

BELARUSIAN CANADIAN ALLIANCE

ЗГУРТАВАЊНЕ БЕЛАРУСАЎ КАНАДЫ

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August 28, 2017

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Re: Zapad 2017 Russia-Belarus Military Exercises

Dear Minister:

It is with growing concern and anxiety that members of the Belarusian Canadian Alliance have been watching the recent developments around the Zapad 2017 Russia-Belarus Military Exercises scheduled to take place this September in Belarus and close to its borders. There are a number of reasons for all this concern and anxiety.

First and foremost, we are concerned about Belarus' sovereignty. Although Russia claims that the Belarusian portion of the war games will involve no more than 13,000 troops, according to some analysts, the overall number of military and non-military personnel deployed in Belarus itself, as well as in its immediate proximity (western regions of Russia and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad) will reach a total of 100,000. Although international observers have reportedly been invited to the maneuvers, it is yet to be seen whether they will be granted the needed level of access to monitor the exercises. Understandably, many people in Belarus suspect that some of those Russian troops that will exercise in the country, will never leave.

Second, we believe that this concentration of troops right across the border from NATO forces is likely to tilt the fragile balance of power in the region. In the past decade we have seen a number of redeployments and military drills that served the purpose of building up Russia's offensive rather than defensive potential. It is hard to believe that the Zapad 2017 will be an exception. As Russia becomes more and more unpredictable, its neighbours become ever more wary. Ukraine's officials have already voiced their concerns that the Zapad 2017 may turn into an offensive on their country across its northern borders. At this time, there is no convincing evidence which could alleviate this concern.

Finally, having formally withdrawn in 2015 from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), now Russia effectively lifted any restrictions on its conventional military arsenals stationed on its western borders. This inevitably puts military and political pressure on the countries of the region, both those that do and do not belong to NATO, thus impeding possible resolution of many issues that need to be resolved in this part of Europe.

The Belarusian Canadian Alliance is urging the Government of Canada and its allies to closely observe the developments in the region and, if needed, take decisive political and economic measures to prevent possible Russian annexation of Belarus, which, if carried out, is likely to ruin any prospects of a safe and peaceful Eastern Europe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dzmitry Elyashevich', written in a cursive style.

Dzmitry Elyashevich
Chair of the Board

CC The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development