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Collective Security Treaty Organization

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Summary

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is a regional international organization (military-political bloc), created in 2002 and based on the 1992 Collective Security Treaty.

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The goals of the organization are strengthening peace, security and stability, and the protection of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Member States on a collective basis. The original signatories to the Collective Security Treaty (CST) were Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In 1993, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia joined the treaty, and on 20 December 1994, the treaty entered into force. When in 1999 the CST was prolonged, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan withdrew from it. Azerbaijan and Georgia referred to the insufficient response to the armed conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. Uzbekistan explained its decision by the ineffectiveness of the post-Soviet structures in ensuring the country's security.

In 2002, the CST was transformed into an international organization with the adoption of the Charter and the Agreement on the legal status of the CSTO.

After dramatic internal political events in May 2005, Uzbekistan decided to restore its membership in the CSTO. However, Uzbekistan's participation remained nominal: Tashkent refrained from participation in joint exercises and the creation of a Collective

Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF). In 2012, Tashkent officially suspended its participation in the CSTO. Thus, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan remained members of the organization.

International legal framework of the CSTO

The framework for cooperation of the Member States is enshrined in two documents: the Collective Security Treaty and the Charter of the Organization.

Article 4 of the CST contains the obligation to collective defence: «If one of the Member States undergoes aggression (armed attack menacing safety, stability, territorial integrity, and sovereignty), it will be considered by the Member States as aggression [...] against all the Member States of this Treaty». Article 4 of the CST resembles Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, a document that forms the basis of NATO. At the request of the affected state, all the CSTO members shall immediately provide the latter with the necessary help, including by military force, as well as any other support in accordance with the right to the collective defence pursuant to the UN Charter. Throughout the history of the CSTO, the Member States have never activated this article.

Article 4 can only be used to deter external aggression, yet the CST also provides a mechanism for responding to internal threats. Article 2 establishes a mechanism of joint consultations and assistance (not necessarily military) in case of a «threat to the safety, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty of one or several Member States».

Article 1 establishes the prohibition for the Member States to enter military alliances «against another Member State». However, it does not preclude the Member States from cooperating and participating in joint exercises with other military-political blocs. For example, membership in the CSTO did not preclude Kazakhstan and Armenia from creating peacekeeping brigades with the assistance of NATO and participating in joint military activities and missions with the alliance.

Cooperation outside of crisis situations is regulated by the CSTO Charter. Article 9 of the Charter obliges states to coordinate their foreign policy positions on international and regional security problems.

The development of the collective security system is regulated by the CSTO Collective Security Strategy. Among the threats to collective security, the strategy names political instability, unresolved conflicts, the deployment of air defence systems, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The Strategy also mentions hybrid threats: an external change in the constitutional order in the Member States and the exerting of a destructive ideological influence on their population.

Structure of the CSTO

The highest body of the CSTO is the Collective Security Council. The following advisory and executive bodies are accountable to the Council: the Council of the Ministers of Defence (to which the Military Committee and the CSTO Joint Staff are accountable), the Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Committee of the Secretaries of the Security Councils, and the Permanent Council. The permanent working institution of the CSTO is the Secretariat.

The formation, functioning, and use of the CSTO collective forces are under the responsibility of the CSTO Joint Staff. The collective forces are formed through the integration of national armed forces and are divided into the coalition and regional groups of forces.

Coalition groups of forces:

1. Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF);
2. Collective Air Forces;
3. Collective Peacekeeping Forces.

Regional groups of forces:

1. East European Joint Group of Forces (Russia-Belarus);
2. Caucasian Joint Group of Forces (Russia-Armenia);
3. Collective Rapid Deployment Forces of the Central Asian Region of Collective Security (CRDF CAR).

