

Yulia Nikitina

## Security cooperation in the Post-Soviet area within the Collective Security Treaty Organization\*

Europe hosts two of the most developed regional organizations in the world – the EU and NATO. Thus, European scholars and politicians tend to compare all other regional projects to their own regional experience, and consequently take the EU as a model for political and economic integration and the Alliance as a model for security cooperation. However, integration projects in other regions may have different drivers and goals. From a European perspective, regional security organizations in the Post-Soviet area do not demonstrate much success. Yet, from a Post-Soviet perspective, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is a viable regional project that meets the needs of its member-states. This policy brief analyses these needs and the effectiveness criteria of the CSTO.

### Military cooperation in the 1990s: integration or disintegration?

In 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the most pressing task for the new independent states was disintegration, not integration. In the Agreement on the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which marked the breakdown of the USSR on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 1991, it was proclaimed that the CIS member-states would keep a united command and control over the “common military and strategic space”, including united control over nuclear weapons. The term “common military and strategic space” implied common armed forces. However, sovereignty of the new independent states would have been defective without national armed forces, so this term disappeared from the Alma-Ata Declaration signed on the 21<sup>st</sup> December 1991; the document that completed the collapse of the USSR and the creation of the CIS. After a rather short transition period, by autumn 1993 national armed forces had been formed by all former republics.

\*Some ideas in this Policy Paper draw upon: Y. NIKITINA. *The Collective Security Treaty Organization Through the Looking-Glass // Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 59, No. 3, 2012, pp. 41-52.

No. 152 – JANUARY 2013

### ABSTRACT

The experience of Post-Soviet security cooperation looks unimpressive compared to the successes of NATO and EU. However, the main goal of the first stage of cooperation of the former Soviet republics (1990s) was peaceful disintegration, not integration. In the second stage (2000s), the creation of collective crisis reaction mechanisms did not lead to any interventions despite the obvious need for them. The explanation is that sovereignty has a higher value than regional integration for the member-states. However, this does not mean inefficiency of regional organizations in Eurasia, it simply shows a difference from Western models.

Yulia Nikitina, Research Fellow, Center for Post-Soviet Studies, MGIMO-University

The opinions expressed herein are strictly personal and do not necessarily reflect the position of ISPI.

In the Agreement on joint measures in relation to nuclear weapons (signed along with the Alma-Ata Declaration on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1991) it was proclaimed that there would be a united command and control over the nuclear weapons and strategic forces that were deployed in 1991 not only in Russia but also in Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. By 1<sup>st</sup> July 1992 the nuclear weapons from these three Post-Soviet states were to be transferred to Russia as legal successor of the USSR. Due to some political and technical circumstances, these weapons were either destroyed or were transported to Russia only by 1996. According to the 1991 agreement, before the dismantlement of the Belorussian, Ukrainian and Kazakh nuclear weapons, a decision on the use of nuclear weapons could have been taken only by the Russian president after consultations with the other sides. By 1994, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine joined the Non-Proliferation Treaty as non-nuclear weapon states.

So, for the former Soviet republics, the early 1990s were a period of “civilized divorce” (as this process is called in CIS documents). However, not only centrifugal but also centripetal forces were driving the regional processes at the time. Fears of potential external threats made CIS countries sign the Collective Security Treaty (CST) in May 1992. In many aspects this treaty resembles the North-Atlantic treaty. The CST has the collective defence clause (Article 4) which will be applied in the case of an attack against a member-state. The CST came into force in 1994 and until 1999 integrated nine out of twelve CIS members (Moldova, Turkmenistan and Ukraine never joined this treaty).

In 1995 the Collective Security Concept was signed. According to this document, after formation of the national armed forces the next stage of integration would include the creation of three regional groups of forces and a united air-defence system to counter military threats. The final integration stage could (in the event of successful completion of previous stages and willingness of member-states) lead to the creation of united armed forces. However, not all these plans have been carried out to date.

In 1999, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan did not prolong their membership of the CST, unofficially pointing to the inefficiency of the treaty in securing peace in the CIS region. Yet such arguments were misplaced, since the CST is a collective defence treaty and did not have any provisions on conflicts between member-states or internal conflicts. Thus, the CST could not have helped settle the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or conflicts in Georgia. Uzbekistan was waiting for help in the fight against extremist insurgents, but again, at that time the CST was aimed only at countering threats from other states and not from non-state actors. Peacekeeping operations in the Post-Soviet area were carried out either under CIS mandate (Abkhazia and Tajik civil wars) or on the basis of multilateral agreements (South Ossetia, Transnistria). The CST was part of the CIS legal system but it was not designed to counter the entire array of security threats.

In the 1990s the CIS states had very little experience of independence, sovereignty or interstate relations and thus a very limited understanding of the essence of regional cooperation and integration processes. The regional cooperation of the 1990s was a dialectical process in all cooperation areas: the CIS states had to reconcile the consolidation of national sovereignty with the demands of regional integration. In the first round, national sovereignty won. That is why the 1990s were mainly years of disintegration with attempts to institutionalize the processes of multilateral cooperation and subsequent failures to implement the signed agreements (only a small share of the CIS agreements really worked). The situation started to change at the beginning of the 2000s when the Post-Soviet states more or less managed to consolidate their political institutions and stabilize economic development.

