

**A FAILED PROJECT.  
DEVOTED TO THE 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE CIS**

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This year the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States is marked. This is a date giving a sufficiently serious reason to appraise the role of this political formation in the history, as it substituted the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – the colossus which formed the former world order and determined the development of an entire epoch, thus laying foundation of the unique Soviet civilization.

***1991 – the Year of Birth of the Commonwealth***

Contemporary history and official chronicles proceed from the following description of the formation of the CIS. The Commonwealth was founded on December 8, 1991 by the Belarus SSR, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, and Ukraine, when leaders of the three countries met and signed the *Creation Agreement* (also known in the media as Belavezha Accords) in Viskuli in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha Natural Reserve near Brest (Belarus). This document stated that the USSR was abolished as a subject of international law and geopolitical reality. However, given the historical commonalities and ties among the peoples, etc., the parties agreed to form the Commonwealth of Independent States.

On December 10 the Agreement was ratified by the Supreme Soviets of Belarus and Ukraine and on December 12 – by the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (this is still a disputable question in the history of the CIS, since according to the constitution of the RSFSR, the ratification of the international agreements was in competence of the Congress of Peoples' Deputies of the RSFSR). In April 1992

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the Congress of Peoples' Deputies of the RSFSR refused putting to vote the ratification of the Agreement for three times; it was never ratified by the Congress, which dissolved in 1993.

On December 13, 1991 the leaders of five Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, met in Ashgabat. In the result they issued a Statement in which they agreed to enter the organization on conditions that all the subjects of the former Soviet Union would have equal rights and all the states of the CIS would be recognized as founders.

On December 21, 1991 a declaration stating the goals and principles of the CIS was signed in Alma-Ata. It affirmed a provision that cooperation between the members of the Commonwealth will be carried out in accordance with the principle of equality through coordinating institutions formed on a parity basis and operating in a manner established by the agreements between members of the Commonwealth, which is neither a state, nor a supra-state structure. It also stated that the unified command of the military-strategic forces and a sole control over nuclear weapons would be preserved, the sides would respect each other's desire to attain the status of non-nuclear and (or) neutral states and commitment to co-operation in forming and developing a common economic space. The fact that with the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States the USSR ceased to exist was stated.

The geopolitical project “the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics” which brought to the world the Soviet civilization, ceased to exist.

The imbalance that ensued due to the collapse of the geopolitical power pole caused sharp upsurge in the number and intensity of local and regional conflicts. The number of such conflicts drastically increased especially on the territory of the new formation – the CIS.

### *Routine*

Internal frictions between Commonwealth members began immediately after its establishment. The signatory states of the Agreement differed too much. When they were Union republics, their economic and social inequality was not so evident. But independence is a hard way to go.

The aspiration of the power centers which instigated the collapse of the USSR also differed. They were interested in using the resources and domestic markets of the new states for settling their own problems, but certainly not the problems of those states.

The issue of deep mutual integration of the new states and formation of a new, even regional power center on the territory of the prostrated colossus was definitely irrelevant, especially because at the same time the formation of another power center – the European Union, was in its closing phase, and simultaneous establishment of other power centers in Eurasia would have disturbed the general scenario of the New World Order builders.

The most important issue in relations with the newly formed states for the developing Europe was ensuring a secure and steady supply of hydrocarbons from Russia. It became a cornerstone for the formation of regional policy for most of the countries in Eastern Europe, as well as for the Baltic States, Belarus and Ukraine. The same issue has become one of the main sources of problems in building reliable partnership relations between the CIS countries.

First years of independence were marked by the division of the Soviet legacy, destruction of the integration ties and attempts to rebuild them, but this time in a new configuration of economic potentials.

The further experience showed that not everyone and everywhere succeeded in it. In the course of the time some countries spiraled increasingly down in terms of state development and by the late 1990s a number of former USSR republics found themselves in the blacklist of the “failed states”.

The diminishing level of social development, as well as loss of the state’s control over the internal situation brought to the point that at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century spreading of fundamentalist Islamist movements became the main threat for many Central Asian countries, which were formed on the ruins of the USSR.

Islamization of the countries in this region became another problem for building partnership relations within the CIS: the emissaries of the Islamist terrorist organizations, which were active in the Russian Caucasus, used the territories of bordering CIS countries for their bases with increasing frequency.

It is characteristic that for two decades none of the newly formed states (including Russia) has managed to reach economic development indices of the Soviet era. In most of the states many industries founded in the USSR ceased to exist (this especially concerns the high-tech industry). The only exception is Belarus, which managed to preserve its potential to a significant extent.

