

PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES OF THE COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANIZATION (CSTO)

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Abstract: The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) represents the most developed and deepest form of institutional defense and security cooperation in the post-Soviet space. This international organization includes member states that are connected by a wide scope of competence in the area of preserving regional security. Although there are other organizations in the same region besides the CSTO, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Eurasian Union, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, their reach in the security sector is relatively small. It should be noted that the leading power in the CSTO is the Russian Federation, and considering the current geopolitical events in the world, the CSTO is gaining more and more importance. In addition to an overview of the role and place of the CSTO, the paper also presents the current situation and perspectives, as well as the challenges faced by the CSTO. Finally, as the leading international regional organization in the field of security in the post-Soviet space, the CSTO became a key element in the emergence of multipolarism in Eurasia. In this regard, the paper looks at the relations that Serbia has developed with this international organization in the meantime.

Keywords: CSTO, Russian Federation, Post-Soviet space, Eurasia, Serbia

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INTRODUCTION

The CSTO establishment was fazed. The Collective Security Treaty was signed in Tashkent as early as May 15, 1992, by the representatives of Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Tajikistan (Rajić & Gajić, 2020, pp. 148, etc).¹ The following year, 1993, Georgia (September 9), Azerbaijan (September 24), and Belarus (December 31) joined the Treaty (Tošić Malešević, 2017, p. 423). The Treaty text states, among other things: "If one of the States Parties is subjected to aggression by any state or group of states, then this will be considered as aggression against all States Parties to this Treaty. In the event of an act of aggression against any of the participating States, all other participating States will provide him with the necessary assistance, including military, and will also provide support at their disposal in exercising the right to collective defense in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter (Article 4 of the Treaty). Article 2 of the Treaty is also important, stating the possibility of CSTO members reacting in the event of aggression against one of the members: "In the case of a menace to the safety, stability, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of one or several Member States or a menace to international peace and safety, the Member States shall immediately launch the mechanism of joint consultations for the purpose of their positions coordination, develop, and take measures for assistance to such Member States for the purpose of elimination of the arisen menace" (Collective Security Treaty, 1992, May 15; 2010, December 10). Among other things, Article 7 of the Treaty Charter states that, "(...) the Member States shall take joint measures to achieve the purposes of the Organization to form thereunder the efficient system of collective security providing collective protection in case of a menace to safety, stability, territorial integrity, and sovereignty and exercise of the right to collective defense, including the creation of coalition (collective) forces of the Organization, regional (united) groups of armies (forces), peacekeeping forces, united systems and the bodies governing them, military infrastructure. The Member States shall also interact in the spheres of military and technical (military and economic) cooperation, supplying of armed forces, law enforcement agencies and special services with necessary arms, military, special equipment and special means, as well as in the spheres of training of military cadres and experts for the national

¹ Hence, the Tashkent Pact, as the Treaty is sometimes called.

armed forces, special services and law enforcement agencies” (Lobanov, 2019; Collective Security Treaty, 1992, May 15; 2010, December 10). What would be the motives for forming the CSTO? The Russian Federation, but also other post-Soviet space countries, faced various forms of challenges and pressures after the dissolution of the USSR. In terms of security in the post-Soviet space, with the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact, and then with the dissolution of the USSR, there was a vacuum, but also a whole range of challenges, from terrorism to various forms of armed conflict and threats to peace. Conflicts continued in Afghanistan, threatening the wider Central Asian region. Contradictions and conflicts in the post-Soviet space, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and others, are a special phenomenon. The influence of NATO and the US was obvious, which, among other things, is reflected in the encouragement of the so-called “color revolutions” that affected the countries in the post-Soviet area. At least in serious trials in the cases of programmed color revolutions supported by the US and some of its Western allies, the domestic security services were insufficient. He refers to cases and challenges that have hit Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Armenia, and others (Lobanov, 2015, p. 91). Then, on November 1, 1995, it was registered with the UN Secretariat, thus gaining an international legal dimension. On September 18, 2003, it was upgraded and renamed the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The Collective Security Treaty Organization was granted observer status in the United Nations General Assembly on December 2, 2004 (CSTO, 2009, p. 3). The full members of the CSTO are Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In addition to these full members, Serbia and Afghanistan have the status of observer countries (both countries were granted this status in 2013). Three other countries have the status of negotiators: India, Egypt, and Iran. Former members are Georgia (until 1999), Azerbaijan (until 1999), and Uzbekistan (until 2012), while Moldova was a member from 1999 to 2002. According to the charter and official acts of the CSTO, its goals are “to strengthen peace and international and regional security and stability, and to defend on a collective basis the independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of member states. Priority in achieving these ends is given to political means. The Collective Security Treaty Organization promotes the formation of a just and democratic world order based on generally recognized principles of international law. The CSTO’s principal areas of action are the multilateral development of political cooperation; the development and improvement of the military dimension; and combating international