### **Security cooperation of the 2000s: what for or against whom?**

The 2000s witnessed an institutional build-up in regional security cooperation in the Post-Soviet area: in 2002 the Collective Security Treaty Organization was launched by Armenia, Belarus, Ka-

zakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. The CSTO includes members of the former Warsaw Pact and consists of states that do not fully comply with Western standards of democracy. So the CSTO is often perceived in the West as “anti-NATO”, “OPEC with bombs” or a “club of dictators”. For the West the most suspicious aspect of the CSTO’s activities is that this organization cannot boast practical results – to date it has not carried out any military or peacekeeping operations, but at the same time has regular military exercises. So what are the real goals of this regional structure? Is it not directed against NATO or the EU? Cold War-time thinking in balance of power terms and European integration theories might lead us to hasty conclusions about the anti-Western nature and ineffectiveness of the CSTO, however a more detailed analysis will show a different picture. So what are the goals of this organization and what instruments does it have to fulfill these goals?

In 2001 security threats from the Afghan territory urged CST members to create the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF) for Central Asia, which included contingents from Russia and three Central Asian countries. The decision was taken a year before the 9/11 events in the US and the launch of the international coalition operation in Afghanistan. In 1999-2000, groups of insurgents from the Afghan territory became more active in Central Asian states and the CST turned out to be the only regional instrument that could be used to counter extremist threats from Afghanistan. In Central Asia there was no CST regional group of forces aimed at countering external threats, so the CRDF in a way substituted this. Besides, the CRDF were originally designed to fight terrorist and extremist insurgency, not state actors. According to the Collective Security Concept, three regional groups of forces were planned but only two were created – the Armenia-Russia and the Belarus-Russia regional groups. The CRDF conduct anti-terrorist exercises yearly, which presumably helped to reduce extremist activities in the Central Asian region. If regional stability worsens after the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014 and extremist attacks from the Afghan territory occur, the CRDF – consisting of about 4,000 troops – will be used to counter such attacks.

As the CRDF were created to counter threats only in the Central Asian region, in 2009 CSTO members decided to launch another type of collective forces, the Collective Quick Response Forces (CQRF) that consist of contingents from all CSTO members. These 20,000 strong forces can react to different kinds of threats ranging from terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking and organized crime to military aggression, emergencies and natural disasters, with the exception of interstate conflicts. To deal with conflicts, the CSTO has collective peacekeeping forces, created in 2011. The 4,000 peacekeepers can be deployed under a UN or regional organization’s mandate in the CSTO region as well as in other regions. Legally, the CSTO will take part only in classic peacekeeping operations (under Chapter 6 of the UN Charter) and not in peace enforcement operations. All the above-mentioned CSTO collective forces meet once a year for exercises but have never taken part in any real operation, which provides grounds for speculations about the ineffectiveness of the CSTO.

Contrary to widespread perceptions, the CSTO demonstrates practical results in regional cooperation. In order to fight drug trafficking from the Afghan territory, since 2003 the CSTO has annually carried out the *Kanal* (Channel) operation to intercept drugs and precursors. This operation has been highly esteemed by the UN and attracts many observers from different regions (Bolivia, China, Columbia, Finland, Iran, Italy, Pakistan, Poland, Spain, Ukraine, United States, Interpol etc.). Along with operation *Kanal*, on a yearly basis the CSTO conducts operation *Nelegal* (Illegal migrant) against illegal migrants from non-CSTO states, and operation *PROKSI* aimed at closing down websites with extremist content. Military and technical cooperation within the CSTO is attractive for Russia’s allies who can buy Russian weapons without extra export charges. Military personnel from one member-state can receive professional education or training in another member-state, either on payment of reduced fees or free of charge.

So why, despite all the mechanisms it has, is the CSTO still perceived as a weak security organization? The answer is missed opportunities for intervention, the most obvious cases being the Kyrgyz revolution in 2005 and ethnic clashes in south Kyrgyzstan in June 2010. To name more possible

occasions, we can include in this list the Zhanaozen riot in Kazakhstan in December 2011 and the Gorno-Badakhshan clashes in Tajikistan in July 2012. However, non-interference has a legal explanation: the CSTO can launch an operation only after a formal request from an endangered member-state. And CSTO members prefer to cope with internal security threats on their own, safeguarding their sovereignty from external intervention. The only exception was the ethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan, when the revolutionary government addressed a request for collective help to Russia and not the CSTO. There are different versions of the rationale behind the CSTO non-intervention. Formally, no request was made to the CSTO itself. Unofficially there are speculations that CSTO members simply did not want to support the revolutionary government that came to power after an unconstitutional coup d'état. A more down-to-earth explanation posits that in an operation it would have been almost impossible for CSTO contingents to distinguish on the ground between those who needed protection and the aggressors, since this was a civil war-type conflict.

