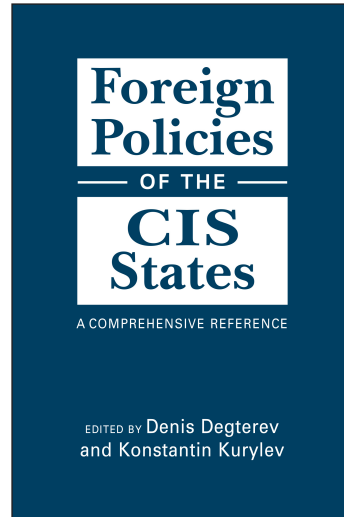


EXCERPTED FROM

Foreign Policies
of the CIS States:
A Comprehensive Reference

edited by
Denis Degterev and
Konstantin Kurylev

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ISBN: 978-1-62637-785-1 hc



LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

1800 30th Street, Suite 314
Boulder, CO 80301 USA
telephone 303.444.6684
fax 303.444.0824

This excerpt was downloaded from the
Lynne Rienner Publishers website
www.rienner.com

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1

Integration Processes in the Commonwealth of Independent States

The CIS Institutionalization Process¹

In December 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) disintegrated, and fifteen new independent states emerged, of which twelve founded a new regional association—the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Many experts regard the establishment of the CIS as the most significant historical event in the post-Soviet space after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The very fact of its emergence allowed the nation to avoid the Yugoslavian scenario of the country's disintegration into bloody civil wars, to mitigate the social and economic repercussions of the dissolution of a unified state, to preserve and develop, on a new basis, historical ties between ethnic groups who lived in the Soviet Union. Moreover, within the framework of the CIS, new integration initiatives in the post-Soviet space started to emerge, and a search began for essentially new forms of cooperation, which needed to be filled with new substance corresponding to changed political realities and global development trends.

The Belavezha Accords, the Alma-Ata Decisions, and the CIS Charter

The dissolution of the USSR was formalized de jure on December 8, 1991, at Viskuli (Belavezha Forest), a countryside residence of the Byelorussian government, where heads of Byelorussia, Russia, and Ukraine signed the Agreement on the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States. It said that “the Union of SSR, as a subject of international law and a geopolitical reality, ceases its existence.” During the few days after the signing of that document, the Supreme Councils of Ukraine, Byelorussia, and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) denounced the 1922 Treaty on the Creation of the USSR.

In the agreement, the parties declared adherence to the principles of respect for national sovereignty, of equality of rights and noninterference in internal affairs, and rejection of the use of force or any other methods of pressure in addressing contentious matters. The agreement was declared open for accession by other former Soviet republics or other nations sharing the goals and principles of that document. On the night of December 12 to 13, 1991, leaders of Central Asian republics—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—met in Ashgabat. The outcome of a long nocturnal discussion was the approval of the Belavezha Accords by them and their stated willingness to join the CIS as founders.

On December 21, 1991, leaders of eleven former union republics (excluding the Baltic nations, which had withdrawn from the USSR before, and Georgia, which chose not to participate) met in Almaty and signed a protocol to the founding agreement and the Alma-Ata Declaration, which reaffirmed the endeavor of Commonwealth nations to establish cooperation in various areas of internal and foreign policy. Those documents, alongside the December 8, 1991, founding agreement, are the founding documents of the CIS. In December 1993, Georgia joined the CIS as its twelfth member.

The CIS Charter, adopted in January 1993 (it was never signed by Turkmenistan and Ukraine), embodied the following important purposes of the Commonwealth:

- Accomplishment of cooperation in political, economic, ecologic, humanitarian, and other spheres.
- Balanced economic and social development within the framework of common economic space.
- Interstate integration.
- Safeguarding human rights and basic freedoms, and cooperation in safeguarding world peace and security.
- Promotion of freedom of communications, contacts, and travels in the Commonwealth for citizens of its member states.
- Mutual legal assistance and cooperation in other spheres of legal relations.
- Pacific settlement of disputes and conflicts.

The organization's charter distinguishes between original members (the states that have signed and ratified the founding agreement and its protocol—those are Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine); member states of the CIS—those that have assumed the obligations under the charter within one year after its having been adopted by the Council of Heads of States (Georgia became a member of the CIS in December 1993); and associate members (since August 2005, Turkmenistan has participated in CIS activities as an associate member).

Establishing the CIS, the founding nations proposed well-defined objectives for the new organization. First was to dissolve the USSR with the fewest side effects; to settle complicated matters related to guarantees of compliance with international commitments of the former USSR, including division of union property, implementation of international treaties and those that regarded control of the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons; and to promote international recognition and sovereignty of the republics. Second was to take into account joined experience of interaction within the boundaries of one country and in a common economy, to create a common economic, political, cultural, and educational space of the new independent states on the basis of new cooperation principles.

The CIS managed to handle the first set of tasks quite successfully, while the second task—building an effective integration association—turned out to be more complicated, because of a number of objective reasons.

The CIS Governing Bodies

Member nations of the Commonwealth were seeing complicated processes of finding national identity; those countries were trying to identify their own foreign policy priorities, to optimize relations with the outer world. It was necessary to find cooperation mechanisms, which would allow partners within the CIS to interact at the intergovernmental level, thus reinforcing their statehood, to safeguard themselves from external and internal challenges and threats.

Within the framework of the Commonwealth, a ramified institutional structure was built, and CIS interstate governing bodies were established: the Council of Heads of States, Council of Heads of Governments, Interparliamentary Assembly, Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, CIS Economic Council, CIS Economic Court, Council of Permanent Authorized Representatives of Commonwealth Member Nations at Constituent and Other Bodies of the Commonwealth, and CIS Executive Committee. The supreme body of the CIS is the Council of Heads of States.

The powers invested in the Council of Heads of States include decisionmaking on matters of principle related to common interests of member nations. It also makes decisions on amending the CIS Charter, creating new and abolishing old bodies of the Commonwealth, and improvement of the structure and activities of its bodies. The Council meets twice a year. Extraordinary meetings can be convened at the initiative of any member nation.

The Council of Heads of Governments coordinates cooperation of executive public authority bodies of the CIS countries in economic, social, and other areas of common interest. The Council of Heads of Governments holds meetings four times a year. In accordance with the CIS Charter and internal regulations, decisionmaking in both Councils is based on consensus. Any

country may declare its lack of interest in any matter, and this may not be considered as an obstacle for making a decision. Heads of states and heads of governments chair meetings of respective Councils on a rotating basis, according to the names of the respective Commonwealth countries by the Russian alphabet. Within the framework of the organization, CIS sector-specific cooperation bodies function in various areas of activities.

The Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs is an executive body of the Commonwealth; between meetings of the Council of Heads of States and Council of Heads of Governments, the ministerial council carries out, based on decisions of the latter two, cooperation in foreign policy activities of CIS countries. Within the framework of the CIS, the Council of Defense Ministers ensures interaction on military policy and development of military capability on the basis of the Concept of Military Cooperation of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States, through 2020, which was adopted on October 16, 2015.

Social and economic issues were passed to the purview of the Coordination and Consultative Committee, a standing executive and coordinating body of the CIS. A key role in building a common economic space was assigned to the Interstate Economic Committee of the Economic Union, which was set up in 1994. Since 2000, it is the Economic Council that handles social and economic interaction within the framework of the CIS.

In order to ensure performance of economic obligations within the framework of the CIS, the Economic Court has been functioning since 1992; it is called to settle disputes that may arise in the performance of economic obligations and to construe provisions of the Commonwealth's agreements and other statutory acts on economic matters.

On the basis of the 1992 Agreement on the Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Interparliamentary Assembly was established. It holds interparliamentary consultations and drafts advisory statutes, and promotes exchange of legal information between member nations. The body has drafted a few dozens of such acts—for instance, the civil, penal, and criminal procedural codes. After the Convention on the Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States, signed in 1995, became effective, the Interparliamentary Assembly received a formal status and all rights of an independent international organization. The Interparliamentary Assembly's headquarters is located in St. Petersburg.

In April 1999, at a Special Interstate Forum in Moscow, issues related to CIS activities and CIS reform were discussed. The forum attendees passed a resolution to submit a number of documents for the consideration of the Council of Heads of States and Council of Heads of Governments, including a draft regulation on the CIS structure. A decision was made to improve and reform the structure of bodies of the Commonwealth of Inde-

pendent States, which was recorded in a declaration of heads of CIS member states on the principal vectors of development of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The Executive Committee of the CIS was reorganized; it is a common standing executive, administrative, and coordinating body that organizes work of the Council of Heads of States, Council of Heads of Governments, Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Economic Council, and other bodies. The most important functions of the Executive Committee include development of proposals on the Commonwealth's development priorities and prospects, analysis of the progress in the implementation of decisions and treaties concluded within the framework of the CIS, and coordination and analysis of activities of the sectoral unit. The committee consists of departments and other structural divisions.

Thus, the institutional structure of the CIS formed in the first half of the 1990s was significantly improved at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The Decisionmaking Mechanism

One specific feature of the decisionmaking mechanism within the framework of the CIS is the unique rule of "consensus of interested parties." Article 23 of the CIS Charter allows any member of the group to declare its lack of interest in addressing any issue. It means that resolutions of the Commonwealth's coordinating bodies can be adopted not by all but only by interested parties. However, those resolutions are considered legitimate and binding only on the parties involved in their adoption.

Economic and political interests of the Commonwealth's countries did not always coincide, which led to considerable differences in national approaches to the preparation of drafts of common resolutions and in the implementation of the documents adopted within the framework of the Commonwealth. A certain part of them either remained in the dormant state or, if they were used at all, fell far short of their full extent or intent. There are many reasons for this—for instance, peculiarities of the regulatory framework, which does not provide for liability for a failure to fulfill obligations.

Imperfections and lack of harmonization across national legislations of CIS countries are worth noting, insofar as ratification deadlines and implementation of internal procedures with respect to international treaties are concerned.