### ***The Multi-faceted Partnership***

Twenty years of the CIS development has rather clearly shown that Russia, preoccupied with settling its domestic problems and issues of self-assertion on the international arena, was not able to clearly delineate its interests in the neighboring countries and, as a result, has shown no apparent interest in development of the CIS in its original form. Instead of building an independent regional power center and offering clear reference points for the motivating the states in CIS membership, Russia initiated talks on integration into European and North Atlantic structures. This activity sent a signal for other CIS members, which got vigorously involved in the activities of such Western projects as “Partnership for Peace” and later on “Eastern Partnership”, hence getting more and more estranged from Russia.

During the last twenty years about a dozen various alliances and regional organizations have appeared in the post-Soviet territory:

1. ***Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)***, which includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
2. ***Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC or EurAsEC)*** – Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.
3. ***Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (OCAC)*** - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Russia (since 2004). On October 6, 2005 a decision was made at the summit of OCAC to prepare documents for the establishment CAC-EurAsEC in the view of forthcoming entry of Uzbekistan to EurAsEC, i.e. actually it has been decided to dissolve OCAC.
4. ***The Shanghai Cooperation Organization or SCO*** - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and PRC

5. *Common Economic Space* – Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia

6. *Union State of Russia and Belarus*

In all these organizations Russia plays a dominant role (only in SCO this role is shared with China).

Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova are members of *GUAM* – an organization established in October 1997.

On December 2, 2005 the establishment of the *Community of Democratic Choice* (CDC) was announced, which included Ukraine, Moldova, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Macedonia, Slovenia and Georgia. The initiators of the creation of the Community were Victor Yushchenko and Mikheil Saakashvili. The declaration on creation of the Community notes that the members will be: “promoting and establishing democratic processes and institutions, and encouraging to exchange experience on the way to strengthening democracy and the respect for Human Rights ... coordinating support to new and emerging democratic societies.”

The multitude of international cooperation options emerged in the recent years on the territory of the former USSR shows the absence of any clear and definite understanding by Russia what is that all for.

### *Culmination*

The situation has begun to change just recently. Russia’s integration in the European structures, in which so much effort was invested, does not bring any real benefits. Cooperation with NATO is mostly built on unilateral grounds where the Russian leadership has to make concessions to the members of the Alliance. Meanwhile NATO more actively speaks about its intention to gain foothold in as many countries of the CIS as possible.

Conflict between Russia and Georgia on August 8, 2008 was a litmus test, which showed the true state of affairs within the CIS – none of its members dared to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia after Russia did.

Another event was not long in coming. The “Tulip Revolution” in Bishkek did not bring about a unanimous response by the CIS member countries and CSTO forces did not interfere. The representatives of NATO make unambiguous comments concerning this situation – the CSTO is acting in coordination with the Alliance and is not an independent military and political bloc<sup>1</sup>. In general, referring to the future of the CIS and other organizations on the post-Soviet territory, the Western political analysts note that most of them are not viable, as today Russia has nothing to offer to its partners. This is true to a large extent.

### *Future*

The recent developments in the world, as well as the entire 20-years’ period of the CIS existence allow rather definitely stating the lack of any prospects for further existence of this formation.

Today there is no more Soviet inheritance to divide, so there are no motives for the CIS existence.

Today other approaches and principles of uniting the states are needed. It is obvious that the prosaic motive of economic practicality should be taken as a basis, since it is very specific and understandable. Besides, economic interests must be safely protected by military power, which makes the existence of military and political alliance a rather explicit need for states that have decided to build their own economic system.

The current situation in the world, along with the problems of the global economy, which has been fluctuating feverishly for several years due to the deepening world crisis, brings about inevitable changes. However, the devastating consequences of the global crisis provide another chance for building new relations between the member countries of the CIS.

Currently, one of the possible directions for development of the post-crisis world is the regionalization of the world monetary and financial system. The world economy inescapably moves away from dollar as the main reserve currency, and this is disputed almost by no one. Under such circumstances the

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.noravank.am/rus/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=5831](http://www.noravank.am/rus/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=5831)

world monetary and financial system most probably will turn into a combination of regional financial systems. This path may become a basis for establishment of the new future for the political and economic unions on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Laying foundations of this path has already begun. Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus united in the Customs Union. Unlike with the CIS, the motives of each member of the Union are clear and transparent. Further mutual integration of the economies, the financial, stock and commodities markets, as well as norms and rules of regulating the trade relations both inside the Customs Union and with the countries outside the Union will allow break the ice in establishing a new power center in Eurasia.

In any case, it has to be admitted that the 20-years' experience of the CIS existence was not totally useless. It can be supposed that over some time an understanding has come on what and how things should be arranged for the economies of the countries to develop, and to mutually supplement each other, thus making possible to improve the people's quality of life.

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