 2022, the ministry of defence once again published a denial, taken up by the official news agency *BelTA*, describing the rumour of a “hidden mobilisation” as disinformation<sup>153</sup>.

However, on the 5 December 2022, the Ukrainian news outlet *TSN* broadcast an interview with a former Ukrainian ambassador to Belarus in 2011-2021, who once again described the “data verification” operation as a “mobilisation”, but one which was being met with forms of sabotage from within the military institution<sup>154</sup>.

The Belarusian defence ministry restated in mid-December 2022 that the “data verification” procedure was part of a standard annual routine<sup>155</sup>.

On 7 January 2023, the Belarusian opposition figure in exile Pavel Latushko reiterated his fears that the Belarusian authorities were implementing a real mobilisation of troops to provide military support to Russia in the war waged against Ukraine<sup>156</sup>. As a new argument supporting his fears, he referred to sources in Minsk whom he claimed had informed him that in several towns in the country, most of the officials in bodies under the Ministry of Internal Affairs had received the order to hand their passport

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<sup>142</sup> Nasha Niva (Russian version), 13/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>143</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 15/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>144</sup> Hromadske, 18/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>145</sup> Hromadske, 18/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>146</sup> Zerkalo, (1) 19/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>147</sup> Fakty.ua, 22/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>148</sup> Charter'97, 22/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>149</sup> Charter'97, 22/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>150</sup> European Council on Foreign Relations, Pavel Slunkin, 27/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>151</sup> European Council on Foreign Relations, Pavel Slunkin, 27/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>152</sup> Charter'97, 22/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>153</sup> BelTA (news agency), 22/11/2022, [url](#); Charter'97, 22/10/2022, [url](#)

<sup>154</sup> TSN, 05/12/2022, [url](#)

<sup>155</sup> Zerkalo, 13/12/2022, [url](#)

<sup>156</sup> Radio Svoboda (Russian service), 07/01/2023, [url](#)



over to the authorities, to prevent them leaving the country in the event of a martial law-type mobilisation being implemented<sup>157</sup>.

### 3.3. Possible penalties during “data verification” at military commissariats

*Note:* the Belarusian news outlet *Zerkalo* has published articles based on interviews with lawyers at the Belarusian non-governmental organisation Legal Hub, regarding legal obligations surrounding the “data verification” procedure and the risks of penalties applicable in the event of refusal by individuals to comply with this procedure<sup>158</sup>. In this section, we cover arguments developed in relation to existing Belarusian law, while no information on the actual implementation of these penalties was provided in the sources referred to.

According to the lawyers quoted by *Zerkalo*, there is a distinction in terms of obligations under the law depending on whether a summons to appear before a military commissariat comes under the military census procedure or actual conscription for military service<sup>159</sup>. The military census is governed by part 3 (article 11 et seq.) of the Law on Military Duty and Military Service, while conscription, both for fixed-term military service and for mobilisation in time of war, is governed by part 5 (article 30 et seq.) of the same law<sup>160</sup>. According to the lawyers consulted by *Zerkalo*, the data clarification or verification procedure officially comes under the military census<sup>161</sup>.

#### 3.3.1. Generic obligations in relation to the military census in Belarus

According to the lawyers consulted by *Zerkalo*, citizens recorded in the military register have obligations that they must fulfil without waiting to be reminded of them, in particular<sup>162</sup>:

- In the case of a change in marital status, family composition, training, place of work (or place of study), position occupied (speciality, profession) at the main place of work, place of residence within the administrative-territorial unit or place of stay, citizens are required to inform the registration office at the military register within a period of one week<sup>163</sup>.
- When a citizen moves to a new place of residence, they must sign up to the military register of the new place of residence within a period of one month<sup>164</sup> (see article 18 of the Law on Military Duty and Military Service)<sup>165</sup>.

#### 3.3.2. Situation in case of the absence of a written summons to the military commissariat

According to the lawyers consulted by *Zerkalo*, if a citizen informs the military commissariat in good faith and in a timely manner of any changes occurring in their personal data, in particular the place of residence (or stay) and the place of work (or study), then they are not required to go to the enrolment office if there is no summons. If the military commissariat considers that it is necessary to summon such a person for verification anyway, then they have all the necessary data at their disposal to do so<sup>166</sup>.

#### 3.3.3. Obligations in case of the receipt of a written summons to the military commissariat

A person who does not go to the military commissariat after receiving a summons incurs administrative or criminal liability<sup>167</sup>. Article 10 of the Law on Military Duty and Military Service contains a list of reasons justifying (on presentation of supporting documents) failure to appear following a summons: an injury or illness causing loss of function; a serious health condition of a close relative or guardian, or attendance

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<sup>157</sup> Radio Svoboda (Russian service), 07/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>158</sup> *Zerkalo*, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#); *Zerkalo*, 05/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>159</sup> *Zerkalo*, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>160</sup> Republic of Belarus, Act No. 1914-XII of 5 November 1992, last update 11/05/2023, [url](#)

<sup>161</sup> *Zerkalo*, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>162</sup> *Zerkalo*, 05/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>163</sup> *Zerkalo*, 05/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>164</sup> *Zerkalo*, 05/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>165</sup> Republic of Belarus, Act No. 1914-XII of 5 November 1992, last update 11/05/2023, [url](#)

<sup>166</sup> *Zerkalo*, 05/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>167</sup> *Zerkalo*, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

at their funeral; a case of force majeure beyond their control; other reasons deemed to be valid by the recruitment committee or the court<sup>168</sup>.

The consequences of an unjustified failure to appear before the military commissariat differ depending on whether it is a summons for a census on the registers or for conscription for compulsory military service<sup>169</sup>. According to the lawyers interviewed by *Zerkalo*, because the data verification procedure falls under the military census, citizens' obligations are those set out under article 18 of the Law on Military Duty and Military Service<sup>170</sup>.