In October 1997, a summit of heads of states of the CIS was held in Chisinau, where Boris Yeltsin, then chairman of the Commonwealth Council, emphasized the following: "Within the framework of the CIS, progress has been all too modest. In some vectors, we are making no headway. And in some others, we are seeing a backslide. . . . Mechanisms

From December 8, 1991, through December 1996 alone, 789 documents were adopted within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States, including 330 at meetings of the Council of Heads of States and 459 at meetings of the Council of Heads of Governments of the Commonwealth (see Appendix 1). Out of them, 704 took effect from their signing day, and 85 required ratification or implementation of internal procedures by CIS member nations and submission of respective documents to the CIS Executive Secretariat. Out of the 26 documents that required ratification, 18 entered into force, while the others did not take effect because they lack a required number of ratification instruments or approval documents. Out of the 59 documents that required implementation of internal procedures, only 40 entered into force, while the others did not collect the required number of notices on the implementation of internal procedures.

of the Commonwealth are working, as they did before, by fits and starts. . . . Our Commonwealth is being destroyed by the chronic gap between joint resolutions and their implementation. Endless red-tape causes damage to the prestige of the CIS and its members.”

After the Chisinau meeting, leaders of CIS countries managed to find a civilized mechanism of working out a new development concept of the Commonwealth—a special interstate forum. The initiative put forward by presidents of Russia and Ukraine found support of all heads of state of the Commonwealth.

Development Prospects

To ensure better coordination of the countries within the framework of the Commonwealth, CIS member nations adopted a number of joint resolutions on the most important economic and sociopolitical issues. Those included the CIS Further Development Concept, including an implementation plan, which was approved at the CIS Dushanbe summit on October 5, 2007. The document was signed by all member nations, except for Georgia and Turkmenistan. The CIS Further Development Concept identifies, in sufficient detail, priority vectors of the Commonwealth’s activities. The document refers to economic cooperation as an important priority for the CIS. It notes that economic ties across the CIS must be based on market principles, mutual respect, and advantage. The document says that “the economic goal of the CIS at the present stage must be finalization of the formation of a free-trade zone and its further improvement according to WTO principles, rules and standards.”

During informal meetings of CIS heads of state on February 22, 2008, in Moscow and on June 6, 2008, in St. Petersburg, principal cooperation areas were identified and formulated: energy industry, transport, food security, building a free trade zone, development of nanotechnolo-

gies, youth policy, migration, and the humanitarian sphere. At its October 10, 2008, meeting in Bishkek, the CIS Council of Heads of States approved in essence a draft Strategy of CIS Economic Development through 2020, which was adopted by the CIS Council of Heads of Governments on November 14, 2008, in Chisinau. The goals of the strategy are to ensure sustainable development and economic security, to enhance the well-being and living standards of people on the basis of the synergistic effect and the scale effect, to boost competitiveness of national economies of CIS member nations, and to reinforce nations' positions in the global economic system.

The strategy provides for the implementation in three stages: 2009–2011, 2012–2015, and 2016–2020. The mission of the first and second stages (to accelerate social and economic development of CIS member nations on the basis of a free trade zone) was largely achieved. In October 2011, the Treaty on a Free Trade Zone was signed (see Appendix 1), which regulates further development of mutual trade within the framework of the Commonwealth. At the third stage (2016–2020), building a regional market of the nano- and picotechnology industry is projected, as well as development of an innovative socially focused economy, design of new infrastructure projects in the nuclear power energy sector, use of alternative and renewable fuel and energy sources, and high-tech transportation systems.

In September 2016, an international research conference on the theme “Twenty-five Years of the Commonwealth of Independent States: Results and Prospects” was held in Minsk, and a statement of heads of member nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States was released in Bishkek on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the CIS. The joint statement made a special emphasis on the willingness of CIS member nations to enhance efficiency of cooperation for the promotion of peace, good neighborly relations, and progress.

Economic Integration in the CIS²

Integration in the CIS is determined by the objective context of a fast-changing world, as well as by security and sustainable development needs. Economic integration in the CIS takes into account practices of other interstate associations, without, however, attempting to copy them. CIS countries are trying to identify areas of cooperation that would be acceptable and beneficial for everyone.

The key benefits of economic integration in the CIS space are:

- Expansion of the market and cut of transaction costs (all CIS member nations are located within a common Eurasian space).

- Opportunities for attracting direct foreign investments, which tend to prefer large markets for building independent production facilities.
- Economic proximity of countries, a vast number of major joint projects, and partnership with big businesses, not only to derive economic benefits but also to strengthen relations at the political level and open up an opportunity for a more active cooperation in the military, social, cultural, and other noneconomic areas.
- Backing up new sectors of national industry. In today's world, an international association is frequently regarded as a means of backing up local manufacturers, which could have a larger regional market.
- Integration as a method of reinforcing bargaining positions within the framework of multilateral negotiations.
- Promoting structural transformations in national economies by sharing best experiences in building a market economy, technology exchanges, and a subsidized pricing system.

A Model of Economic Integration

In 1993, member nations of the Commonwealth entered into the Treaty on Economic Union, for which not all of them were ready.

The Commonwealth's countries already had a common economy;

According to a classic integration pattern proposed by Hungarian economist Béla Balassa, which was largely proven correct by the experience of the European Union (EU), any integration association goes through five stages: (1) a free trade zone; (2) a customs union; (3) a common market; (4) an economic and currency union; (5) a political union.

therefore, they did not have to start integration from scratch. They were still technologically interdependent; they had common transport infrastructure, interconnected communication networks, and energy grids. An agreement on creation of a free-trade zone was concluded by CIS countries in 1994, but they did not sign the actual treaty at the Commonwealth level until 2011. In 1995, the CIS members that were

most actively involved in integration—the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Kazakhstan—entered into the Agreement on the Customs Union. The document proposed to eliminate barriers that could impede interaction of businesses of the parties to the treaty, to ensure conditions for a free exchange of goods and fair competition. Kyrgyzstan (in 1996) and Tajikistan (in 1999) later acceded to that treaty (see Appendix 3).

However, the adopted agreements did not work to the full extent, and their parties, for all their willingness, did not manage to create a legal framework following the European Union's example. Among the reasons

for the integration failures, it is worth noting the lack of objective conditions for a cooperation model similar to the European one. New independent states reoriented their external economic ties to third countries. Economic policies of CIS countries differed in forms, pace, and choice of third countries as their preferred cooperation vectors, as a result of which different economic models emerged. Since the economic systems of CIS countries started to differ even more, there were difficulties in the harmonization of national legal systems and legislations within the framework of groups making unifying efforts.

In economic integration, two groups of countries could be distinguished: those that were active in promoting development of integration processes and those that were interested in interaction in order to address local issues. The first group of countries (the Russian Federation, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Tajikistan) set up a few regional economic associations in various formats: the Union State of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation (1999), and the Eurasian Economic Community (2000), and later started to develop the Eurasian Economic Union.

For a number of reasons, Commonwealth nations adopted a model of multispeed and multi-level integration, and that pattern was especially manifested in the economic sphere. Multispeed integration means that every nation independently determines when it will accede to a certain international treaty, so parties to that treaty are at different levels of integrational interaction.

The Russian Federation and Belarus

Bilateral ties between the Russian Federation and Belarus have intensified since 1992. On April 2, 1996, the Treaty on the Formation of an Association Between Belarus and Russia was signed, and on the same day a year later, on April 2, 1997, the Treaty on the Union of Belarus and Russia was signed. The Treaty on the Establishment of a Union State, signed on December 8, 1999, was ratified by the parliaments of both countries. On January 26, 2000, ratification instruments were exchanged, and the latter treaty took effect.

The preamble of the treaty says that the parties signing it were “moved by a desire to continue the development of the integration processes set forth in the Treaty on the Formation of an Association between the Russian Federation and Belarus of April 2, 1996, the Treaty on the Union of Belarus and Russia of April 2, 1997, and the Charter of the Union of Belarus and Russia of May 23, 1997, and also in implementation of the provisions of the Declaration on the Further Unification of Russia and Belarus of December 25, 1998.”³

The powers and authorities of the Union State include foreign policy, defense and security, budget, monetary and tax systems, customs issues, energy, transportation, and communication systems. The legal status of the association created by the treaty is a state. Article 3 says that the Union State “shall be based on the principles of sovereign equality of the participating States, voluntariness and conscientious fulfilment by them of their mutual obligations”—that is, on the principles of international law, which is characteristic of different subjects of international law. According to Article 6, each participating state shall retain, taking into account the powers voluntarily transferred to the Union State, its independence, territorial integrity, state structure, constitution, state flag, emblem, and other attributes of statehood. The participating states shall retain their membership in the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations. The possibility of a common membership in international organizations and other international associations shall be determined by a mutual agreement between the participating states.

Article 60 (paragraph 2) provides for the primacy of the union legislation: “In the event of a conflict between a provision of a law or decree of the Union State and a provision of a domestic law of a participating State, the provision of the law or decree of the Union State shall prevail.” However, constitutions of the participating states shall take precedence: “This shall not apply to a conflict between the provisions of a law or decree of the Union State and provisions contained in the constitutions or constitutional acts of the participating States.”

A ramified organizational structure of bodies was set up. The supreme body of the Union State is the Supreme State Council. It is composed of heads of states, heads of governments, and chairpersons of chambers of parliaments of Belarus and the Russian Federation. Meetings of the Supreme State Council are also attended by the chairperson of the Council of Ministers, the chairpersons of parliament chambers, and the chairperson of the Union State Court. Other principal bodies of the group are the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union of Belarus and Russia, the Council of Ministers of the Union State, and the Permanent Committee of the Union State. Within the framework of the Union State, a number of joint programs are carried out, funded from the budget of the Union State.

The Eurasian Economic Community

On February 26, 1999, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, and Tajikistan signed the Treaty on the Customs Union and Common Economic Space. The document, without specifying implementation deadlines, proposed elimination of customs control at internal borders, carrying out common economic policies and creation of a common market of

goods, services, labor, and capital, unification of national legislations, and pursuing a coordinated social, scientific, and technological policy.

