

THE COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANIZATION (CSTO)

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Abstract: This article is devoted to the activities of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) at the present stage of international relations. The authors refer to the history and genesis of the CSTO's creation since the signing of the Collective Security Treaty. By using the CSTO official documents, they describe the purpose and objectives of this international organization. The paper clarifies the organizational structure and characterizes the various instances of the CSTO. Special attention is also paid to decisions coming from the Collective Security Council (CSC), which plays a leading role in the CSTO system. The emphasis is on the essence of the CSTO as a military-political block of modern post-Soviet countries with a decisive Russian influence. The article examines the role of the CSTO in Russian and other member countries' foreign policies. Particular attention focuses on the activities of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force CSTO in the Central Asian region, taking into account the decisive role of Russian Special Forces in this structure. The paper examines various forms and aspects of the organization's activity in the military-political sphere, including, first of all, joint military exercises and actions aimed at ensuring collective security in various post-Soviet regions. The authors show certain features that characterize the activities of the CSTO as an international organization of modern post-Soviet states. They also try to clarify the special role and place of the CSTO in modern world politics.

Keywords: CSTO, CSC, CST, CIS, international relations, military-political cooperation, Russia.

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INTRODUCTION

In December 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) ceased to exist, bringing the Cold War to an end. This event had a huge impact on the geopolitical balance of power in international relations in the post-Soviet space, the role and place of the Russian Federation (RF) and other post-Soviet states in the system of international relations. The collapse of the USSR was the result of centrifugal tendencies that actively manifested themselves at the final stage of the Soviet Union's history. However, the demise of the USSR did not call into question the objectively leading position and ambitions of Russia in the post-Soviet space. This leading position was manifested, in particular, from the first days of the registration of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) by the majority of the former Soviet republics in December 1991. We agree with the point of view of the Russian researcher, Valery Nikolaenko, who believes that "the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (...), pursued the goal of, on the one hand, ensuring a "civilized divorce" of the former Soviet republics, and on the other hand, maintaining a certain community and interaction of participants in various fields, including military-political" (Nikolaenko, 2004, p. 24). It should be borne in mind that immediately after the USSR collapsed, the Russian leadership set the goal of maintaining its dominant position in the military-political sphere in the post-Soviet space and, in order to achieve this goal, to form a common military-political framework in which Russia would be assigned a central role.

ON THE QUESTION OF THE CSCO CREATION HISTORY

Taking into account the nervous and difficult atmosphere in which the legal transition from the USSR to the CIS as a community of sovereign and independent countries took place, it should be understood that initially, the issue of ensuring security was a priority both for the Russian leadership and for those post-Soviet countries that still in the 1990s positioned themselves as Moscow's allies in the international arena. Since the beginning of the CIS functioning, Russia and these countries have taken a course towards the development and strengthening of diplomatic cooperation. In the Charter of the CIS adopted in January 1993, the most important goals of the Commonwealth were indicated as "cooperation between member states in ensuring international peace and security, implementing effective measures to reduce armaments and military spending, eliminating nuclear and other types of mass destruction weapons, achieving universal and complete disarmament" (Commonwealth. Information issue, 1993, p. 18). Not all former republics of

the USSR were ready to develop priority foreign policy relations with Moscow, but in the early 1990s, most of the independent states that joined the CIS opted for close relations and military-political cooperation with Russia. However, the most important event in the military-political cooperation of the post-Soviet states in the first half of the 1990s was the signing of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) on May 15, 1992, in Tashkent (Uzbekistan). The Treaty was signed by the Presidents of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In 1993, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia also joined the agreement. The CST officially entered into force on April 20, 1994. Until now, the CST can be regarded as an unprecedented pact for the post-Soviet space in terms of the level of obligations undertaken by countries in the military-political integration field. In particular, the states that signed this Treaty reaffirmed their obligations to refrain from the use of force or the threat of force and also assumed obligations “not to enter into military alliances or take part in any groupings of states, as well as in actions directed against other states-participants” (Collective Security Treaty, 1992, p. 592). In general, the text of the CST on the obligations assumed by the countries resembles the military-political alliances already existing in the history of international relations. Thus, the Treaty provided for the obligation to immediately activate the mechanism of joint consultations in the event of any threat to the security, territorial integrity, or sovereignty of any country that signed the CST. In addition, the states that signed the Treaty decided to form a Collective Security Council (CSC) consisting of the heads of the participating states and the Commander-in-Chief of the CIS Joint Armed Forces. It was the CSC that took upon itself the coordination and provision of joint activities of the participating states. A very important provision of the 1992 Treaty, directly emphasizing the nature of the military-political union being created, was Article 4 of the Treaty: “If one of the participating states is subjected to aggression by any state or group of states, then this will be considered as aggression against all states-participants of this Agreement” (*Ibid.*, p. 323). The decision to use armed forces to repel aggression was given to the heads of the participating states. At the same time, the CST also stipulated the possibility of using armed forces outside the territory of the participating states, but it was noted that such an option was possible in strict accordance with the Charter of the United Nations (UN) and solely in the interests of international security. The CST was originally signed for five years, renewable at a later date. The Treaty also stipulated the right of individual countries to withdraw from the agreement by placing other participating countries at least six months before this demarche. Countries such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan eventually took advantage of this right. The treaty was signed in 1992, at a time when the Cold War had just ended and