terrorism and extremism, arms and drug trafficking, and other threats” (*Ibid.*, p. 7). The CSTO bodies primarily include the Collective Security Council, which is made up of the presidents of the member states, together with the CSTO Secretary General, the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly, and several coordinating bodies. There is a Commission for Military-Economic Cooperation within the CSTO management. At a somewhat lower level are the Councils, comprising the ministers of foreign affairs of the CSTO members, then the Councils of the Ministers of Defense, and the Committee of Secretaries of the Security Council (CSTO, 2022a). According to the CSTO Charter, the Council of Defense Ministers “is a consultative and executive body of the Organization for coordinating the interaction of member states in the areas of military policy, military construction, and military-technical cooperation” (CSTO, 2022b). According to the Charter, the Committee of the Secretaries of the CSTO Security Council is “the advisory and executive body of the Organization for the coordination of the interaction of member states in ensuring their national security” (CSTO, 2022c). There are also working groups within these councils, such as the one for Afghanistan under the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The Committee of the Security Council Secretariat has a Working Group on Combating Terrorism and Extremism, and the Council of Ministers of Defense has the CSTO Joint Defense Staff and the CSTO Collective Force bodies. At an even lower level is the CSTO Permanent Council, which has its own Secretariat, governing Intelligence Structure, the Scientific Expert Council, and the International Anti-Terrorist Media Forum (CSTO, 2009, p. 9). The CSTO Parliamentary Assembly was established in November 2006. So far, it has been chaired by B. Gryzlov (2006 to 2012), Sergey Yevgenyevich Naryshkin (2012 to 2016), and Volodin Vyacheslav Viktorovich since November 2016. In all three cases, these were the presidents of the Duma, the Russian Federation (CSTO, 2022d). The plenary meetings, meetings of the Council of the Parliamentary Assembly of the CSTO and its Standing Committees, which are held twice a year, examine the organization’s activities, the situation in the organization’s area of responsibility, the implementation status of the decisions of the Organization’s CSC sessions and the tasks of their legal support. The meetings discuss issues such as the implementation of the program for the approximation and harmonization of legislation; the practice of ratification of international treaties concluded within the framework of the CSTO; and other issues. The CSTO Parliamentary Assembly has an Information Analytical Legal Center and an Expert Advisory Council. The

members of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly have repeatedly visited the member states, especially those regions in need of particular attention. The Permanent (Standing) Council operates between the two sessions of the highest CSTO bodies. The CSTO Permanent Council is a body dealing with the issues of coordination of the member states' interaction in the implementation of decisions made by the organization in the period between the two Council sessions. The Permanent Council comprises permanent and authorized representatives appointed by the member states in accordance with their local procedures and operates in accordance with the rules approved by the Council (CSTO, 2022e). The CSTO program principles within the framework of military cooperation are as follows:

- Connection of the member states in the military field;
- Institutionally specified regular consultations and cooperation on the issue of military organization and armaments, and the entire military force of the member states.
- Joint military preparations and maneuvers, raising military readiness to a higher level if necessary.
- Achieving cooperation in the construction of military infrastructure, and air and water space of the member states;
- Agreeing on strategic and operational endeavors, operational coverage of the defense of the CSTO member states' territories;
- Agreeing on the composition and dislocation of the armed forces of the member states, the reorganization of the army in the region and the entire joint defense;
- Agreeing on the creation of a unified joint defense system in the region;
- Implementation of operational and combat readiness of the armed forces and other military assets of the CSTO member states.
- Development of shared norms of the member states and use of material resources in the CSTO's interest (CSTO, 2009, p. 11; Petrović, 2010, p. 84).

Regarding military-political cooperation, the CSTO members are defined by the following:

- Participation of the CSTO member states independently and with other states and international organizations in the collective security system of Europe and Asia.

- Coordination of actions after the implementation of new international treaties on the conditions of disarmament and arms control;
- Implementation of agreed measures in the military field;
- Establishment and development of equal partnership relations with NATO and other military-political organizations and regional security structures, based on an effective solution to peacekeeping tasks;
- Carrying out peacekeeping operations according to the decisions of the UN Security Council, the OSCE, and international obligations;
- Harmonization of the CSTO member states on the issue of defense of their external borders (CSTO, 2009, p. 13).