The agreement became the foundation of a new association—the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), which was established on October 10, 2000 (the treaty took effect on May 30, 2001). It was an international economic organization composed of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, and Tajikistan; the group was meant to build a common market. Member nations of the organization decided to form an integration structure targeting a closer cooperation on the basis of a harmonized regulatory base and coordinated processes of structural transformation of economy.

It is worth noting an emphasis on economic vectors of cooperation—for instance, integration in the transport sector. Ahead of the first Economic Forum of EurAsEC (Moscow, February 2003), Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev sent a letter to presidents of the Community's member nations, which contained a concept of development prospects of the micro union. In Nazarbayev's opinion, priority vectors of cooperation among the five nations were to be transit corridors and other transport projects, a closer collaboration in the energy industry, including joint ventures, and integration in the communication sector. On January 25, 2006, a protocol was signed on Uzbekistan's accession to the organization; however, in October 2008 its participation in the work of EurAsEC bodies was suspended.

EurAsEC was set up in full agreement with UN principles and rules of international law and had its own international legal identity. It was a clearly structured system with its own decisionmaking and decision implementation mechanism. The Community and its officials enjoyed immunity privileges, which were necessary to perform the functions and achieve the goals specified in the organization's founding treaty and in the treaties in effect in the Community. In December 2003, EurAsEC was granted the observer status at the UN General Assembly. EurAsEC positioned itself as an open organization; any country that would be willing to assume commitments arising out of the founding treaty and other treaties of the Community according to a list defined by a resolution of the EurAsEC Interstate Council could be its member. Observer status at EurAsEC could be granted to a country or an international interstate organization at their request. In May 2002, Ukraine and Moldova received observer status at EurAsEC, and in January 2003 so did Armenia. The Interstate Aviation Committee (IAC) and Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) also received observer status.

The supreme body of the Eurasian Economic Community was the Interstate Council, composed of heads of states and governments of the Community. Its decisions were made on the basis of a consensus. The Integration Committee was the principal executive body; it was composed of

deputy heads of governments of EurAsEC member nations. The Integration Committee passed resolutions by a two-thirds majority of votes.

The number of votes allocated to each country when voting on resolutions of the Integration Committee corresponded to each country's contribution to the budget of the Eurasian Economic Community: the Russian Federation received 40 votes, Belarus and Kazakhstan each had 15, and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan each had 7.5 votes.

The body of parliamentary cooperation, the Interparliamentary Assembly, considered matters related to the harmonization of national legislations and making them compliant with the treaties concluded within the framework of EurAsEC.

Controversies between members, and sometimes disregard of legal norms and resolutions passed by EurAsEC itself, hindered a deeper economic integration in the Community. As a result, an idea emerged to set up a customs union that would include only those nations that were most ready for that move: the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

After the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2014, EurAsEC was abolished.

The Customs Union

On August 16, 2006, at a meeting of heads of EurAsEC member nations in Sochi, a decision was made to set up a customs union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation. In October 2007, those countries signed the Treaty on the Creation of a Common Customs Territory and on the Creation of the Customs Union. At the same time, a plan of action was approved to ensure free movement of goods in mutual trade, to encourage favorable conditions of trade with third countries, and to promote economic integration. On December 19, 2009, heads of the three countries—Dmitry Medvedev, Alexander Lukashenko, and Nursultan Nazarbayev—signed a joint statement on the establishment of the Customs Union, and, after that, on January 1, 2010, the single customs tariff took effect. Armenia joined the Customs Union in October 2014, and Kyrgyzstan did so in May 2015.

On July 1, 2011, customs control was completely removed at internal borders and thus the formation of a single customs territory was completed, and the Customs Union started to be fully functional. It ensured the first “classical freedom” within the framework of the Customs Union—free movement of goods across the entire territory where a single mechanism of customs and foreign trade regulation (the one based on customs tariffs and the nontariff one) operates, and where a single legal environment exists in the area of technical regulation, and application of sanitary, veterinary, and phytosanitary measures, which ensures the use of common lists of regulated products; common requirements for those products; common proce-

ture of their entry into the single customs territory and movement across it; and execution of permits according to unified formats recognized by all parties.⁴ During the first years of the Customs Union's existence, good results were seen. For instance, mutual trade volumes spiked by more than 60 percent in terms of value between 2010 and 2014. Moreover, the product structure of mutual trade of the member nations became more diversified than in external trade with third countries.

The Customs Union had two bodies making decisions that were binding on its member nations: the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (the supreme supranational body of the Eurasian Economic Union [EAEU], composed of heads of EAEU member states) and the Eurasian Economic Commission (a standing regulatory body of the Eurasian Economic Union that is responsible for creating conditions for the functioning and development of the EAEU and for drafting proposals for further integration). The Supreme Eurasian Economic Council was the supreme body that also functioned as the interstate council of another organization, the Eurasian Economic Community. That structure can be accounted for by the fact that the Customs Union, which was set up in 1995 and subsequently grew into the EurAsEC, was the initial association.

The Supreme Eurasian Economic Council was composed of representatives of member nations of the Customs Union and of a common economic space—heads of states and governments. At the level of heads of states, meetings of the Supreme Council were convened at least once a year, and at the level of heads of governments at least twice a year. The most important feature of the Supreme Council was that its resolutions required a consensus to be adopted. The Eurasian Economic Commission (EAEC) was the actual executive body of the Customs Union. It often has been called a supranational body, because the commission, within the limits of its authorities, passed resolutions that were binding on the parties. The commission was composed of the Commission Council and the Commission Collegium. Each member of the council and of the collegium had one vote.

The Commission Collegium, to which the Supreme Council appointed three representatives from each party, conducted day-to-day organizational work. The Commission Council, which was composed of representatives of the parties (one representative from each party—deputy heads of governments, by virtue of their office), handled general matters and, among other things, was able to override decisions of the Commission Collegium. The Commission Collegium passed resolutions and issued recommendations by consensus or, in individual cases, by a qualified majority of two-thirds of votes, and the Commission Council voted by consensus.

Until its abolition in 2012, the Customs Union Commission worked as a supranational body, as, legally speaking, its decisions with direct effect

were binding on the parties, and, in addition, in terms of the drafting procedure of those decisions, it functioned as an interstate body. All drafts of its resolutions were approved by the parties according to their respective domestic procedures. It predetermined their conformance to the national interests of the parties and the consensus nature of the decisionmaking procedure. For nearly three years of its work, the commission did not have to resort to a voting procedure by a qualified majority of votes.⁵

The concept of multispeed and multilevel integration, which was at the foundation of the Customs Union, pursued a goal of creating a space with clear-cut rules of the game and specific development prospects. After the transition to the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union and transformation of the Customs Union Commission into the Eurasian Economic Commission, EAEU member nations had those goals in mind looking forward.

The Eurasian Economic Union as a New Stage of Integration

The Eurasian Economic Union, a relatively new institution, is the core of today's economic integration processes in the CIS space. Its members are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and the Russian Federation.

On February 2, 2012, the Eurasian Economic Commission, a standing regulator of the Customs Union and common economic space, started to function. On May 29, 2012, heads of member states of the Customs Union met in Astana and approved an action plan of work on a draft treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union. Thus the EAEU is a new form of integration of three member nations of the common economic space, which were later joined by Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

On May 29, 2014, at a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, presidents of member nations of the Customs Union and common economic space signed the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union, which signified transition of the Eurasian economic project to a new and deeper level of integration. Vast opportunities opened up for the business community of those nations: emergence of new dynamic markets with uniform standards and requirements for goods, services, capital, and work force.

On October 10, 2014, at a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, a treaty on the accession of Armenia to the EAEU was signed in Minsk. On December 23, 2014, presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation, on one part, and the president of Kyrgyzstan, on the other, signed a treaty on the accession of Kyrgyzstan to the EAEU in Moscow. In May 2015, an

Prerequisites for the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union, the treaty for which took effect on January 1, 2015, had been emerging for nearly two decades after the collapse of the USSR.

agreement was signed on the creation of a free trade zone between the EAEU and Vietnam.

The EAEU ensures free movement of goods, services, capital, and work force; in addition, it helps pursue a coordinated, consensual, or common policy in various sectors of the economy. The EAEU's official status is an international organization of regional economic integration, which has an international legal identity and was founded by the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union—the principal legal document of the EAEU. The document is laid out in 680 pages, of which the treaty takes up 100 pages, and the remainder is composed of annexes thereto (see Appendix 3).

President Nursultan Nazarbayev has been a constant mastermind of the Eurasian economic integration; when the USSR was being dissolved, he proposed preserving the economic unity of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine. In his speech at Lomonosov Moscow State University on March 29, 1994, he put forward for the first time an idea of establishing a Eurasian Union State. It is based on a large-scale project of integration of new independent states on a pragmatic and mutually beneficial economic foundation; the project was designed by the Kazakhstan leader. The novelty was in the fact that, alongside further improvement of the Commonwealth of Independent States, an integration entity should be set up, with a purpose of carrying out coordinated economic policies and adopting joint strategic development programs.⁶ Russian president Vladimir Putin played a special role in the implementation of the integration concept.

During the signing ceremony of the Treaty Establishing the EAEU, Vladimir Putin said: "Together, we are creating today a powerful and attractive economic development center, and a major regional market uniting over 170 million people. . . . Our geographic location makes it possible to create transportation and logistics routes of not only regional, but also of global significance, and to attract large-scale trade from Europe and Asia. All this is the basis for the competitiveness of our union and for its dynamic development in this rapidly changing and complicated world."⁷ The EAEU accounts for one-fifth of the planet's gas reserves and for nearly 15 percent of oil reserves. In the opinion of Nursultan Nazarbayev, "promising integration effect in the form of aggregate GDP [gross domestic product] growth of the three countries may reach nearly \$900 billion by 2030."⁸

EAEU countries are building their interaction on the basis of a high degree of integration. In terms of the depth of integration, it is the world's second most deeply integrated association, after the EU. The logic of the EAEU's development proposes two stages. At stage one, the group needs to build a common internal market; at stage two, backed by the internal market, it needs to promote member states' competitive products and services in external markets. Building a common market of goods, investments, and

services in the region will allow the EAEU to increase the cumulative GDP of all its member nations by at least one-quarter by 2020–2022.