the failure of the Soviet Union to implement it was obvious. In turn, the collapse of the USSR, which can be assessed as the largest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, led to serious and long-term international changes for all ex-Soviet republics. The signing of the CST gave an appropriate impetus to the development of these integration processes. In February 1995, an Agreement was signed on the creation of a Joint Air Defense System, which became the first collective military system in the Commonwealth to protect air borders, control the use of airspace, provide mutual notification of the aerospace situation, and train personnel for air defense CST troops (Nikolaenko, 2004, p. 31). In 1996, the Council of Heads of State of the CIS adopted the Concept for Preventing the Settlement of Conflicts on the Territory of the Commonwealth Member States. In the same year, the Regulations on the Secretariat of the Collective Security Council were adopted.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CSTO

Throughout the 1990s, consistent work was carried out aimed at transforming the CST into a full-fledged international organization. In 1999, the member countries signed the Protocol on the Extension of the CST. However, by that time, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan had refused to participate in the Treaty system for various reasons. "At the session of the CST participants in Moscow on May 14, 2002, the Heads of State of the Treaty Members decided to transform the CST into a full-fledged international Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) headquartered in Moscow" (Kokoshina, 2019, p. 8). A little later, at the CSC session in October 2002, the Charter of the Organization was adopted. This founding document is quite clear about the goals and main tasks of the organization. In particular, it proclaims that "the goals of the Organization are to strengthen peace, international and regional security and stability, and to protect on a collective basis the independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of the Member States, in achieving of which the Member States give priority to political means" (Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, 2002, p. 326). In our opinion, it is worth mentioning specifically Article 4 of the CSTO Charter, which states: "In its activities, the Organization cooperates with states that are not members of the Organization and maintains relations with international intergovernmental organizations operating in the field of security. In this regard, the Organization also contributes to the formation of a just, democratic world order based on universally recognized principles of international law" (Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, 2002, p. 326). The Charter of the Organization stipulates that in order to achieve their goals, the Member States take joint measures to form an

effective system of collective security within the framework of the CSTO, create coalition (regional) groupings of troops or forces and their command and control bodies, train military personnel and specialists for the armed forces, and ensure their necessary weapons and military equipment. An important task of the CSTO activity was the provision fixed in the Charter and other political documents of the Organization on coordination and pooling of efforts “in the fight against international terrorism and extremism, illicit trafficking in drugs and psychotropic substances, weapons, organized transnational crime, illegal migration and other threats to the security of state members” (Nikolaenko, 2004, p. 91). The transformation of the Treaty into an international Organization put forward the tasks of improving the international legal framework of the collective security system and military-political integration within the framework of the CSTO. This led to the implementation of more detailed legal regulation of the military component, including the use of armed forces in various circumstances and situations, legally ensuring the use of the armed forces in anti-terrorist activities, the nature of their interaction with law enforcement forces and special services, etc. Of course, all this was already required in the 2000s and 2010s, achieving a deeper and more sophisticated level of cooperation among the CSTO Member States.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE CSTO FUNCTIONING

