

# The Collective Security Treaty Organization

## Introduction

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)<sup>1</sup> is not among the most significant regional organisations, there is hardly any information about it in academic literature (BLAHÓ–PRANDLER 2011: 437; KARNS – MINGST 2010: 177–178), the Hungarian military literature does not deal with it too much either (GERGICS 2009: 16–23; LIPUSZ 2013: 14–24), it is mainly the Russian experts and their counterparts from the Commonwealth of Independent States (AZHDAR 2008; RAHIMLI 2015; MUBASHAR 2015; KEANEY 2017), who wrote about this organisation. The Collective Security Treaty was created by the successor states of the Soviet Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)<sup>2</sup> as a political and military intergovernmental organisation. The Treaty was signed on 15 May 1992 by the six founder countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Armenia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan in Tashkent. Three more countries joined the organisation the next year in 1993: Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus. The Treaty itself was originally planned to be created for five years with the possibility of extension as the future of the post-Soviet region countries was at the time unpredictable due to the political and military turmoil. The ratification of the Collective Security Treaty Organization was completed on 20 April 1994 and was registered as international organisation by the United Nations on 1 November 1995.

## Historical context

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation made significant efforts to create new regional, bilateral and multilateral cooperation forms in the fields of politics, economy and military. After the termination of the Warsaw Pact in 1991 it was important for Russia to maintain influence in the region (named as “Near Abroad” later by Russian foreign politics) and the means for these efforts was the Treaty of Tashkent signed by six post-Soviet states (Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) on 15 May 1992. Three other post-Soviet states – Azerbaijan, Belarus and Georgia – signed in 1993 and the treaty took effect in 1994. In these years there was a serious lack of security in the region, which forced the post-Soviet states to keep seeking the guarantee of security in Russia. From the previously enormous Soviet army significant forces remained only in three

<sup>1</sup> Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – Организация Договора о Коллективной Безопасности (ОДКБ) (see more at <https://en.odkb-csto.org/>).

<sup>2</sup> The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – Содружество Независимых Государств was established on 21 December 1991 in Minsk.

countries: Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. The inheritor of nuclear weapons became Russia which became the exclusive trustee of the nuclear aegis in the post-Soviet region. There were civil wars going on in several countries, like in Georgia and Tajikistan, serious conflicts burdened the relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and Russia took an active part in several conflict zones. It was impossible at the time to predict what the identifying factor of integration will be in the region as there was no Eurasian alternative for development created yet, as there is one these days. The Tashkent Treaty<sup>3</sup> itself was placid too, as it confirmed “the obligation to abstain from use of force or threat by force in the interstate relations. They shall undertake to settle all disagreements among themselves and other states by peaceful means” (CST 1992: Article 1). Article 4 practically provides collective defence for the members, when it states that in case of aggression to any of the member states, this “will be considered aggression to all member states and provide a necessary help, including military one”. In the amendment process in 2010, the Alliance clarified what it meant by aggression (armed attack menacing to safety, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty), which proved to be very useful during subsequent decisions (e.g. intervention in Kazakhstan in 2022). In case a collective security system is created either in Europe or Asia, its member states can join that regional pact after consultation with other CSTO members.

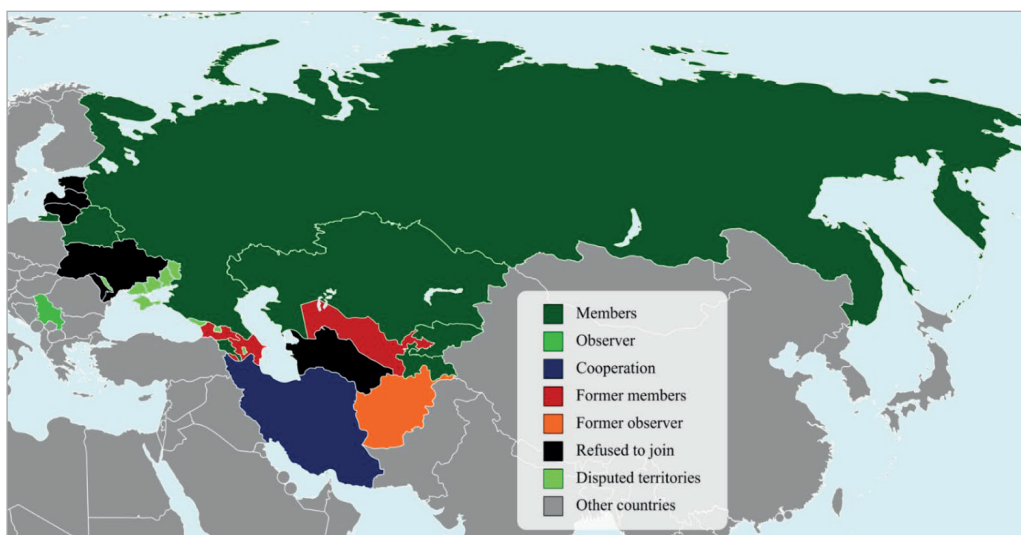


Figure 1: Collective Security Treaty Organization (2023)