Principal Bodies of the EAEU

The EAEU has a clearly structured institutional system; within its framework, the principal bodies are the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (Supreme Council), the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council (Intergovernmental Council), the Eurasian Economic Commission (the Commission), and the Court of the Eurasian Economic Union (Union Court).

Matters of principle in the Union's activities, its strategy, vectors, and prospects of integration development are approved by the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, which is composed of heads of the group's member nations. The Eurasian Intergovernmental Council, which is composed of heads of governments of the group's member countries, carries out work according to ten powers and authorities, including overseeing implementation of the EAEU Treaty and approval of a draft budget. The Eurasian Economic Commission, based in Moscow, has started its full-scale work; it is a common supranational institution, the regulatory body of the Union, and the driving force of the integration. The Eurasian Economic Commission is the Union's standing supranational regulator; it is composed of the Commission Council and the Commission Collegium. The commission's principal objectives are to ensure an environment for the Union's functioning and development, as well as drafting proposals in the area of economic integration within the framework of the Union. At the supranational level, the commission is vested with 140 powers and authorities.

The Court of the Eurasian Economic Union is a specialized judicial body that considers disputes on matters related to the implementation of interna-

The decisions, resolutions, and recommendations of the Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission are made or passed by consensus; those of the EAEC Collegium, by a qualified majority (two-thirds of the votes of its members) or by consensus (on sensitive matters, the list of which is defined by the Supreme Council).

tional treaties within the framework of the Union and decisions of its bodies. For instance, decisions on the Single Customs Tariff have a direct effect. The Union Court ensures implementation of the EAEU Treaty and other international treaties within the framework of the Union by its member nations and bodies. The court is composed of judges nominated by member nations (two

judges from every member); the judges are appointed by the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council for a term of nine years. The court hears cases in the Court Grand Collegium, Court Collegium, and Court Appellate Chamber. The EAEU court is located in Minsk.

Financial mechanisms of Eurasian integration become operative through the Eurasian Development Bank and the Eurasian Fund for Stabilization and Development (EFSD).

The EDB is a regional development bank founded by the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan in 2006; it has asserted itself as an influential international financial institution. On a priority basis, it carries out projects that ensure expansion of mutual trade and cross-border investments. Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are also full-fledged members of the bank. Other countries and international organizations may accede to the bank's foundation agreement. The bank's authorized capital equals \$7 billion, including paid-up capital of \$1.5 billion and on-demand capital of \$5.5 billion.

In its operations, the bank identifies priorities in every member nation, taking into account its respective needs in economy and development of its competitive edge, and also subject to the bank's available resources. That approach allows the bank to formulate tasks of vital significance for every country and to ensure a toolbox that will help their implementation.

The EFSD is a key mechanism of anticrisis regulation and financial stabilization in the region. The Eurasian Fund for Stabilization and Development, in the amount of \$8.5 billion, was founded by governments of six countries: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, and Tajikistan. The principal goals of the EFSD are to help member nations overcome the fallout of the global financial crisis, to ensure long-term sustainability of their economies, and to promote integration processes in the region.

Economic Development Prospects of the EAEU

Effective on January 1, 2015, a common service market started its operations in forty-three sectors identified by EAEU countries; within its framework, service providers are given the widest margin of freedom. In terms of its worth, the market accounts for nearly 50 percent of the total value of the services. For businesses, it means a serious reduction of consumed time, financial costs, and labor efforts.

At its regular meeting in October 2015, the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council approved the Key Vectors of EAEU Economic Development through 2030. By 2030, EAEU members nations are expected to see 13 percent of extra GDP growth as an effect of their membership. One of the key goals of the EAEU, according to the Union Treaty, is "to create proper conditions for sustainable economic development of the Member States in order to improve the living standards of their population" (Article 4).

One of the most important results of integration in that area was creation of a common labor market in 2015; it ensured free movement inside

the EAEU, thus significantly boosting mobility of citizens of member nations. Citizens of the Union countries can be employed in any Union member nation without additional permits, both under employment contracts and under independent contractor contracts. On January 1, 2015, mutual recognition of diplomas in all specialties, except for pharmaceuticals, medicine, jurisprudence, and pedagogics, became effective. Social insurance and medical care are also provided on equal terms. As a result, mutual flows of labor force across member nations increased. In particular, 520,000 citizens of the Union's countries went to Russia, the main employment destination, in 2015, and 730,000 in the first six months of 2016; about 16,000 and nearly 10,000, in those respective time periods, went to Kazakhstan.⁹

Improvement of business environment is one of the commission's priorities. The EAEC has a successfully functioning system of institutions for cooperation with the business community. The commission has standing consultative committees composed of public officials, experts, and representatives of the business community of EAEU member nations. In total, the Commission Collegium has twenty functioning consultative committees, including those on entrepreneurship, trade, oil and gas, intellectual property, and financial markets. In 2012, an advisory board was set up for the interaction between the Eurasian Economic Commission and business dialog among Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia. It has evolved into a platform where the EAEC and representatives of business associations can network and discuss systemic and strategic issues of the EAEU's functioning. In 2015, the idea of creating the Business Council composed of representatives of business associations of EAEU countries for more insightful work of the Advisory Board started to take shape.

Creation of a common electric power market is scheduled for 2019; not only will it be beneficial from an economic standpoint, but also it will reinforce energy security of member nations. A program and legislative framework is being prepared to ensure transition to a common macroeconomic, currency, financial, and antimonopoly policy. The program for building a common financial market is to be completed between 2020 and 2023.

Common oil, gas, and petroleum product markets are to be built between 2024 and 2025. At the May 2016 EAEU summit, held in Astana, heads of EAEU states approved concepts of building common hydrocarbon markets. As a result, energy companies of the Union countries will obtain nondiscriminatory access to the oil infrastructure of the partners, and will be able to purchase oil and petroleum products without any quantitative restrictions or export duties and for a market price. After a treaty to that effect is signed, a common energy market will have been built by 2025.

Mutual investments are the most important elements of integration. Joint projects worth \$24 billion are in the works, of which \$17.7 billion (74

percent) accounts for direct investments in industry, technology, and infrastructure. The principal areas for investments are the energy sector, metal industry, communications, and agrobusiness.

Effectual promotion of the Union's competitive strengths (size of territory and market, natural resources, transit potential, sociocultural factors) are likely to boost investments in potentially integrative projects. EAEU member nations carry out their foreign policies within the framework of that integration group in both bilateral and multilateral formats.

Relations between Russia and Kazakhstan are an example of successful international interaction within the framework of the EAEU. Russian companies take part in the development of Kazakhstan's major hydrocarbon fields. Twenty major joint investment projects have been completed, four more are nearing completion, and three more are in the pipeline. The bulk of Kazakhstan oil transit (about 20 million tons) goes to international markets through Russian territory via the Atyrau-Samara and Makhachkala-Novorossiysk oil pipelines and also via the Caspian pipeline.

Many large-scale joint projects are implemented in the high-tech, industry, agriculture, and energy sectors. Kazakhstan's investments in Russia amount to about \$3 billion. Both countries have big plans for joint oil production in the Caspian Sea. The electric power systems of the two countries have been synchronized, and a program of creating a common electric power market is in the works. A project is in progress to expand and upgrade the GRES-2 Power Station in Ekibastuz, Kazakhstan.

Preparations are under way for the construction of the first nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan; assembly lines and service centers of major Russian automotive manufacturers are being built. An AvtoVAZ factory in Ust-Kamenogorsk with an output of 120,000 cars a year will be the biggest one of them. Work is in progress to set up a joint venture to assemble versatile Ka-226T helicopters. A closer cooperation is taking shape in outer space exploration. The Baiterek space launch complex is being designed. A Kazakhstan cosmonaut made a space flight to the International Space Station as a crew member of the Soyuz TMA-16M spaceship.

Attempts have been made to establish closer economic contacts with other integration associations. Interest in developing cooperation with the EAEU has been shown by over forty nations. In 2015, a free trade agreement was signed between EAEU countries with Vietnam, providing for zero duties on nearly 90 percent of goods within the next decade, which would more than double the product turnover between the two parties by 2020 and would open up an opportunity of cooperation with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members. The agreement paved the way for a closer integration with other countries of the Asia Pacific region.

The EAEU has plans to link China's Silk Road Economic Belt program to EAEU projects. In May 2015, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping agreed to

work out the possibilities of linking the Eurasian Economic Union and projects of the Silk Road Economic Belt.

Addressing the Federal Assembly on December 3, 2015, with his annual State of the Nation speech, Vladimir Putin proposed working out a large-scale economic partnership between the EAEU, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and ASEAN.¹⁰

Military-Political Integration

Military-political integration in the post-Soviet space is carried out by creating collective security systems within the framework of such groups as the CIS and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and also through a system of bilateral and multilateral military cooperation programs. Common challenges and security threats, as well as limited capabilities of countries to ensure their own military security, drive uniting efforts.

*Building CIS Military Administration Bodies*¹¹

As far back as December 8, 1991, in the articles of the Belavezha Accord concerning military construction and defense issues, CIS founding members proclaimed their willingness to collaborate actively “in providing international peace and security, realization of effective measures for the reduction of armaments and military spending”—reiterating their desire to liquidate “all nuclear armaments, [to complete] general and full disarmament under strict international control” and attesting to their respect for the agreement partners in looking “toward reaching the status of a denuclearized zone and neutral state.”¹² In addition, leaders of the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Ukraine declared that they would “preserve and support the common military-strategic space under the united command, including the united control of nuclear weapons,” and would “together guarantee the necessary conditions for arrangement, functioning, material and social welfare of the strategic armed forces.” Those provisions underpinned future multilateral treaties and agreements on military issues in the CIS.