The CSTO conducts regular exercises. In recent years, the following manoeuvres have taken place:

- Exercise of the Collective Peacekeeping Forces «Indestructible Brotherhood» (held in Belarus in 2020);
- Exercise of the CRDF CAR «Frontier» (held in Tajikistan in 2019);
- Exercise of the Collective Peacekeeping Forces «Interaction» (held in Russia in 2019);
- Exercise «The Brotherhood of War» - manoeuvres combining all the types of the CSTO exercises («The Brotherhood of War – 2019» consisted of several parts: «Echelon-2019» (Russia), «Interaction-2019» (Russia), «Search-2019» (Belarus) и «Indestructible Brotherhood – 2019» (Tajikistan));
- Anti-drug training «Thunder» (held in Kyrgyzstan in 2019).
- Tactical-special exercise of Special Forces Units «Cobalt» (held in Kazakhstan in 2018);

- Special tactical exercises involving reconnaissance forces and units «Search» (held in Kazakhstan in 2018);

Many of the 2020 exercises have been cancelled or postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Forces

The creation of the CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Forces received a great response in the media. The draft agreement on their creation was signed in February 2009, and the session approving the CRRF was held in June. However, the decision was approved by only four out of the six Member States, which contradicted paragraph 1 of Rule 13 of the Rules of Procedure of the Collective Security Council (lack of consensus). The document on the CRRF was not signed by Belarus and Uzbekistan. The Belarusian delegation did not attend the CSTO summit, referring to "economic discrimination" on the part of Russia as the reason. However, as early as October 2009, Minsk approved the creation of the CRRF.

According to the Agreement on the CRRF, the main tasks of the forces include participation in the prevention and repulsion of an armed attack on the territory of a Member State, fighting against international terrorism, participation in activities relating to the protection of the population, and the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance. The creation of the CRRF was conditioned by the need for a universal tool of response to a wide range of challenges and threats throughout the CSTO territory (the functionality of the CRDF CAR is limited both geographically and by the scope of the tasks).

The CRRF comprises approximately 20,000 people (for comparison: the CRDF CAR - 5,000 people). The CRRF, unlike the CRDF CAR, includes not only military units and units of constant readiness of the armed forces of the Member States, but also units of special forces from the ministries of internal affairs, security agencies and special services, as well as emergency response bodies.

CSTO cooperation with international organizations

Cooperation of the CSTO with international intergovernmental organizations operating in the sphere of security is enshrined in Article 4 of the Charter.

In 2004, the CSTO received the observer status at the United Nations General Assembly. In 2010, the Joint Declaration on cooperation between the secretariats of the CSTO and the UN was signed. In 2020, the UN Secretary-General and the Secretary-General of the

CSTO issued a joint statement underlining progress in the development of the relations.

The CSTO is strengthening cooperation with the CIS and SCO. Apart from bilateral agreements, interaction with the counter-terrorism structures of the CIS and SCO is regulated by the trilateral Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation and Interaction signed in 2018.

There is no cooperation between NATO and the CSTO in practice, although the CSTO traditionally expresses its readiness for such cooperation. For example, at the 2019 meeting of the CSTO Council of Foreign Ministers, an Open Appeal to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of NATO Member States on strengthening mutual trust and cooperation development was adopted. However, such calls do not find any response from NATO, despite the statements on the prospects for cooperation. In 2009, the Secretary-General of NATO appeared ready to offer the CSTO official cooperation, but the proposal was perceived by the United States as legitimizing an organization that «has proven ineffective». The argument that the CSTO is not perceived as an organization equal in its capabilities to NATO was put forward later, including by Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. Moreover, Russia's actions towards Ukraine since 2014 have further tightened NATO's position on cooperation with Russia and the CSTO.

Problems and prospects for the development of the CSTO

Many development plans of the CSTO remain at the level of statements. For example, a unified air defence system was promised to be created back in 2009, the CSTO Situation Centre was announced in 2011. In 2021, the prospective creation of joint communications, reconnaissance, and air defence systems was announced, yet the time frame was not specified. This problem is often associated with the fragmentation of the interests of the Member States, which are brought together by Russia – the obvious leader of the CSTO that provides 50% of the organization's budget.

Nevertheless, the CSTO continues to aim for the development of its potential. At the meeting of the Collective Security Council in December 2020, the Plan for the Development of the Military Cooperation of the Member States and the Anti-Drug Strategy for 2021-2025 were adopted. Special emphasis was placed on the development of the CSTO peacekeeping forces and the building up of joint efforts to combat terrorism and extremism.

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