In addition to the basic CSTO activity elements underlined in the Charter, other documents issued over the years have additionally specified military-technical cooperation, military-economic cooperation, border security, joint education and additional training of personnel in security and military issues, and the fight against international terrorism (*Ibid.*, pp. 17, 21, 25; Petrović, 2010, p. 85). The fight against illegal migration and human trafficking has its own special body. A number of these concerns in the region were related to Afghanistan and the crisis that had burned there for years (*Ibid.*, p. 31). The special anti-terrorism and drug trafficking body is the International Anti-Terrorist Media Forum (IAMF), operating under the high CSTO bodies, specifically the Council of Defense Ministers and the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. In the last decade, the combat against international terrorism has been further developed by segments, so platforms for the fight against chemical terrorism, the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes, and other various forms of terrorism have been established (CSTO, 2022f).² Thus, on February 16, 2022, a joint statement of the CSTO, the SCO, and the CIS on countering terrorism in Eurasia was issued (*Ibidem*). The meeting of the CSTO body against chemical terrorism held on March 16, 2022, is interesting, underlining the readiness for the joint fight against the spread of chemical weapons and terrorism in that direction, directly referring to the Islamic State in Syria, Lebanon, and the Middle East as a whole (*Ibidem*). Countering international terrorism is an important item of CSTO activities, with a series of adopted four-year action plans emphasizing cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States,

² The joint CSTO members' statement addressed to the OSCE and the international community regarding the danger of the spread of terrorism on the Internet, the COVID-19-related issues, etc.

the Shanghai Organization, and the Eurasian Union. In terms of CSTO operating costs, on an annual basis, Russia covers 50% and the other five members, 10% each (Karimov, 2021, January 11). The share of the Russian army in the CSTO is over 80%, and the rest is covered by other members (*Ibidem*). When it comes to the CSTO armed forces, they are primarily the forces of the members themselves. In addition, there is the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF) of the CSTO. Although the number of CRRF members is variable, it is approximately 20,000, half of which are from the Russian Federation. The last few years have seen an increase in the number of CRRF members, which was estimated at around 26,600 in 2020 and is currently at around 28,000 people (*Ibidem*). In order to typify the CRRF armed forces, the Program for Equipping the CRRF with Weapons and Equipment was adopted. There is also the CSTO Armed Forces Joint Staff (Bardžić & Đurić, 2016). The CSTO has been taking a position of establishing cooperation with NATO since June 2004. Then, the CSTO Security Council decided on the direction of dialogue with NATO (Rajić & Gajić, 2020, pp. 152). However, in the following years, NATO avoided recognizing and cooperating with the CSTO. The CSTO and the SCO have a view to enhancing cooperation in some areas and partnerships. Thus, on October 5, 2007, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the CSTO and the SCO. The agreement included the fight against terrorism, human trafficking, illegal migration, and drug trafficking, as well as military cooperation through intelligence sharing and the organization of joint military exercises (*Ibid.*, p. 169). Together with China, Russia has a dominant influence in the CSTO and the SCO. The CSTO can be considered a military bloc, while the SCO is more of a political and economic entity with a security component (*Ibidem*).³ In this respect, one gets the impression of the SCO's wider domain of interests and even activities compared to the CSTO. In reality, the SCO has a wider membership, including nuclear powers (Russia, China, India, Pakistan), and Iran as a regional power that is a full member. So, unlike the CSTO, which has only one prominent world power, Russia, the SCO has a range of influential world and regional powers. It is also noteworthy that, in addition to full members, the SCO has a number of countries with different cooperation statuses, from partners to observers and guests. The permeation of the two alliances is logical in that almost all CSTO members are full-fledged members (Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan,

³ In that direction, Nikola Rajić and Aleksandar Gajić state that the SCO monitored the parliamentary elections in Tajikistan in 2015 and Uzbekistan in 2016.