At that stage, joint military administration bodies of the CIS were set up. By a resolution of the Council of Heads of States of the CIS (those of Armenia, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) dated February 14, 1992,¹³ the Council of Defense Ministers (CDM) and the High Command of the CIS Joint Armed Forces (CIS HC) were established. On January 22, 1993, Kyrgyzstan acceded to that resolution. On March 20, 1992, the Agreement on Joint Armed Forces for the Transition Period was signed.

Despite their intention to keep the Joint Forces, CIS countries started to build and develop national armies, which caused a haphazard division of the USSR armed forces. As a result of that process, national armed forces of the CIS countries emerged, which were unequal and heterogeneous by their composition and availability of various resources.

In May 1992, the process was completed, with Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine coming into possession of nuclear weapons.

The bulk of the infrastructure of strategic forces and the nuclear complex, as well as most of the strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, were situated in Russia's territory. At the moment of the USSR's dissolution, there were 130 UR-100NU (SS-19) rocket launchers and 46 RT-23UTTH (SS-24) ballistic missile silo launchers in Ukraine. In addition, 19 Tu-160 bombers, 25 Tu-95MS bombers, and 2 Tu-95 bombers were also stationed in Ukraine; 81 Topol land-based mobile missile systems (SS-25) were deployed in Byelorussia; and 104 R-36MUTTH/R-36M2 (SS-18) ballistic missile silo launchers and 40 Tu-95MS bombers were located in Kazakhstan. Afterward, nuclear weapons were pulled off from Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.

In September 1993, the High Command of the CIS Joint Forces was transformed into the Headquarters for the Coordination of Military Cooperation of CIS Member Nations (it slightly demoted the level of the military construction administration in the Commonwealth), and the Strategic Nuclear Forces Command was transferred to the Defense Ministry of the Russian Federation.

Afterward, within the framework of the CIS, other documents were signed, such as the Memorandum on the Principal Vectors of Integration Development of the CIS and the Prospective Plan of Integration Development of the CIS (both in 1994), the Concept of Collective Security (1995), the Agreement on the Establishment of Joint CIS Air Defense System (1995), and the Regulations on Collective Peacekeeping Forces in the CIS (1996).

*The Tashkent Treaty*¹⁴

On May 15, 1992, leaders of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan signed the Collective Security Treaty (CST) in Tashkent. Between 1993 and 1994, Belarus, Georgia, and Azerbaijan acceded to it as well; after that, it was ratified and entered into force. The CST includes eleven articles.

Article 1 of the treaty says that the parties shall "abstain from use of force or threat by force in the interstate relations."¹⁵ Member nations also

undertake to settle all disagreements among themselves and other states by peaceful means. It is important to note that member states may not enter military alliances or take part in any groups of states or in actions against another member state. This rule creates a firm stepping-stone for further military-political cooperation. The treaty, however, does not preclude participation of CST countries in wider collective security systems in Europe and Asia.

Article 2 of the CST establishes a mechanism of joint consultations for the purpose of coordinating their positions, which is immediately launched in case of a threat to security, stability, territorial integrity, or sovereignty of one or more member states, or a threat to international peace and security of member nations.

Article 3 speaks about the Council for Collective Security, composed of heads of member states. It is the only body mentioned in the CST. The council may set up its own bodies; it provides coordination and ensures joint activities of member nations in accordance with the treaty (Article 5). On the basis of that article, the Council for Collective Security adopted resolutions to set up the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Council of Defense Ministers, the Committee of Secretaries of Security Councils, and the Secretariat.

The backbone of the CST is Article 4, according to which aggression against one party to the treaty shall be considered as aggression against all parties to the CST. In scholarly literature, Article 4 of the CST is regarded to be similar to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which also considers aggression against one party as aggression against the entire North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military bloc.¹⁶

In 1999, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan refused to renew the CST for the next five years. The process of alternative integration without Russia's participation became stronger when Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova (GUAM) became the founders of the GUAM Consultative Forum in October 1997. In April 1999, at a meeting of presidents of GUAM member nations and Uzbekistan, the forum was transformed into GUUAM. In May 2005, Uzbekistan declared its exit from the organization, pointing to "a considerable change in the initially proclaimed goals and objectives of the organization" as a formal cause. On June 28, 2012, Uzbekistan sent a note, advising of suspending its membership in the CSTO. That decision became effective on December 19, 2012.

*Safeguarding Regional Security*¹⁷

CIS countries pursue a coordinated policy in the area of international security, disarmament and weapons control, and construction of armed forces, and they keep up security across the Commonwealth, including the use of groups of military observers and collective peacekeeping forces.

In January 1996, CIS countries adopted the Concept for Prevention and Settlement of Conflicts in the Territory of Commonwealth States. It defined common principles of CIS countries in handling issues related to prevention and settlement of conflicts, and resolution of arising disputes and disagreements. Activities of Commonwealth nations in that area help prevent or settle contentious issues and conflict situations, and promote rapprochement of viewpoints of parties to a conflict in order to find mutually acceptable arrangements. The nature of those activities and the selection of means depend on the scale and stage of conflicts. In January 1996, the Council of Heads of States approved the Regulations on Collective Peacekeeping Forces in the CIS. Those forces were perceived as a temporary coalition unit, which was to be put up for peacekeeping operations in order to promote settlement of conflicts in the territory of any of CIS member nation.

Since internal borders of the CIS countries remained “transparent,” the focus was on the protection of the Commonwealth’s external borders. In 1992, an agreement on the protection of state borders and maritime economic areas of states, an agreement on cooperation of Commonwealth states in ensuring a stable situation at their external borders, an agreement on the status of CIS border security forces, and other documents that protect inviolability of borders were signed. In 1996, the Council of Heads of States adopted the Concept of Protecting CIS Borders with Non-Commonwealth Countries. The concept was designed to coordinate efforts of border security forces in the protection of border security. The document defines the foundations of border policy, the main areas of cooperation in border security, and the ways of implementing its provisions.

A new stage in the existence of the Collective Security Treaty began after the Minsk session in May 2000, where a common political standing of leaders of CST parties, their willingness to expand military-political integration, commonality of approaches to security due to the evolution of the geopolitical context, and practical experience were revealed. Taking into account new cross-border risks and threats, counteraction against international terrorism and extremism emerged as priorities of international cooperation of the parties to the Collective Security Treaty.

A decision was made in 2000 to start creating regional systems of collective security and relevant joint administrative bodies. It was proposed to build a system of collective security under the CST by combining multilateral and bilateral approaches. The structure of consultative bodies of the Council for Collective Security was worked out, which included the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Council of Defense Ministers, and secretaries of security councils. They were to coordinate actions, first of all those related to a fight against international terrorism. A number of treaties and other legal documents were adopted that were especially significant for practical development and functioning of the collective security system—

for instance, the Agreement on the Main Principles of Military-Technical Cooperation.

Cooperation became especially active within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty in the fall of 2001, when almost all post-Soviet countries joined vigorously in the efforts against international terrorism. Commonwealth countries held intensive bilateral and multilateral consultations and agreed on additional joint measures in stepping up action against terrorism. They discussed enlargement of the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces of the Central Asian region. At an extraordinary meeting of the Committee of Secretaries of Security Councils of CST parties held on October 9, 2001, secretaries of security councils of Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan were also present, as well as the administration of the CIS Antiterrorism Center.

*Institutionalization of the CSTO and Creation of the SCO*¹⁸

On May 14, 2002, at the Moscow summit of CST parties, a decision was made to transform the CST into a full-fledged organization—the Collective Security Treaty Organization—and on October 7, 2002, the Charter and the Agreement on the CSTO Legal Status were signed in Chisinau; they took effect on September 18, 2003. At the August 16, 2006, CSTO Sochi summit, Uzbekistan decided to become a full-fledged member of the organization. Protection of the territorial and economic space of member nations by joint efforts of armies and auxiliary units from any external aggressors, international terrorists, and natural disasters was declared to be the purpose of the CSTO. The CSTO was tasked with coordinating activities of the East-European Allied Forces (Russo-Belarusian), Caucasian Allied Forces (Russo-Armenian), and Allied Forces of the Central Asian Region.¹⁹

Amid growing military and political instability across the globe and in the regions that border on the CSTO's area of responsibility, the importance of the organization's military element is rising. Its foundation is composed of the CSTO Collective Forces (troops), which unite bilateral and multilateral regional and coalition task forces, established and emerging joint air defense, command and control systems, collective mechanisms of military-technical, and military-economic cooperation. Within the framework of that interaction in the CSTO format, a mechanism of fitting armed forces and other power structures of member nations with modern and compatible weapons, and military and special machinery, has been established and is being improved. Practical steps are undertaken to deploy production facilities in member nations to manufacture components for weaponry and military hardware once made abroad. Military universities provide training in a wide spectrum of specialties on a free basis or on preferential terms.²⁰

At the same time, in April 1996, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was established as a group focused on development of both economic and military-political cooperation. Currently, its members are the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, India, and Pakistan. Afghanistan, Belarus, Mongolia, and Iran have observer status. Dialogue partners are Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, and Sri Lanka. Bangladesh, Egypt, and Syria have applied for observer status within the organization.

The SCO's security targets are joint counteraction against terrorism, separatism, and extremism in all their manifestations; measures against drug and weapons trafficking; other kinds of cross-border crimes and illegal migration; and interaction in the prevention of international conflicts and their peaceful settlement. Since 2002, the Regional Antiterrorist Structure has been functional within the framework of the SCO. Joint antiterrorism exercises regularly take place. However, the SCO is not a military alliance.