On the first occurrence, a person who fails to appear incurs administrative liability, with a penalty fine (article 26.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences); in the event of a repeat offence, their liability becomes criminal, with a higher penalty fine, a community service sentence or imprisonment from 1 to 3 months (article 437 of the Penal Code)<sup>171</sup>. According to the lawyers interviewed by *Zerkalo*, in practice, criminal liability is incurred when a citizen does not provide up-to-date information on their place of residence and work (or study), which prevents them from receiving a summons<sup>172</sup>.

In addition, citizens have an obligation to accept and comply with a summons to appear before the military commissariat if it is delivered to them at their place of work, through their employer, or at their place of study<sup>173</sup>. In the event of refusal to accept the summons (see article 24.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences), the penalty may be a fine, community service or administrative imprisonment<sup>174</sup>. It is also forbidden to refuse to give up-to-date personal data, including if they are requested at the place of work<sup>175</sup>.

#### **3.3.4. Situations of Belarusian citizens who are registered in Belarus but are located abroad for a long stay**

Under legislation on the military census (article 18 of the Law on Military Duty and Military Service)<sup>176</sup>, Belarusian citizens are required to inform the military commissariat of their place of residence during stays abroad lasting more than 6 months<sup>177</sup>; they are reminded to do so on the websites of the consular services of the embassy of the Republic of Belarus in France and in Belgium, which we consulted, where information on the military census procedure is also published<sup>178</sup>. Furthermore, the above-mentioned consular services of the Belarusian embassies specify that the registration procedures for the military census are carried out neither in the diplomatic representations, nor in the consular services of Belarus<sup>179</sup>, which has been the case since the repeal of article 16 of Belarus' Law on Military Duty and Military Service (the date of the repeal is not specified in the sources consulted)<sup>180</sup>.

Article 10 of the Law on Military Duty and Military Service provides for an individual examination, on a case by case basis, by the recruitment committee of whether the situation justifies a failure to appear before the military commissariat<sup>181</sup>.

#### **3.3.5. Situations of Belarusian citizens who avoid living at the registered place of residence in order to evade the military commissariat**

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<sup>168</sup> Zerkalo, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>169</sup> Zerkalo, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>170</sup> Zerkalo, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>171</sup> Zerkalo, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>172</sup> Zerkalo, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>173</sup> Zerkalo, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>174</sup> Zerkalo, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>175</sup> Zerkalo, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>176</sup> Republic of Belarus, Act No. 1914-XII of 5 November 1992, last update 11/05/2023, [url](#)

<sup>177</sup> Zerkalo, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#);

<sup>178</sup> Republic of Belarus, Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the French Republic, s. d., [url](#); Republic of Belarus, Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Kingdom of Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the permanent representations to the European Union and NATO, s. d., [url](#)

<sup>179</sup> Republic of Belarus, Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the French Republic, s. d., [url](#); Republic of Belarus, Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Kingdom of Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the permanent representations to the European Union and NATO, s. d., [url](#)

<sup>180</sup> Republic of Belarus, Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Kingdom of Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the permanent representations to the European Union and NATO, s. d., [url](#)

<sup>181</sup> Zerkalo, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)



The lawyers quoted by *Zerkalo* remind citizens that the obligation to communicate changes in personal data to the military administration does not only concern registered places of residence, but also places of stay, within a period of one week<sup>182</sup>.

### 3.4. Statement and denial concerning a ban on leaving the territory for failure to appear for “data verification”

On 13 January 2023, the military commissioner for the region of Brest, Aleh Kanavalaŭ (in Russian, Oleg Konovalov), stated that more than 97% of people subject to military duties had complied with the registration procedure for data verification, and announced, concerning the others who had failed to appear, that measures to restrict their leaving the territory of Belarus would be taken<sup>183</sup>. However, on the same day, the ministry of defence officially denied Aleh Kanavalaŭ's statement on the exit restriction from the territory of Belarus on those grounds<sup>184</sup>.

*Note:* At the beginning of 2023 (January-February 2023), Russia and Belarus once again conducted joint military exercises, fuelling fears ahead of the exercises of a new attack on Ukraine by Russian troops coming from Belarus, as in February 2022, with speculation about a possible participation this time by Belarusian troops<sup>185</sup>. In addition, on the 24 January 2023, President Lukashenko signed a decree to facilitate the conscription of adult male citizens who no longer had a right to deferment, as well as the recruitment of reservists between February and May 2023<sup>186</sup>. However, there were no new attacks on Ukraine from Belarusian territory at the beginning of 2023. Furthermore, in late April 2023, President Lukashenko stated that he no longer considered that Ukraine was likely to attack Belarus, which was interpreted as a form of distancing from Russia and as a message implying once again that he did not want Belarusian troops to fight in Ukraine<sup>187</sup>.

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<sup>182</sup> *Zerkalo*, (2) 30/11/2022, [url](#)

<sup>183</sup> Brest City, (1) 13/01/2023, [url](#); Nasha Niva, 13/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>184</sup> Brest City, (2) 13/01/2023, [url](#); Nasha Niva, “Nasha Niva” shared Telegram Messenger account, 13/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>185</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, IOFFE Grigory, (2) 16/11/2022, [url](#); The Guardian, 08/01/2023, [url](#); Radio Svoboda (Russian service), 06/01/2023, [url](#); Foreign Policy, 10/01/2023, [url](#); Charter'97, (2) 11/01/2023, [url](#); Belarus Security Blog, 17/01/2023, [url](#)

<sup>186</sup> BelTa (news agency), 25/01/2023, [url](#)

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