
SERBIA TO HOST SLAVIC BROTHERHOOD MILITARY EXERCISE

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Paratroopers from Serbia will join elite counterparts from Russia and Belarus for this years Slavic Military Brotherhood exercise over 13 days between June 14 and 27 in Pancevo, in northern Serbia.

About 600 troops, including more than 200 people from Russian Airborne Forces, about 300 people from the Serbian Armed Forces and up to 60 soldiers from Belarus, as well as more than 50 combat vehicles, will take part in the exercise, the Russian Defence Ministry said.

The drill will be held at the base of the Special Brigade of the Serbian Armed Forces in Pancevo, north of Belgrade.

The Russian ministry added that a special ceremony will be held at the start of the operations, which will include raising flags, a parade of military equipment and an exhibition of weapons.

The Serbian Defence Ministry has not confirmed this, as it has not yet published any information about the drill on its website. It did not respond to questions from BIRN about the exercise by the time of publication.

This would not be the first time Serbia has participated in a Slavic Brotherhood exercise, however. Elite Serbian troops joined a similar drill in 2018 in Novorossiysk in Russia, and other drills in previous years.

It is an excellent modality of cooperation that enables an exchange of experience among members of elite military units, a report from the 2017 drill, published on the Serbian ministry website, said.

Serbian military expert Nikola Lunic said participation in military exercises is the most important way of improving interoperability.

The forthcoming Slavic Brotherhood □ 2019 exercise can generate good analysis of the counter-terrorism concept of other countries, while viewing its own experiences, capabilities and comparative analysis, and advance standard operational procedures in the fight against the terrorism, the retired naval captain and director of the Belgrade-based NGO Council for Strategic Policy told BIRN.

However, as he explained, in reality, Serbia cooperates militarily far more with NATO than it does with Russia. Since 2006, when Serbia joined the NATO Partnership for Peace program, PfP, Serbia has participated in over 150 military exercises with NATO member states. The number of joint exercises with Russia was ten times smaller.

This tells us about a strategic approach [by Serbia] towards the mechanisms of building interoperability, which is obviously through affiliation with the neighbouring NATO member countries, Lunic noted.

He added that the media image in Serbia of close military cooperation with Russia was highly inaccurate. Direct decision-makers in the defence system and their Russophile media narratives are responsible for this, Lunic explained.

In 2013, Serbia gained non-member observer state in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, CSTO.

On May 20, addressing the Parliamentary Assembly of the CSTO, the Deputy Speaker of the Serbian parliament, Veroljub Arsic, thanked its member states for their support for Serbia over the issue of Kosovo, whose independence Serbia rejects. Arsic said Belgrade welcomed their continued principled support on the Kosovo-Metohija matter and non-recognition of its unilaterally declared independence.

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