Deepening Integration Within the Framework of the CSTO²¹

On June 14, 2009, an agreement to create the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces of the CSTO was signed; they were to consist of ten battalions of national armed forces (with the Russian Federation and Tajikistan providing three each, and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan providing two each). The forces were to protect territorial integrity and sovereignty of CSTO members and also to repulse military aggression, to conduct special antiterrorist and antiextremist operations, to counteract cross-border organized crime and drug trafficking, and the like.

In peacetime, those units report exclusively to the command of the armed forces of their respective countries; only if needed do they perform their allied obligations.²² Because of a special position of Belarus, the documents signed by Alexander Lukashenko were submitted to the CSTO Secretariat on October 20, 2009.

Large-scale exercises of the CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Forces were held in October 2010 at the Chebarkul firing range in the Chelyabinsk region (Russia). In total, 1,700 military personnel from Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, and Tajikistan took part in those exercises.

Between 2014 and 2016, integration within the framework of the CSTO continued. The Council for Collective Security of the CSTO passed a resolution on collective air forces of the CSTO (2014). In May 2015, a snap exercise was run across military contingents of all member nations of the CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Forces; during the exercise, those units were moved to Tajikistan to perform combat training near the Tajik-Afghan

border. In 2016, a decision was made to create the CSTO Crisis Response Center and to approve the Collective Security Strategy of the Collective Security Treaty Organization through 2025, which serves as the basis for planning further development of the collective security system within the CSTO. The document embodies the guidelines for further development across all cooperation vectors.

*Military-Industrial Cooperation*²³

Revival of the scientific, scientific-technical, and industrial cooperation of military-industrial complexes of CIS countries is a mutually beneficial project that allows cutting production costs of military goods and using the full extent of the scale effect. Military-industrial cooperation is a necessary complement to military-political cooperation. For instance, Europe has the European Defense Agency, a body of common security and defense policy operating since 2004.

In the CIS, according to a September 15, 2004, resolution of the Council of Heads of Governments of the CIS and a June 23, 2005, resolution of the Council for Collective Security of the CSTO, the Interstate Commission on Military-Economic Cooperation of CSTO countries was set up. The principal areas of cooperation within the framework of the CSTO are:

- Building an optimal (in the CSTO format) system of joint ventures to design, produce, upgrade, repair, and recycle military products, with an all-around adjustment of their operating mechanism, including control within the organization and in entering the international arms market.
- Creating a legal framework to ensure uniform principles and rules of interaction across all aspects of international economic cooperation.
- Carrying out coordinated policy in the unification and standardization of pieces of armament and military equipment.
- Transfer to long-term planning of military-economic and military-technical cooperation.
- Building a common advertising and promotional environment in the area of military-economic cooperation within the framework of the CSTO.²⁴

During regular meetings of the Interstate Commission on Military-Economic Cooperation, matters of military-industrial cooperation, standardization of defense products, creation of an interstate system for cataloging procurement items of the armed forces of CSTO member nations, improvement of the supply mechanism of military goods, further integration of enterprises of ammunition sectors of the industry, and the like, are discussed.

For instance, at the fourteenth meeting of the CSTO Interstate Commission on Military-Economic Cooperation in Dushanbe (May 2016), the attendees discussed the opportunities of using the high-precision signal of the Russian satellite communication system GLONASS by CSTO countries.

Cooperation in the Cultural and Humanitarian Areas²⁵

Over twenty-five years of the Commonwealth's existence, it has become clear that humanitarian cooperation within the framework of the organization has been the bedrock of integration processes. Landmarks of the evolution of humanitarian integrational cooperation of CIS countries and successful projects in that field are discussed here.

The Institutional Foundation of Cooperation

On May 8, 2005, on the eve of the sixtieth anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, heads of CIS countries signed the Declaration on Humanitarian Cooperation of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The document emphasized that, "based on the ideas of multipolarity, peaceful and constructive dialog of civilizations, confirming mutual willingness of peoples, in a new historical environment, to respect the interests and independence of each other, and their willingness to promote and strengthen humanistic ideals," the parties, going forward, would pay priority attention to matters of humanitarian cooperation,²⁶ and declared the need to conclude an agreement on humanitarian cooperation. The agreement was adopted on August 26, 2005.

The parties agreed, "for the purpose of creation of the most favorable conditions for mutual enrichment of national cultures," to realize joint programs and projects in the field of cultural cooperation, to encourage experience-sharing between interested departments and organizations, and, in addition, to foster learning of languages of the peoples of other Commonwealth member nations and to promote creation and activities of national culture centers.²⁷

Afterward, that framework agreement was enlarged with a number of agreements on specific areas of interaction, including an agreement on cooperation in work with youth; on healthcare and medical aid provided to citizens of CIS member nations; on physical culture and sports; on tourism, culture, book publishing, book distribution, and printing; and on building a single (common) educational space.

At present, in the humanitarian sector, a system of eleven bodies of sector-specific cooperation is functioning: the Council for Humanitarian Cooperation; Council for Youth Affairs; Council for Cooperation in Healthcare; Council for Cooperation in the Area of Education; Council for

Cultural Cooperation; Council for Physical Culture and Sports; Council for Tourism; Interstate Council for Cooperation in Periodicals, Book Publishing, Book Distribution, and Printing; Advisory Board for Labor, Migration, and Social Protection of People; Council for Cooperation in Fundamental Science; and Advisory Board of Heads of Consulate Services of Ministries of Foreign Affairs of CIS Member Nations.

The Department for Humanitarian Cooperation on General Political and Social Issues of the CIS Executive Committee performs the functions of the executive office of those councils and organizes the work of their secretariats. The department also backs up activities of twenty-seven base organizations of CIS member nations in various areas of cooperation (two in the area of performance standards, seventeen in the area of education, six in culture, and two in work with youth and development of entrepreneurship of young people).

From 2010 to 2016, supreme bodies of the Commonwealth approved strategies of development of physical culture and sports; strengthening cooperation in tourism; improvement of the work in healthcare; programs of support to and development of national sports; joint actions in

The year 2011 was declared the year of historical and cultural heritage in the CIS, 2012 the year of sports and healthy lifestyles, 2013 the year of ecological culture and environmental protection, 2014 the year of tourism, 2015 the year of veterans of the Great Patriotic War, 2016 the year of education, 2017 the year of family, and 2018 the year of culture.

HIV/AIDS control; and prevention and treatment of diabetes; concepts of cooperation in culture, public healthcare, and control of oncological diseases; and a declaration on the support of books. For a more effectual concentration of resources in certain areas of humanitarian cooperation, CIS member nations decided to hold thematic humanitarian years.

*The International Foundation for Humanitarian Cooperation*²⁸

On May 25, 2006, heads of governments of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan approved a resolution on the establishment of an interstate nonprofit organization—the International Foundation for Humanitarian Cooperation (IFHC)—of CIS member nations. In 2008, Azerbaijan acceded to the agreement.

The goal of the activities of the International Foundation for Humanitarian Cooperation is to “provide funding to measures (projects) in humanitarian cooperation, mutually agreed with the foundation’s Council.”²⁹ The organization’s supreme body is its board, and the headquarters of the foundation’s Executive Directorate is located in Moscow. The IFHC was the organizer and coordinator of most humanitarian projects carried out within the framework of the Commonwealth. In total, over

500 joint projects in culture, education, science, cultural heritage, information and media, sports, tourism, and work with youth have been implemented; they have involved about 300,000 people from all member nations of the CIS and also from Georgia and Baltic countries. Since December 2013, Anatoly Iksanov, former director of Bolshoi Theater, has been executive director of the IFHC.

One priority area of the foundation's work is cooperation with the UN on matters concerning education, science, and culture. For instance, on November 28, 2008, a memorandum of understanding between the IFHC and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was signed in Paris; within its framework, joint projects are implemented. In 2010, the foundation was awarded a UNESCO medal for contribution in development of nanoscience and nanotechnology.³⁰

Cooperation in the Area of Education

On May 15, 1992, heads of governments of Commonwealth member nations signed an agreement on cooperation in education. Within the framework of the agreement, a standing Conference of Education Ministers of CIS member nations was established. On January 17, 1997, a concept of building a single (common) educational space of the CIS was adopted, an agreement on cooperation in building a single (common) educational space of the Commonwealth was signed, and the Council on Cooperation in the Area of Education was set up.

In 1992 and 1993, two conferences of education ministers of CIS member nations were held, which passed resolutions on the development of educational standards, creation of mechanisms for the recognition and ascertainment of equivalence of education documents, and the like. From 1994 to 1996, no such conferences were held. Conferences of education ministers of CIS member nations resumed their activities in 1998. The most recent, nineteenth, conference of education ministers of CIS member nations took place in October 2012 in Yerevan. After that, interaction of CIS countries in the area of education continued in the format of the Council for Cooperation in the Area of Education, with its status upgraded.

At present, the council consists of heads of public authority bodies in charge of education and bodies responsible for performance evaluation of senior academic and educational personnel of CIS countries. In April 2017, the thirtieth meeting of the Council for Cooperation in the Area of Education of CIS member nations was held in Moscow.

During its existence, the Council for Cooperation in the Area of Education has performed a big job preparing drafts of agreements on mutual recognition of higher professional education certificates, on advanced training of educators employed by general education institutions, on granting equal

rights to citizens for enrollment to higher education institutions, and the like. For instance, on April 16, 2004, an agreement was signed to provide citizens of CIS member nations with equal terms of access to general education institutions. In 2013, the Council of Heads of Governments of the CIS concluded an agreement on mutual recognition of higher professional education certificates. In 2014, the Council of Heads of States of the CIS declared 2016 a year of education, which allowed organizing a number of events and raising the public's awareness of unsolved issues in the area of education of CIS countries.

On November 28, 2014, the Interparliamentary Assembly of CIS member nations issued a resolution adopting a model law on cross-border education “establishing legal foundation for the development and implementation of common state policy of CIS member nations towards building a single (common) educational space of higher education across the CIS and designed to ensure harmonization of legislative acts of CIS member nations with respect to cross-border education.”³¹ Additionally, special emphasis is placed today on the program of development of remote training and education of adults.