Kyrgyzstan), or at least in some state of cooperation (observers or partners) within the SCO (Belarus, Armenia). What the CSTO and the SCO have in common is that they are working towards reducing the US and NATO dominance, so they are important levers in the emerging multiplanar world. The CSTO's attitude towards the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the BRICS is similar to that of the SCO. The Commonwealth of Independent States originated from the USSR, and it has, among other things, a security component, and all CSTO members are also CIS members. The Eurasian Economic Union is a form of integration in the field of economics, and all its members are also CSTO members. Finally, the BRICS, which has an intercontinental character in the domain of economics, and Russia, China, and India are at the same time SCO members, and Russia is the leading power of the CSTO (as well as the CIS and the Eurasian Economic Union). Since 2013, Serbia has been granted observer status within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO, 2020, June 15).⁴ "Contemporary security challenges such as terrorism, as well as the possibility for Serbia to cooperate with the regional security alliances of the Eurasian space through military-technical and military-economic cooperation, especially through professional development and training of staff, as it does through NATO's Partnership for Peace Program, are crucial for cooperation" (Simić, 2018, pp. 142, etc.). The CSTO has far greater cohesion than the SCO in that it assists members in the event of a threat from a third country. There are also permanent forces of the CSTO Joint Staff numbering 28,000 people and significant military-technical means, including nuclear weapons. The CSTO also has substantial funds paid by the members annually, with Russia investing more than 50% (Lobanov 2019, pp. 221-222). At the annual CSTO session, held online on November 30, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ivica Dačić, as the representative of Serbia, underlined Serbian military neutrality and readiness for further cooperation with this military alliance. Dačić pointed out that Serbia has "good friendly relations with all CSTO members individually (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan), and by cooperating with the CSTO it is given the opportunity to strengthen them (...)"⁵ Serbia's neutral position, including developed cooperation with NATO (open NATO military office in Belgrade,

⁴ Within its observer status, Serbia continuously monitors the CSTO activities, so, among other things, the National Assembly of Serbia has been an observer of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly work for years.

membership in the Partnership for Peace, signed SOFA agreement, etc.), observer status and some degree of cooperation with the CSTO, in parallel with certain forms of cooperation with the Slavic Brotherhood, strengthens this neutral position. In that direction, Serbia could establish cooperation with the SCO and even get some status (guest, partner, or observer), which would not include full membership. At the same time, Serbia is developing military cooperation with China, from which it purchased, among other things, CH-92 drones. Reuters reported that Serbia increased military expenditures by 42% compared to 2018, 2019 and 2020, amounting to \$ 1.4 billion, or 2.4% of annual GDP. Serbia and Republika Srpska, to which we can potentially add Montenegro as part of the historical "Serbian hood" (which are ethnically, culturally, and geopolitically still related), have significant motives for cooperation with the Russian Federation and Eurasian integration in the modern world. The world order is in the process of transitioning to multipolarism, with Russia and the BRICS countries playing a significant role, including China's position. China, as an emerging superpower, in addition to the BRICS, is participating with Russia in integrations within the SCO. The collapse of the neoliberal model failed to establish a new generally accepted economic and social concept, and variants of neo-Keynesianism are gaining importance. In terms of security, Serbia is a neutral state, with developed cooperation with NATO and as a member of the Partnership for Peace, and, on the other hand, an observer in relation to the CSTO and with certain cooperation with the Shanghai Security Organization. The intensity of Serbia's cooperation with Russia, the CSTO, and the SCO in the field of security is, in any case, more modest compared to cooperation in the same domain with NATO, the Partnership for Peace, and the United States. However, that cooperation exists and it is evident that Serbia and especially its public opinion do not want to abandon its neutral status in the military-security domain. The support of Russia (as well as other members of the Eurasian integration in which the Russian Federation participates) on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija and the position of the Republic of Srpska is especially important to Serbia. In recent years, there has been an increase in the CSTO's scope of activity. As with migrant movements in recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted

⁵ On that occasion, Dačić stated that he highly appreciates the continuous and principled support of the CSTO member states in connection with the non-recognition of the unilateral Kosovo and Metohija independence declaration, i.e., respect for universal principles of international law.