It was the transition from the CST to the CSTO that predetermined a clearer allocation of organizational bodies within the Organization. Chapter IV of the CSTO Statutes opens as follows: “The Organs of the Organization are: a) the Collective Security Council (CSC); b) the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM); c) the Council of Ministers of Defense (CMD); d) the Committee of Secretaries of Security Councils (CSSC)” (Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, 2002, p. 327). Still adopted in 1992, the CST provided that “coordination and provision of joint activities of the participating states in accordance with this Treaty is undertaken by the Collective Security Council of the participating states and the bodies created by it” (Collective Security Treaty, 1992, p. 323). Thus, as in the case of the CST, for the CSTO, the central and most important authority is the CSC, the highest body of the Organization. The Charter of the CSTO postulates that “the Council considers the fundamental issues of the Organization’s activities and makes decisions aimed at realizing its goals and objectives and also ensures coordination and joint activities of the Member States to achieve these goals” (Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, 2002, p. 328). The tasks of the CSC seem to be quite diverse. These

include, in particular, the definition of a strategy, key areas and prospects for the development of military-political integration within the framework of the CSTO system; coordination and deepening of interaction between states in the foreign policy field; development of cooperation with various international organizations, individual countries or groups of countries, determination of the positions of the Organization on important international and regional issues; development and improvement of the collective security system and its regional structures, etc. The CSC considers issues that determine the activities of the Organization; conducts consultations in order to coordinate the positions of nation-states in the event of a threat to the national security, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of one or more participating States, or a threat to peace and international security; resolves issues of providing the necessary assistance to member countries; establishes and takes measures to maintain or restore peace and security, etc. It also should be remembered that, in principle, "the decisions of the Collective Security Council and the decisions of the Council of Foreign Ministers, the Council of Ministers of Defense, and the Committee of Secretaries of Security Councils adopted in their execution are binding on the member states" (Nikolaenko, 2004, p. 91). It is very important to keep in mind that these decisions, with the exception of procedural ones, are taken by consensus, while any Member State of the Organization has one vote when voting. Thus, in essence, it can be said that in the CSTO system, the member countries have a right of veto in making political decisions at the level of the Organization. Other bodies of the CSTO – councils of the ministers of defense, foreign affairs, etc. – have both executive and advisory status. They play an important coordinating role in the life of the Organization but, at the same time, remain subordinate to the CSC. The status of an international organization within the CSTO is complemented by the presence of the position of the Secretary General of the Organization, who is the highest administrative officer of the CSTO. The powers of the Secretary General are quite diverse: "he manages the Secretariat; organizes consultations on the implementation of the Collective Security Treaty... coordinates the development and approval of relevant draft decisions (...)" (Shamakhov, Kirilenko, Kovalev, 2019, p. 99-100). In turn, the CSTO Secretariat provides organizational, informational, political, and advisory support for the activities of all organs of the Organization. It is the Secretariat, in cooperation with the Permanent Council, that prepares draft decisions and other documents of the CSTO bodies. Another political institution of the Organization is the Parliamentary Assembly (PA) of the CSTO. This institution was founded on the basis of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. The main forms of work of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly in the CST format were regular meetings of the members of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly

(members of the CST and the Permanent Commission of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Defense and Security) (Kokoshina, 2019, p. 23). *De jure*, the PA CSTO was founded in 2006. It consists of parliamentary delegations of states participating in the Organization's activities. Within the framework of the Parliamentary Assembly, there are several permanent commissions: on political issues and international cooperation; on defense and security issues; and on socio-economic and legal issues, in which legislators from the CSTO member countries take part. Plenary meetings of the PA CSTO are held, as a rule, twice a year. As in other political instances of the CSTO, the role of Russia in the regular activities of the PA seems to be dominant.

THE CSTO AS A MODERN MILITARY-POLITICAL BLOC

Throughout the Cold War, the USSR acted as the country that actually "led" the "communist" pole of international relations. The main military-political dimension of this Soviet dominance was the Warsaw Treaty Organization, which consisted of the Eastern European "socialist" countries. The end of the Cold War marked dramatic changes in the system of international relations, in particular, the self-dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and a clear reorientation of almost all of Moscow's Eastern European allies towards Washington and Western Europe. Taking into account the new geopolitical realities, which implied a decrease in Russian influence on the western flanks of the former USSR and in the South Caucasus, such a configuration has developed when most of Moscow's military and political allies in the post-Soviet space are represented by countries belonging to Central Asia. The formation of CST/CSTO as a military-political subject of modern international relations was helped by the work on the development of the Concept of Collective Security of the Treaty, which was approved back in 1995. The Concept proclaimed that the CST countries were ready to carry out consultations in order to coordinate positions and pursue a coordinated security policy (The concept of collective security, 1995, p. 335). The territorial and geographical framework for the implementation of the CSTO Collective Security Concept will extend primarily to the Central Asian Organization's member states. They also affect the zones of Eastern Europe (Belarus) or the South Caucasus (Armenia). In general, the collective security of the CSTO member states is based on the principles of the indivisibility of security; the equal responsibility of the member states for ensuring security; respect for territorial integrity and respect for sovereignty; and collectivity of defense created on a regional basis. Taking into account these political obligations of the CSTO member countries, we must also take into account the realities of modern international relations, which show the fragility