Regular professional meetings of educators in the Commonwealth space—congresses of teachers and educators of CIS member nations—encourage building a common educational space across the Commonwealth. In 2010, the first Congress of Teachers and Educators of CIS member nations was held in Astana. The fourth congress was held in Moscow in 2016 and thirty-eight educators were awarded a badge of honor for excellent education work in the CIS at a special ceremony, for the first time. The fifth congress took place in Bishkek in October 2018 uniting more than 450 representatives. Congresses play an important role in preservation of the common educational space of the CIS; they help work out vectors and mechanisms of integration, and find ways of mutually beneficial and equitable cooperation of national education systems.

The CIS Network University

One important step toward building a common educational space of the CIS is the project of the CIS Network University (CIS NU). Its establishment was initiated in 2008 by Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN). The idea of creating an emulation of Erasmus Mundus, a European program of academic mobility, in the post-Soviet space was backed up by partner universities, governments of CIS member nations, and the IFHC. Today, the CIS NU operates in the territory of nine countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Ukraine), and unites twenty-eight major higher education institutions (see Appendix 4 and 5).

The CIS NU is a platform for a uniform educational space, within the framework of which partner universities implement joint master's programs and collaborate in training of specialists across fourteen basic areas, including computer science, international relations, management, mechatronics and robotics, oil and gas, tourism, philology, and economics. The CIS NU operates as an open-end consortium (all its participants perform their activities on an equal footing).

Erasmus Mundus + Mobility is the European Union's program of student exchange, a collaboration which is designed to increase mobility of European students and to improve the quality of higher education through international cooperation. The project includes joint master's and PhD programs, cooperation among universities, and enhanced attraction of European higher education.

The consortium's Coordination Council is entrusted with management and administration of the joint activities of its participants. The council includes heads of all participating institutions of the consortium or their appointees. Peoples' Friendship University of Russia has been selected to be the central coordinating body of the Coordination Council. Professor Vladimir Filippov, Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences, Academician of the Russian Academy of Education and Rector of RUDN University, chairs the Coordination Council, organizes its activities, and presides over its meetings.

In the 2012–2013 academic year, RUDN University, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), Novosibirsk State University, Bauman Moscow State Technical University, Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas, and Ural Federal University (named after the first president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin) enrolled 192 students from nine Commonwealth countries to study within the framework of the CIS Network University. Students are educated in national languages and in Russian under a joint educational program in each of the partner universities. The first master's class graduated in 2012.³²

No doubt, the CIS NU system faces inherent complications in the implementation of the tasks at hand. First, university rankings of some countries are generally higher than those of other countries. Therefore, a large part of CIS NU students opt for a program of exchange education with Russian universities. Second, regulations vary across different universities. For instance, since deadlines for enrollment to master's programs vary across participating countries, there may be delays in the execution of documents for the students. Goals pursued by the CIS NU include training of highly qualified specialists who would be competitive

in the international labor market, and promotion of an intercultural dialogue in the CIS space.

Common Informational Space

In the twenty-first century, informational space has become a fixture on the agenda in the international stage, often referred to as “new political space.” The legislative framework for the information-integrational cooperation within the framework of the Commonwealth is composed of a number of documents, such as the Agreement on Cooperation in the Area of Information, dated October 9, 1992; Regulations on the Procedure of Receipt and Use of Information of Commonwealth Member Nations, dated November 15, 1993; Agreement on International Legal Guarantees of Unimpeded and Independent Activities of the Interstate Television and Radio Company Mir, dated December 24, 1993; Resolution on Coordinated Policy in Building Single Information Space of the CIS, dated May 26, 1995; Resolution on the Concept of Building Information Space of the CIS, dated October 18, 1996; and Agreement on Free Access to and Procedure of Exchange of Publicly Available Scientific and Technical Information of CIS Member Nations, dated September 11, 1998. Also, in 1993, the Information Technology Coordination Council of CIS member nations was set up.

The Concept of Building Common Information Space of the CIS was adopted by a resolution of the Council of Heads of Governments of Commonwealth Countries. The document defined “information space of the CIS” as a “totality of national information spaces of CIS member nations interacting on the basis of relevant interstate treaties in mutually agreed areas of activities.”³³ The principal goal of building a common information space of the CIS is designated as “to ensure interaction of national information spaces on a mutually beneficial basis subject to national and common interests.”³⁴ According to the concept, the main prerequisite for the achievement of the tasks at hand is pursuit of a coordinated information policy. The concept was proposed to become the driver for information-integrational processes across the Commonwealth.

One of the most successful completed projects is the creation of Mir, an interstate television and radio company, which recently turned twenty-five.

Mir was set up in 1992 by an agreement of heads of CIS member countries to cover social, political, economic, and cultural life of Commonwealth countries. The Mir Group includes television channels Mir, Mir 24, and Mir HD; the radio station Mir; and the information and analytical web portal mir24.tv. The headquarters of the company is located in Moscow, and it has national branches and representative offices in nine CIS and Baltic countries. The company broadcasts in twenty-three countries, including CIS and neighboring countries.

A resolution of the Council of Heads of Governments of Commonwealth Countries dated May 25, 2007, on creation of a Council of Heads of State-Owned and Public Television and Radio Entities of CIS Member Nations, can be regarded as important; that new body, in turn, decided to set up an Interstate Information Pool on October 31, 2008. A dynamic nature of the council's activities is manifested by the fact that the body holds regular meetings, often attended by leaders of Commonwealth nations.

In September 2004, the Association of National Information Agencies (ANIA) of CIS member nations was set up; it unites information agencies of the following countries: Armenia (Armenpress), Azerbaijan (Azertac), Belarus (Belta), Kazakhstan (Kazinform), Kyrgyzstan (Kabar), Moldova (Moldpress), the Russian Federation (TASS), and Tajikistan (Khovar). ANIA helps bring exchange of materials to a new level and make it more effective, pulling in efforts of different agencies in prompt dissemination of objective information on life in CIS member nations.

Cooperation in Science

Scientific integrational cooperation is a sector that is the least prone to the influence of the domestic agenda of Commonwealth member states. Scientific progress is an international phenomenon. While every country naturally wants to be a pioneer in science (which is often impossible without cooperation and exchange of scientific knowledge) and wants to be proud of its scientists, the outcome of any scientific achievement is common heritage of humankind.

The purpose of building a common scientific space of the CIS is "existence of sufficient conditions for a mutual study of scientific research experience accumulated in different countries, exchange of the outcome of those studies, joint research, cooperation in training of human resources, [and] personal contacts between scientists."³⁵ No doubt, a common scientific space of the CIS has a few peculiarities. And lack of funding is the main obstacle to its creation, like in many other areas.

Today, within the framework of scientific-integration activities across the CIS, the International Association of Academic Sciences of Commonwealth countries operates. The Interstate Space Council was set up to coordinate implementation of joint programs in space studies and use.

The year 2009 was a successful period in scientific-integration cooperation within the framework of the CIS, as the Interstate Council for Cooperation in the Area of Science, Technology, and Innovation was set up, the Principal Vectors of Long-Term Cooperation of CIS Member Nations in Innovations were adopted, and the Interstate Program of Innovative Cooperation of CIS Member Nations through 2020 was developed.

On May 19, 2011, an agreement on the establishment of the Council for Cooperation in Fundamental Science of Member Nations of the

Commonwealth of Independent States was signed. The main purpose of the council was declared as “creating a favorable environment for the development, coordination and consistent expansion of cooperation in the area of fundamental science.”³⁶ Today, the council is drafting a treaty on the establishment of an International Foundation for Scientific Research of CIS member nations.

Furthermore, a system of joint use of unique facilities of the scientific and technological infrastructure of CIS countries is actively developed, for instance the International Innovation Nanotechnology Center in Dubna (Moscow region) and the high-altitude Pamir-Chacaltaya scientific research center in Tajikistan.

In 1946–1947, the Pamir high-altitude scientific station of the Institute of Physics of the Academy of Sciences (FIAN) was built in the Murghob district of Tajikistan at an altitude of 3,860 meters. Since 1971, large-scale scientific experiments under the Pamir program had been conducted on the Ak-Arkhar site (Tajikistan) by employees of the Institute of Physics and Technology of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan and of FIAN of the USSR; those studies concerned nuclear interactions, including cosmic-ray physics. Japanese physicists who worked in a similar laboratory in Chacaltaya Mountain (Bolivia) displayed interest in those experiments. International cooperation between high-altitude stations across the globe (Brazil, Bolivia, the USSR, Poland, and Japan) was named the Pamir-Chacaltaya project.

In August 2008, during a visit of Russian president Dmitry Medvedev to Tajikistan, an agreement on the foundation and activities of the Pamir-Chacaltaya International Scientific Research Center was signed, according to which the infrastructure of the Ak-Arkhar scientific site was restored.

The International Innovation Nanotechnology Center of the CIS in Dubna organizes annual internships of young scientists and specialists from all countries of the Commonwealth. Over 160 people had the IFHC’s backing for the application of experimental methods in nanodiagnostics, and studies of new materials for nano-, bio-, information, and cognitive technology. On the back of internships, program participants present their own projects, the best of which are awarded grants for further implementation, filing for patents, and industrial applications.

Science festivals of CIS countries, international Youth in Science forums, and conferences and meetings of the International Association of Institutes of History of CIS countries, Institutes of Philosophy of CIS countries, and Eurasian Association of Universities are held on a regular basis.

Cooperation in Culture

On May 15, 1992, heads of governments of CIS member countries signed an agreement on cooperation in culture. The document covered multiple

areas of cultural activities, such as theater, music, arts, show business, circus, cinema, television and radio broadcasting, libraries and museums, conservation and rational use of monuments and other cultural and historical heritage sites, amateur and folk arts, and crafts.³⁷ Within the framework of that agreement, the CIS Cultural Cooperation Council was set up on May 26, 1995.

