

The University of World Economy and Diplomacy

Institute for Advanced
International Studies

Commentary

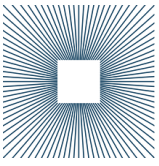
Prospects for the Development of CIS in the Context of Contemporary International Transformations

Author:

Fazliddin Djamalov

Leading Research Fellow

Centre for American Studies



Source: Wikipedia

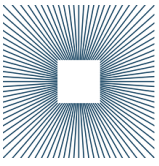
exacerbated by political challenges, economic crises, and ideological conflicts.

The emergence of a multipolar world and the establishment of a neo-colonial order bring to the forefront issues regarding the future prospects of existing international organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Amidst current geopolitical tensions, the Commonwealth faces turbulence due to the absence of a cohesive strategic vision for its development, further

Political differences. Diverging viewpoints among CIS members are evident in their systematic absence from the Council of Heads of State summits, with Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova consistently missing these meetings for several years. Although Armenia remains a member, Prime Minister N. Pashinyan has not attended since 2022, expressing dissatisfaction with Russia's role in the Karabakh conflict, which favored Azerbaijan. Consequently, Yerevan views the CIS as an ineffective organization, incapable of resolving internal political disputes, and has indicated intentions to exit the organization[1].

Despite this, Russian President Vladimir Putin views the CIS as “a reliable, in-demand, and effective format of cooperation,” even though the summits have devolved into formalities. According to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Diplomatic Academy, only 2% of the agreements signed within the CIS framework have a tangible impact. Western experts warn that if the organization, dominated by Russia, fails to expand its influence, it risks losing relevance on the

[1] Гордейчик, А., О Нынешнем Состоянии СНГ и Перспективах Его Развития. Retrieved from: <https://evolutio.info/ru/journal-menu/1999-1/1999-1-gordeychik>



global stage [2]. This concern is underscored by efforts among Central Asian CIS members to diversify their economies, comply with Western sanctions, and reduce reliance on Russia [3]. Russia's narrative suggests that the United States and the European Union are encouraging regional distance from Moscow, with fears that Western powers could provoke conflict in Central Asia to justify NATO intervention. To counter this, Moscow has intensified military cooperation with Kyrgyzstan, a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member, with the Kyrgyz parliament ratifying an agreement for a unified air defense system with Russia before the 2023 CIS leaders' summit [4].

Economic challenges. The CIS member states possess significant combined resources, accounting for nearly 30% of global natural gas and coal reserves, 20% of oil, 36% of uranium, 20% of gold, and 13% of arable land. Yet, they have not eliminated trade barriers or fostered favorable tariff conditions. Most members, excluding Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan, have signed the CIS Free Trade Area (FTA), which reduces import duties on numerous goods. However, mutual trade between CIS FTA members accounts for only 11.9% of their total trade volume, signaling a preference for global trade over regional cooperation. For Russia, CIS countries constitute over a third of its foreign trade. Despite this, from 2010 to 2023, total foreign trade among FTA members grew by 25%, while mutual trade increased by only 8%, illustrating a growing focus on external markets over intra-CIS trade [5].

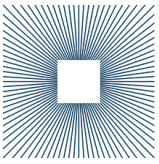
The CIS's primary economic framework, the "Strategy for Economic Development of the Commonwealth of Independent States until 2030," aims to promote sustainable economic growth and improve

[2] Попов В.И. Современная дипломатия: теория и практика. Дипломатия – наука и искусство: курс лекций – 3-е изд. – Москва: международные отношения, 2022.

[3] Caspian Policy Center, CPC. (March 2023) The Beginning of An End to the CIS? Retrieved from: <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/security/the-beginning-of-an-end-to-the-cis>

[4] Russia-Kyrgyzstan Agreement on a Joint Regional Air Defence System Ratified by the Dum (2023) Retrieved from: <https://pacsto.org/events/soglashenie-mezhdu-rf-i-kyrgyzstanom-o-sozdaniy>.

[5] Статкомитет СНГ (2024). Retrieved from: <https://new.cisstat.org/cis-countries>



living standards within member states. However, this strategy lacks legal obligations and primarily complements agreements under the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). In recent years, disintegration trends have prevailed, with slowed trade and economic activities among CIS members.

Cultural and value motives. Ongoing tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as territorial disputes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, diminish the CIS's appeal to non-Western actors. Experts suggest that, due to Moscow's waning influence in the South Caucasus, Russia is focusing on Central Asia, leveraging summits to reinforce its regional presence and preserve the status of the Russian language. During the 2023 CIS summit in Bishkek, an agreement was signed to establish an International Russian Language Organization, emphasizing this cultural priority [6].

Source: akorda.kz

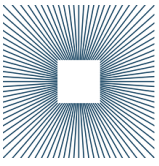


A significant factor influencing the CIS is the presence of over ten million workers from member countries in Russia, which has substantial economic implications, with remittances to their home countries exceeding \$4 billion annually. However, anti-immigrant sentiment is growing in Russia, where 51% of the population opposes living with CIS migrants [7]. In 2023, crimes committed by CIS citizens increased by 6.5% compared to the previous year, further straining relations [8].

[6] Daryo.uz, Kazakhstan's President Proposes International Russian Language Organization at CIS Summit, Daryo.Uz, October 13, 2023b.

[7] Kirillova, K., Anti-Immigrant Sentiments in Russia Lurk Behind Deep Social Issues, Jamestown, May 9, 2024.

[8] Asia-Plus, A., Uzbekistan Tops CIS Member Nations in Terms of Number of Crimes Committed in Russia, Tajikistan News ASIA-Plus.



Analysts foresee several potential development models for the CIS, all of which will ultimately depend on Russia's political and economic actions [9]. Three primary scenarios are identified:

Status quo preservation: The CIS continues operating without significant political or structural changes, functioning as a formal dialogue platform for post-Soviet leaders.

Stagnation and reintegration: A phase of stagnation, followed by potential reintegration processes. However, this scenario is unlikely without a firm stance from Russia, which may reduce CIS membership as the geopolitical memory of the Soviet Union fades in former republics. Russia's failure to develop a comprehensive post-Soviet engagement strategy contributes to this outcome.

Continued stagnation: The Commonwealth structures and relations remain stagnant, with increasing emphasis on bilateral relations rather than multilateral cooperation. In this case, the CIS may gradually dissolve, transitioning into a more flexible, interstate network characterized by both cooperation and rivalry.

In conclusion, the CIS faces an uncertain future. Its declining membership and limited regional influence raise concerns, particularly among full members wary of Russia's dominance. Rather than serving as an effective alliance for regional development, the CIS increasingly symbolizes Russia's desire to maintain its influence over the region.

[9] Тезисы Совета по внешней и оборонной политике (2005). «Содружество Независимых Государств: Есть ли будущее?» Retrieved from: https://svop.ru/public/docs_2005_11_21_1350646825.pdf