of the foreign policy and military-political partnership of the participating countries. Various specific cases (for example, regular tension on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border; non-recognition of the inclusion of Crimea into the Russian Federation by other partners in the Organization; non-recognition of the state independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by them; the absence of any real assistance to Yerevan during the open Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020) show that the CSTO military-political alliance has its own internal weaknesses.

THE ROLE OF THE CSTO IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND OTHER MEMBER STATES

As we have already noted, the CSTO dimension complements for Russia and the partner countries in the post-Soviet space other forms of international interaction, in particular, the Union State of Russia and Belarus or the Eurasian Economic Union, where Russia plays a system-forming role. For Russia, relations with the Organization's member countries are of the utmost priority. With almost all other states participating in the CSTO system, Russia has bilateral military-political agreements. In the Russian Military Doctrine, adopted in 2011, the main tasks of Russia to deter and prevent military conflicts are "...strengthening the collective security system within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and building up its potential (...)" (Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2010). In general, other Organization's member countries also emphasize the fundamental importance of the CSTO for ensuring their own national security. The main military-political Russia's ally, the Republic of Belarus, actively contributed to the transformation of the CST into the CSTO, based on the fact that the formation of an international regional organization corresponds to the national interests of the Belarusian state and the security policy of Belarus. The creation of the Unified Regional Missile Defense System of the Union State of Russia and Belarus is a specific example of Belarusian military-political activity in the post-Soviet space. In the Caucasus strategic direction, Russia's key partner is the Republic of Armenia, adjacent to the southern flank of NATO represented by Turkey. Armenia is actively cooperating with other CSTO member countries in the field of air defense. There is also a Russian military base and Russian border guards on the territory of Armenia. "The Armenian leadership gives priority to its participation in the CST (CSTO) in terms of ensuring its security in a broad sense — political, transport (...)" (Nikolaenko, 2004, p. 73). Strong military-political and strategic relations have developed between the Russian Federation and the countries of Central Asia – Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Russian aid played a

crucial role in the outcome of the civil war in Tajikistan in favor of the secular regime. Russia essentially acts as the main external guarantor of the security of the Republic of Tajikistan, playing a leading role in arming and training the Tajik army. The 201st Russian military base operates on the territory of Tajikistan. In turn, Kyrgyzstan, taking into account the multi-vector foreign policy of this Central Asian state, also receives Russian weapons on a regular basis. A Russian air base has been located on the territory of Kyrgyzstan since the early 2000s.

Since the end of the existence of a single Soviet state, relations with the Republic of Kazakhstan have been of great importance for Russia. Under the first President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, this state actively initiated various political and economic integration projects in the post-Soviet space. Diverse relationships with the Republic of Kazakhstan have been important to the Russian leadership since the 1990s. Political stability in Kazakhstan and Kazakhstan's predictable foreign policy loyal to Moscow were seen by Russia as a constant and given. That is why popular unrest, which turned into riots and coordinated attacks on authorities in certain regions of Kazakhstan in early January 2022, caused deep unrest in Moscow. On January 5, 2022, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, asked the CSTO countries to provide assistance to his country due to the "attack of terrorist gangs" on Kazakhstan, interpreting internal events in the country as an "act of aggression" (Tokayev asked the CSTO countries, 2022). Obviously, the intervention of the CSTO countries played a major role in stabilizing the political situation in Kazakhstan and in maintaining the power of K.J. Tokayev. Taking into account the fact that the CSTO contingent was deployed in Kazakhstan within a matter of hours, that the military personnel of all other member countries of the Organization (with the decisive role of Russia) took part in the operation, and that the mission itself was carried out for 10 days and turned out to be very effective, we can conclude that the "Kazakhstani" operation not only demonstrated a high level of foreign policy unity within the CSTO but also showed the international community how effective the CSTO itself is today. The CSTO operation in January 2022 clearly showed that the level of foreign policy and military-political understanding between the Russian Federation and other CSTO member countries is quite high. However, it would not be correct to say that there are no "pitfalls" in the matter of military-political integration in the Organization. This moment was most clearly manifested during the next aggravation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict for control over Nagorno-Karabakh, when in the fall of 2020, other countries of the Organization did not provide any real and tangible assistance to Yerevan.