The Russian Scientific Research Institute of Cultural and Natural Heritage, named after Dmitry Likhachev (Heritage Institute), a state budget-funded scientific research institute, was selected as the base organization of CIS countries in the area of conservation of world heritage sites; an expert board was organized there.

The Heritage Institute team comprises specialists of ex-Council for Unique Territories of the Soviet Cultural Foundation. To date, the institute's activities are based on the principles cultivated by those professionals in their scientific expeditions and studies held under the auspices of Dmitry Likhachev; they highlight the fundamental role of heritage in conservation of cultural and natural diversity of the CIS and in its sustainable development.

The institute's employees have built a databank of organizations and specialists in culture across the Commonwealth and, in addition, have developed the concept of a program for advanced and professional training of public officials managing world heritage sites in CIS countries.

On December 4, 2004, a model law on culture was passed at a regular meeting of the Interparliamentary Assembly of Commonwealth Member Nations. The law "regulates relations in the area of preservation and development of culture and is aimed at providing and protecting the constitutional right of every citizen to take part in cultural life and to use institutions of culture, to have access to cultural values."³⁸ Moreover, Article 5 of the law notes "equal merit of cultures of all peoples and ethnic communities."³⁹ It is important that the law specifies rights of every person living within the CIS space to cultural activities, and duties of states in the area of culture.

Once every five years, the Council of Heads of Governments of the CIS lists principal events of cooperation in the area of culture, which provide for a broad mutual participation in different international and national campaigns. On July 10 and 11, 2015, the Cultural Cooperation Council met in Yerevan for its thirtieth meeting, where a plan of events for 2016–2020 was approved.

The Commonwealth's Capitals of Culture interstate program is among key projects of the Commonwealth in the area of culture.

Every year, a number of large-scale cultural events are held at the international and national level across the CIS. Special attention is paid to the

The Commonwealth's Capitals of Culture project was initiated in 2010 by the Council for Humanitarian Cooperation of CIS member nations and by the IFHC. On December 5, 2012, the Council of Heads of Commonwealth States, meeting in Ashgabat, approved the regulations of the program. It is based on the European Capital of Culture project. The program proposes annual concentration of creative resources of Commonwealth countries in noncapital cities of CIS member nations, which receive the status of the Commonwealth's Capital of Culture.

First certificates of CIS Capitals of Culture were awarded to Gomel (Belarus) and Ulyanovsk (the Russian Federation) in 2011. In 2012, two other cities were declared CIS capitals of culture—Astana (Kazakhstan) and Mary (Turkmenistan). In 2013, the baton was passed to Gabala (Azerbaijan), Gyumri (Armenia), and Mogilev (Belarus). In 2014, Almaty (Kazakhstan) and Osh (Kyrgyzstan) were Capitals of Culture. Voronezh (the Russian Federation) and Kulob (Tajikistan) were CIS Capitals of Culture in 2015. In 2016, Dasoguz (Turkmenistan) became a Capital of Culture. In 2017, the CIS Capital of Culture status was awarded to Ganja, the second biggest city in Azerbaijan. In 2018 the status of Capital of Culture came to Goris (Armenia), in 2019 it will be passed to Brest (Belarus), and to Shymkent (Kazakhstan) in 2020.

World Forum on Intercultural Dialog, Junior Delphic Games of CIS member nations, concerts of the CIS Youth Symphonic Orchestra, Kino Shock (an open cinema festival of CIS countries, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia), Listapad (a Minsk international cinema festival), and other international cinema festivals like Golden Apricot and Operalia. The Cultural Cooperation Council is also conscientious about organizing joint music events, such as the Belarusian Music Autumn International Festival, Mstislav Rostropovich International Festival, and Yury Bashmet International Festival. Furthermore, international theater festivals are also organized, such as Panorama, White Vezha, and Navruz, the latter an international festival of professional theaters.⁴⁰ At the IFHC's initiative, the CIS Youth Symphonic Orchestra was set up.

The Youth Symphonic Orchestra is a group of young musicians from all Commonwealth countries. The orchestra performed with acclaim in capital cities of most CIS member nations, and also in Paris and New York, and had a successful tour in China. Aspiring musicians from CIS countries have an opportunity to study and perform together under the mentorship of the best orchestra conductors of today. In 2016, the orchestra's concerts in Moscow and Minsk were devoted to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the CIS.

Youth theater forums and laboratories of theater directors, joint theater productions, master classes of art students, networking and mutual intern-

ships of libraries and museums, and cinema and television festivals of CIS countries have also become regular occurrences. Since 2011, TEFI-Commonwealth, an international television festival, has been held every year with participation of major television companies of all CIS countries and also Georgia and Latvia. In 2016, twenty-eight television programs from ten countries were presented at the sixth TEFI-Commonwealth festival, in Armenia. The traditional Festival of Russian and Commonwealth Cinema in Tbilisi was held in the format of a cinema school for the first time and brought together famous cinema masters and young moviemakers from CIS countries and Georgia.

Large-scale national art festivals and contests have acquired a wide international dimension and popularity thanks to participation of performers from across the Commonwealth. The Aram Khachaturian International Competition in Armenia, the Moscow Meets Friends international festival (a youth theater forum of Commonwealth countries), and the Martisor international music festival in Moldova have become regular events (to take part in the latter, about ninety performers from CIS countries arrived in 2016).

The IFHC backed a fundamental academic work, CIS Literature Classics. Within the framework of that book series, twenty-six volumes of literary masterpieces and folklore of Commonwealth nations have been released in about 45,000 copies. An electronic dictionary of state languages of CIS countries and Georgia has been prepared. One noteworthy initiative of the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan is called Cupolas of the Commonwealth.

The idea of the Cupolas of the Commonwealth project includes multiple subprojects, such as museums, libraries, and historical and cultural reserves. The idea is to coordinate cultural policies of CIS member nations in different areas, based on principles of integration and general access to information for all categories of users amid language and cultural diversity of CIS countries.

For instance, within the framework of the libraries Cupolas of the Commonwealth project, the Russian State Library set up and supports Russian book centers at national libraries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Cooperation in Sports

On May 25, 2007, the Agreement on Cooperation in Physical Culture and Sports of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States was signed, and the Council for Physical Culture and Sports was set up. The parties agreed “to promote cooperation of public authority bodies of the Parties, national Olympic committees, national sports federations (unions, associations), international, regional and other physical culture and

sports organizations and associations, to support their initiatives aimed at effective development of physical culture, sports and the Olympic movement.”⁴¹ Every year, the council provides backing for multiple sport events—for instance, an international football tournament called the Commonwealth Cup (1993–2016).

The year 2012 was the year of sports and healthy lifestyles in the CIS. For instance, on May 30, 2012, the Council of Heads of Governments approved the Strategy of Development of Physical Culture and Sports of the Commonwealth of Independent States through 2020, within the framework of which a draft of a new three-year plan of action for 2016–2018 was worked out. It includes over eighty events aimed at promotion of sports and healthy lifestyles, and development of sports focused on socially underprivileged groups. The plan also provides for the development of sport science and medicine, and innovation cooperation. Some events encourage national sports and establishment of an intercultural dialog. In 2014, the Physical Culture and Sports Council founded a festival of national sports of CIS member nations. This cultural and sports event aims to improve mutual awareness of national traditions, ways of life, culture, and philosophy of CIS peoples. The first festival took place in August 2017 in Ulyanovsk (the Russian Federation).

The international Issyk-Kul Sport Games of CIS and SCO countries are gaining momentum and attracting an increasing number of participants. The eighteenth Issyk-Kul Games took place in September 2018. Since 2013, CIS festivals of school sports have been taking place annually with participation of thousands of young athletes from all Commonwealth member countries. In 2016, the revived World Champion Mikhail Botvinnik Open Chess Cup was held among junior teams of Commonwealth countries in Moscow.

The Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) has evolved into an important integration project in the area of sports in the Eurasian space.

From 1992 to 1996, teams from Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine, and also Latvia, played within the framework of the International Hockey League. After the league was dissolved, the best clubs of CIS countries played in their national championships.

In 2008, the Kontinental Hockey League was set up, which brought together hockey clubs from CIS countries (the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Kazakhstan), and also from the European Union (Latvia, Slovakia, and Finland) and China; every year, they compete for the Gagarin Cup. In the 2016–2017 season, the league had twenty-nine teams from twenty-seven cities; in the 2018–2019 season, the number decreased to twenty-five teams.

Youth Cooperation

One of the priorities in the Commonwealth's activities is promotion of youth cooperation. There are permanent venues for the CIS-wide youth dialogue, of which the most popular are Slav Commonwealth, a camp of student activists; the Lomonosov scientific forum; the Dialog of Cultures and Friendship without Borders; the Youth Interparliamentary Forum of the CIS; and Days of Youth of the Commonwealth annual congress. Every year, at Issyk-Kul forums in Kyrgyzstan, young intellectuals discuss the subjects of the forthcoming CIS Humanitarian Year and joint youth initiatives.

The IFHC regularly supports projects that create opportunities for joint activities of young people of Commonwealth countries. Within the framework of the international project Memory Watches, youth groups from Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Ukraine have worked together in former battlefields of the Great Patriotic War, reconstructing the names and burial sites of fallen soldiers. Archeological student youth groups and postgraduates from various CIS countries work together at unique historical and cultural sites. In 2016, young archeologists from Commonwealth countries took part in the excavation work in Sarazm, an ancient farming settlement in Tajikistan.

A new area in youth cooperation is support provided to young people with disabilities. In 2016, Sher Nagly, an international art festival of young people with disabilities, was held for the first time, in Baku.

Notes

1. The following section was contributed by Dana Kavidullaevna Akhmedyanova, Svetlana Alexandrovna Bokerya, Elmira Alpamysova Ibraeva, and Elena Mikhailovna Savicheva.

2. The following section was contributed by Dana Kavidullaevna Akhmedyanova, Denis Andreevich Degtarev, Elmira Alpamysova Ibraeva, and Raikhan Sailaubekovna Zhanbulatova.

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