in cooperation among member states. The CSTO's biggest challenge was a peacekeeping mission to Kazakhstan in January 2022 to quell internal unrest. More than 2,000 troops, most of them Russian, were deployed in Kazakhstan. About 250 pieces of military equipment were delivered, and manpower and equipment were transferred by Russian military transport planes, which, after the successful mission, returned manpower to their home countries (Galović, 2022, January 14). A successful military mission – the CSTO forces' intervention in Kazakhstan – has strengthened the reputation of this international organization in the field of military cooperation. When the war broke out in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, there were no official collective sessions at the CSTO level discussing the Ukrainian conflict. At the meetings of several CSTO bodies during the first two and a half months since the beginning of the conflict, the Ukrainian conflict was not mentioned in the official communication. On the other hand, the principled solidarity of the CSTO members in the direction of strengthening this organization and its further activities was mentioned (CSTO, 2022, April 29). On the other hand, there were several activities that were recorded as activities within the CSTO mutual meetings and communications at the top member level. We single out the meetings between Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko, including video and telephone communications, discussing the CSTO activities as well as the conflict in Ukraine.⁶ Putin's conversation with Tokayev, the president of Kazakhstan, on April 29 is also important in that direction, as they also discussed some CSTO-related issues. While Belarus has completely sided with Russia and given it logistical support, Kazakhstan shows a certain reluctance to take a stand on this issue (Danas, 2022, March 19). Two days after the conflict began, Kazakhstan President Tokayev said "the breach of Minsk 2 is the main cause of the conflict", but called for peace on both sides (Politika, 2022, March 1). Also, Kazakhstan has so far not recognized the seceded Luhansk and Donetsk. Emphasizing that the cause of the war was the breach of Minsk 2, official Kazakhstan marked Ukraine as the main culprit of the conflict. On the other hand, there is reluctance in Kazakhstan to take a more active stance in this conflict, except as a mediator. Finally, a regular CSTO session took place in Moscow in mid-May. Vladimir Putin, Alexander Lukashenko, Kasim Tokayev, President of Kazakhstan, Sadyr

⁶ The visit of the Belarusian top officials with Lukashenko to Russia's top officials in Moscow on April 12, as well as the conversation of Lukashenko with Putin on May 3 via video beam and telephone.

Japarov, President of Kyrgyzstan, Emomali Rahmon, President of Tajikistan, and Armenian Prime Minister Pashinian took part in the gathering. This meeting coincided with the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Collective Security Treaty and the 20th anniversary of the organization's establishment. During the highest level session, the presidents of all member countries agreed in principle to support CSTO unity. In his speech, Vladimir Putin also mentioned Ukraine and the bio-laboratories prepared there as a threat to all CSTO member states. Lukashenko called for greater unity and readiness for a joint appearance of the CSTO countries. This was largely supported by the President of Tajikistan. In his speech, the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, thanked Russia for its support in concluding and implementing peace with Azerbaijan, emphasizing that his country remains faithful to the peace treaty, with peacekeeping troops of Russia as the mediator. On the other hand, he pointed out that Armenia did not receive more concrete help from the CSTO when it was attacked by Azerbaijan. Kazakhstan President Tokayev thanked Russia first and foremost, but also other CSTO members, for the peacekeeping mission in his country in January (President of Russia, May 16). An important part of this session was the CSTO Joint Staff Meeting, which was held on May 18-19. It is interesting that the representatives of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan participated in this session through a video (CSTO, 2022, May 19). The impression remains that Russia expects support from the CSTO for a potential peacekeeping mission in Ukraine, at least as a hypothetical possibility in the current conflict-resolving models (Petrović, 2021). On the other hand, other CSTO members are somewhat more reserved on this issue. Belarus is ready to support Russia, and to some extent, the same applies to Tajikistan and even to Armenia. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in particular seem to have a somewhat more abstained stance. In reality, Kazakhstan's President, Tokayev, owes the CSTO, particularly Russia, for the assistance provided to the country's leadership and to him during January 2022. However, Kazakhstan is a multinational country, with a very large Russian and Russian-speaking population in its northern part. Hence, the leadership and national elite of Kazakhstan steered clear of sending CSTO peacekeeping troops to Ukraine, as that would be a model that could hypothetically be applied to some other countries in the region, including Kazakhstan itself. Kazakhstan, on the other hand, has extremely developed and quality cooperation with Russia and can be said to be one of Russia's most loyal allies. The Collective Security Treaty Organization is an international organization operating in the post-Soviet space, led by Russia and acting primarily in the field of

security. On the other hand, the CSTO has a role in connecting the former Soviet republics with a number of other international organizations and forms of integration, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Eurasian Economic Union, but also broader Eurasian and even intercontinental ones, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the BRICS. Over time, the CSTO has evolved into a well-organized security alliance, made up primarily of the member states but gradually taking on a supranational structure. Russia is the only world power among the CSTO members whose prestige and leading role have not been questioned. It is worth mentioning the increasingly developed forms of cooperation between the CSTO and its members with the CIS and the Eurasian Economic Union, but also with the SCO and the BRICS, and potentially some others that have emerged primarily on Asian soil. At the same time, the CSTO is one of NATO's important rivals and an element of the multipolar world in the domain of security.

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