COLLECTIVE SECURITY COUNCIL SUMMITS AS EXAMPLES OF THE ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONING

As we have already noted, the highest collegial political instance of the CSTO is the CSC summits. Their decisions are worked out in the bowels of the Organization and adopted by consensus. Accordingly, they reflect the unified collective position of the Organization on a variety of issues. The Regulations on the Collective Security Council as the supreme body were approved at the CSC meeting in Dushanbe in 2003. At the same time, regulations on the functioning of other Organization's advisory bodies were also approved. In fact, the establishment of the Organization was finalized at the summit in Dushanbe, and the decision on the formation of the Joint Staff of the CSTO was made at the CSB session in Dushanbe on January 1, 2004 (Nikolaenko, 2004, p. 103). Much attention during the Council meetings was and is being paid to specific forms of military-technical interaction between the allied states. It can be said that the actual military dimension of the CSTO's activities takes place under constant and close control by the Council. This trend took place both at an early stage of the Organization's functioning and will manifest in the future. "Given the important role of the Joint Staff in the Organization's collective security system, the heads of member states in October 2016, at the Yerevan summit, gave a new impetus to the improvement of the Joint Staff's activities by adopting some important documents. On January 1, 2018, its new structure was approved, corresponding to the tasks actually assigned to it, which makes it possible to give a new impetus to the development of the military component of the Organization" (Shamakhov, Kirilenko, Kovalev, 2019, p. 109). At the summit meetings of the CSTO member states in the 2000s and 2010s, the issues of strengthening the effectiveness of interaction in the foreign policy and defense spheres were repeatedly raised. The CSC meetings regularly link the expansion of interaction at the level of the Organization with the need to strengthen international security. For example, the CSTO leaders' statement at the June 2004 Astana meeting stated: "The CSTO member states will strive to use the potential of their coordinated foreign policy, security, and defense activities in the interests of strengthening world and regional stability" (Statement of Heads of the Member States of the Organization, 2004, p. 367). The senior leaders also attach a certain importance to the development of the representative dimension of the Organization. Thus, in June 2006, "the Minsk session of the Collective Security Council identified the need to develop the parliamentary dimension of the CSTO within the framework of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly" (Kokoshina, 2019, p. 23). As a result of these decisions, the PA CSTO was formed in November 2006.

ROLE OF THE CSTO's COLLECTIVE RAPID REACTION FORCE

The factor of the existence and functioning of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF), which exists within the framework of the CSTO, is also an important point that speaks of the high level of interstate military-political and military-technical cooperation. It should be noted that in the early 2000s, real work began in this direction. At a meeting of the CSC in Yerevan in 2001, a decision was made on the collective rapid deployment forces of the Central Asian region for collective security. After the Dushanbe session of the CSC in 2007, a document was signed on the further formation of the collective security system and the creation of a system for managing the forces and means of the collective security system. The process of moving towards the CRRF went much faster. The CRRF was formed based on a decision taken at the CSC summit in December 2009 and is designed to quickly respond to challenges and threats to the security of CSTO members. The Organization's collective security forces and means include: the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces; the peacekeeping forces; and the Collective Air Force. The CRRF also "represents military contingents and formations of special forces allocated by the CSTO states to jointly solve the tasks assigned to them to ensure collective security" (Shamakhov, Kirilenko, Kovalev, 2019, p. 114). The main tasks of the CRRF today are as follows: "deployment on the territory of any of the CSTO states in order to demonstrate readiness for the use of military force; participation in the prevention and repulse of armed attacks, including aggression; localization of armed conflicts; and participation in measures to combat international terrorism, illicit trafficking in drugs, psychotropic substances...weapons and ammunition (...)" (Shamakhov, Kirilenko, Kovalev, 2019, pp. 114-115). To manage the CRRF contingents during the preparation and conduct of the operation and organize the interaction with the interested structures of the CSTO participating countries, the Command of the Collective Forces, headed by the Commander, was created. The core of the CRRF grouping is the 98th division of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and the 37th air assault brigade of the airborne troops of Kazakhstan (Kokoshina, 2019, p. 44). Given that the main operational tasks of functioning are directly related to the Central Asian region, it should be noted that the actions of the CRRF units in Kazakhstan in January 2022 were quite effective.