However, CSTO attitudes towards internal conflicts are evolving. In one of his recent interviews, CSTO Secretary General Nikolay Bordyuzha stated that the term "intervention" is not used within the organization because the CSTO is designed to fight external threats. Nevertheless, very often in Central Asian countries external and internal threats are closely interrelated. So in a case when the legitimate government has been deposed (as in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 or in the Arab countries during the Arab Spring), according to Bordyuzha the CSTO will help de facto and not de jure government to restore stability in the country<sup>1</sup>.

One more problem that can possibly prevent the CSTO from dealing with internal crises is the need to obtain consensus from all presidents of its member-states. As mentioned above, the new independent states value their sovereignty too highly to create precedents for intervention. Some consensus problems occurred after Uzbekistan's return to the CSTO in 2006 after the Andijon events. Uzbekistan very often had a "special" stance on regional security questions, especially those related to Afghanistan, which obstructed the CSTO's efforts to create a consistent strategy to fight threats from the Afghan territory. In June 2012, Uzbekistan decided to suspend its membership of the CSTO. On the one hand this move questions the CSTO's viability as a regional organization, while on the other hand the CSTO will have much fewer problems with consensus decision-making without Uzbekistan.

Russian military dominance in the CSTO prevents NATO from establishing relations with this organization as it seems that Russia imposes its will on other members. Thus, the Alliance prefers bilateral relations with the CSTO member-states. However, in practice Russia is less interested in regional security cooperation than its allies, simply because Russia has enough resources to protect its territory from different types of threats and challenges, while the other member states really need Russian assistance. The CSTO is not a venue for Russian neo-imperial ambitions, rather it is an organization that the former Soviet republics look to for the protection and security they used to have before the collapse of the USSR. And since a comparable level of security is hardly attainable, disappointments are inevitable.

### **Roadmap for future cooperation: functionality versus ideology**

The CSTO originates from a collective defence treaty of 1992 and is gradually evolving towards a multifunctional security organization that has instruments to react to most types of regional security threats. In its structure and collective forces, the CSTO is comparable to NATO. Even its lack of

---

<sup>1</sup> N. BORDYUZHA, *Uzbekistan will not solve national security's problems without the CSTO* (Николай Бордюжа: Узбекистан не решит вопросы нацбезопасности без ОДКБ), 21 November 2012, <http://ria.ru/interview/20121121/911598008.html>.

field operations makes the CSTO similar to the Alliance, whose main goal for more than forty years was containment and whose first military operation took place only in the 1990s.

But there are two factors that make the CSTO different from Western regional organizations. The first is the strong attachment of CSTO member-states to their sovereignty and their unwillingness to delegate it to supranational bodies. These features are characteristic of most non-Western regional organizations<sup>2</sup>. So no matter how functional the CSTO is, its effectiveness will depend on the political will of the heads of its member-states to give up part of their sovereignty and allow some extent of interference in their internal affairs, otherwise the created CSTO collective forces will never be used. The second factor that makes the CSTO differ from the Alliance is its ideological dimension. Liberal democracy leads NATO members in their actions and creates an additional rationale for fighting security threats outside the NATO area. The CSTO does not have such a uniting idea apart from respect of sovereignty, but this approach impedes deeper security cooperation and further integration. Can this clash be overcome?

There are two possible scenarios. If regional cooperation within the EU and NATO is indeed a model for all other regional organizations, which are now simply lagging behind, and if responsibility to protect will become the leading doctrine of international relations, then the CSTO will either be doomed to inefficiency or will have to adapt to the global trends. However, another scenario is also plausible. The experience of the international interventions of the 2000s shows that a successful military stage does not guarantee further stability and needs to be followed by a long and difficult state-building process. So perhaps security organizations should not substitute nation states and should let the latter solve their problems themselves. If this scenario is realized, then the CSTO and other non-Western security organizations will become trend-setters and will no longer be perceived as backward exclusions from the European and Euro-Atlantic models.

La ricerca ISPI analizza le dinamiche politiche, strategiche ed economiche del sistema internazionale con il duplice obiettivo di informare e di orientare le scelte di policy.

I risultati della ricerca vengono divulgati attraverso pubblicazioni ed eventi, focalizzati su tematiche di particolare interesse per l'Italia e le sue relazioni internazionali e articolati in:

- ✓ Programma Africa
- ✓ Programma Caucaso e Asia Centrale
- ✓ Programma Europa
- ✓ Programma Mediterraneo e Medio Oriente
- ✓ Programma Russia e Vicini Orientali
- ✓ Programma Sicurezza e Studi Strategici
- ✓ Progetto Argentina
- ✓ Progetto Asia Meridionale
- ✓ Progetto Cina e Asia Orientale
- ✓ Progetto Diritti Umani
- ✓ Progetto Disarmo
- ✓ Progetto Internazionalizzazione della Pubblica Amministrazione

Le pubblicazioni online dell'ISPI sono realizzate anche grazie al sostegno della Fondazione Cariplo.

ISPI  
Palazzo Clerici  
Via Clerici, 5  
I - 20121 Milano  
[www.ispionline.it](http://www.ispionline.it)

© ISPI 2013

<sup>2</sup> A. ACHARYA – A.I. JOHNSTON (Eds.), *Crafting Cooperation: Regional Institutions in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, NY, 2007, pp. 255-268.