MILITARY MANEUVERS AND OTHER FORMS OF THE ORGANIZATION'S ACTIVITY

Given the military-political nature of the CSTO, it seems completely logical that the organization and conduct of military maneuvers is one of the most important aspects of its specific activities. Undoubtedly, this form of military-

political and military-technical cooperation of the post-Soviet states was present from the moment the Organization was proclaimed. However, in the last few years, it has noticeably changed, becoming more versatile and effective. "The member states of the CSTO regularly conduct military exercises "Interaction" and "Indestructible Brotherhood". In 2016, the "Interaction" exercise was held in the Pskov region, where training tasks were practiced for the use of the CRRF military contingents in the context of the unleashing of armed border conflicts in the collective security region with the participation of more than 6,000 military personnel" (Kokoshina, 2019, p. 40). Also in 2016-2018, joint military exercises included operations related to countering drug trafficking, extremism and terrorism. The exercise "Indestructible Brotherhood-2019" took place in difficult conditions in the southern part of Tajikistan, near the border with Afghanistan; accordingly, the exercise was a peacekeeping operation. At the "Indestructible Brotherhood-2020" exercise held in Belarus, the CSTO's peacekeepers worked out the first stage of preparing for a peacekeeping operation: "The units are practicing escorting convoys with humanitarian cargo, occupying their areas of responsibility by peacekeeping contingents, guarding and countering an attack" (CSTO peacekeepers at the exercise, 2020). It can be concluded that the factor of conducting regular military exercises and maneuvers contributes to the strengthening of the armed forces and the maintenance of national security, primarily of the states located in the Central Asian zone. These events also strengthen military-technical relations between Russia and other countries involved in the life of the CSTO.

Of course, the forms of the CSTO's activities at the present stage are not limited to military exercises alone. As we have already emphasized, the most important task of the Organization is to counter the various threats arising from international terrorism. In particular, these challenges are relevant to the Central Asian region of the CIS. "Coordination of the joint fight against terrorism and related drug aggression, illegal migration, and illegal arms trade is carried out by the CSTO in direct connection, primarily in connection with the Afghan situation..." (Nikolaenko, 2004, p. 114). In the specific conditions of the Central Asian states, the CSTO was particularly concerned about the activities of such structures as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir party, and local cells of Al-Qaeda. Constant attention was paid to the ties of the Afghan Taliban movement with extremist organizations operating illegally in the countries of Central Asia. The triumphant return of the Afghan Taliban to power in 2021 once again confronted the CSTO with the question of deepening cooperation between the relevant anti-terrorist services and strengthening joint collective security in the face of new potential challenges from Afghanistan. The structures of the CSTO provided expert assistance in the adoption of

common documents on countering terrorism for the member countries of the Organization, as well as for the entire CIS. In particular, in this way, in the depths of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, a Model Law "On the Fight against Terrorism" was developed, which characterized international terrorism and terrorist activities. Considering the various forms and activities of the CSTO, attention should be paid to the Organization's potential for unifying the training of personnel and specialists in the higher educational institutions of the member countries. "Joint training of personnel and specialists is carried out free of charge or on preferential terms, which are based on allied obligations and the formation of a unified educational policy and standards in the CSTO format" (Shamakhov, Kirilenko, Kovalev, 2019, p. 120). Thus, in the interests of the CSTO, the training of military personnel for the armed forces of the member countries of the Organization is carried out in about fifty educational institutions in six countries. Military personnel are trained in a wide range of areas and specialties; there are more than a hundred varieties in total.

ON THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE CSTO AS AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE

As we can see, the CSTO is not only one of the interstate organizations uniting the countries of the former USSR but also, objectively, one of the most effective international associations in the post-Soviet space. This is the opinion of many Russian experts on military-political issues. The very process of launching the CST, and then transforming it into the CSTO, is indicative. This process was not problem-free and very fast, but it proceeded consistently with increasing dynamics. As V.D. Nikolaenko, one of the researchers of the CSTO genesis process and its activities, notes, "the creation of the CSTO as an international regional organization is not only the culmination of many years of efforts to form a collective security system in the post-Soviet space, but also means the entry into the international arena of a new political organism with a good potential – if there is the due will of its members – in the field of peacekeeping, influencing, together with other similar organizations, the international and especially regional situation in the interests of peace and stability, and, of course, primarily in defending the interests of the member states themselves" (Nikolaenko, 2004, p. 196-197). The CSTO phenomenon is also interesting due to the fact that at the present stage in the world system of international relations there are separate organizations that are publicly alternative to the paradigm of the hegemony of the "collective West" led by the United States (in particular, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America – ALBA – in Latin Caribbean America), but only the CSTO could today

be considered as a structure that could potentially be an alternative to the NATO bloc in the military-political sense. Not only from the point of view of researchers from the post-Soviet space but also according to the position of the CSTO members' highest statesmen, the format of this Organization has justified itself. Thus, the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, at the beginning of 2022 stated that "... the long-term painstaking work carried out within the framework of the CSTO to form an integrated security system of the participating states, including, of course, the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the CSTO, is yielding results" (Session of the Collective Security Council, 2022). A similar point of view is shared by the presidents of other states participating in the Organization.

ON THE ROLE AND PLACE OF THE CSTO IN WORLD POLITICS

Today, the ranks of the CSTO include countries located in various zones of the post-Soviet space. These are states that have an unequal political culture and political structure, various external partners, and their own national-state interests. Despite the fact that it was Russia that played and is playing a primary role in the functioning of the CSTO, it should be remembered that "when pursuing a multi-vector policy, the CSTO member states do not oppose this organization to NATO or anyone else, although the interests of allies in the CSTO do not always coincide with the interests of their partners in other associations of a military-political nature" (Nikolaenko, 2004, p. 187). Speaking about the role of the CSTO in the system of modern international relations, one should remember the peacekeeping potential of this Organization. The CSTO peacekeeping agreement was signed in 2007 (it entered into force in 2009). This act proclaimed the creation on a permanent basis of the Collective Peacekeeping Forces, which can carry out peacekeeping operations on the territory of countries that are members of the CSTO structure and those that are not (if there is an appropriate UN mandate) (Karnaukhova, 2022). For example, we can cite an excerpt from the statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organization's member countries, dedicated to the future of the UN (2005): "We believe that reforming the structure and mechanisms of the UN should lead to an increase in the efficiency of its work, primarily on such priority areas as peacekeeping and maintaining global peace, non-proliferation of mass destruction weapons, combating terrorism, xenophobia and religious extremism, illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors, organized crime, illegal migration and human trafficking" (Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs., 2005, p. 369). In 2010, a joint declaration on cooperation between the secretariats of the UN and CSTO was

signed. Relations between the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which includes most of the countries that are simultaneously members of the CSTO (namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan), are also at a fairly high level. Back in 2007, the CSTO and the SCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding. It stated that the secretariats of both organizations would support cooperation in the following areas: “ensuring regional and international stability; countering terrorism; combating drug trafficking; suppression of illicit arms trafficking; combating organized transnational crime (...)” (Memorandum of Understanding, 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

The history and evolution of the CST/CSTO show that this international organization in the first two decades of the 21st century gradually strengthened its integration processes and combat capability. The operation in January 2022 in Kazakhstan demonstrated in practice that the CSTO can have the appropriate potential necessary to maintain regional security in the Organization’s area of responsibility. There is a deepening of cooperation not only in the purely military sphere but also in the areas of foreign policy, peacekeeping, inter-parliamentary activities, etc. However, we cannot talk about the total unity of the CSTO member countries in international life. For example, none of Russia’s CSTO allies recognized the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics following Russia, just as they did not recognize the joining of Crimea to Russia in 2014. We emphasize once again that the CSTO’s tasks are aimed at the future. First of all, this applies specifically to the issue of security. The Collective Security Strategy for the period up to 2025, adopted in 2016, states that “the strategic goal of the CSTO is to ensure collective security by consolidating the efforts and resources of the CSTO member states on the basis of strategic partnership and generally recognized norms and principles of international law” (Strategy of Collective Security, 2016, p. 204).

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