Source: [www.wikiwand.com/en/Tashkent\\_Treaty#Membership](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Tashkent_Treaty#Membership)

This interpretation made it possible that member states of the organisation joined the NATO Partnership for Peace program in 1994–1995 (except Tajikistan which only joined the program in 2002) and they take part in the activities of the Organization for Security

<sup>3</sup> Collective Security Treaty, dated 15 May 1992 and amended by the Protocol on Amendments on 10 December 2010 ([https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor\\_o\\_kollektivnoy\\_bezopasnosti/#loaded](https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/#loaded)).

and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE 2017), trying to strengthen their relationship with Western countries. As for Asia, Russia and the three Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan together with China set up the group of the five countries, which became officially the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, SCO in 2001.

Besides providing favourable security environment, other tasks were also hot cases on agenda, like the creation of national armies, which was completed by all countries by the mid-1990s, as well as the idea of the collective security and “renitent” national solutions (Turkmenistan, the countries of GUAM).<sup>4</sup> The CST was set to last for a 5-year period unless extended. On 2 April 1999, six of nine countries – except for Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan – agreed to renew the treaty for five more years. Azerbaijan and Georgia were members only between 1994–1999, while Uzbekistan was member state twice, 1994–1999 and 2006–2012 showing the complexity of national interest and the alliance integrity. Until 2002, the Treaty was essentially a regional agreement which played an important role in maintaining close cooperation and understanding in the political–military field. The highest body of the CST, the Collective Security Council decided to grant the status of regional international organisation to the CST on 14 May 2002, in Moscow. The CSTO Charter was approved on 7 October 2002 at the CIS summit in Chişinău by the presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. The organisation received an Observer status in the UN General Assembly in 2004. In addition to the UN, the CSTO also develops cooperation with the OSCE, the SCO and the SIS and their specialised structures. Regarding cooperation with third countries, the CSTO established the Parliamentary Assembly in 2006 to ensure political stability in CSTO activities. First, the Union State (Belarus and Russia) joined the Assembly in 2010, then Serbia and Afghanistan became members of the political body (Figure 1).

### Basic documents of the CSTO

The establishment of the CSTO, its development and official recognition was supported by two basic legal documents which are like the NATO Founding (North Atlantic) Treaty of Washington. The Treaty of Tashkent<sup>5</sup> is a short document of 11 paragraphs, with the name of Collective Security Treaty (Договор о Коллективной Безопасности). The preamble of the document connects the agreement unambiguously to CIS, by emphasising the sovereignty of the Independent States. Article 1 includes the willingness of member

<sup>4</sup> GUAM: A regional organisation containing Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, established by the four countries in 1997, to improve democracy and economic development. The aim of the member states is to intensify Western integration, counterweight the political, economic and military superiority of Russia. The GUAM countries and Armenia are the beneficiaries of the Eastern partnership program of the EU. Between 1999 and 2005 Uzbekistan was also a member of this group, called GUUAM at the time. The importance and the role of the GUAM has been changing from time to time, but it is still an existing and operating organisation (<https://guam-organization.org/>).

<sup>5</sup> Collective Security Treaty, dated 15 May 1992 and amended by the Protocol on Amendments on 10 December 2010 ([https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor\\_o\\_kollektivnoy\\_bezopasnosti/#loaded](https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/#loaded)).

states to abstain from violence or threatening with violence in international relations and their commitment to resolve conflicts with peaceful means between each other or in cooperation with other states. The members of the alliance must not join other military alliances, they must not take part in any actions against another member state, or in any military alignment. Article 2 emphasises the importance of consultation, and Article 4 establishes the highest decision-making body, the Council for Collective Security.

The collective defence character of the agreement is included in Article 4, which is quite like Article 5 of NATO: “If one of the Member States undergoes aggression (armed attack menacing to security, stability, territorial integrity, and sovereignty), it will be considered by the Member States aggression to all the Members of this Treaty. In case of aggression to any of the Member States, all the other Member States at request of this Member State shall immediately provide the latter with the necessary help, including military one, as well as provide support by the means at their disposal in accordance with the right to collective defence pursuant to Article 51 of the UN Charter. The Member States shall immediately inform the United Nations Security Council on the measures taken based on the Article. When implementing these measures, the Member States shall adhere to the relevant provisions of the UN Charter.”<sup>6</sup> Article 4 also includes three sets of responsibilities as Article 5 in the Washington Treaty: Any external aggression is regarded as an attack against all member states, the member states will provide each other all kinds of support, including military support. Then the Security Council of the UN will be informed about the aggression and the decided measures in connection with it. Finally, any further action can be taken only after the decision of the United Nations Security Council.

Articles 5 and 6 authorise the Council for Collective Security to decide on the use of force and means of collective security including the activation of the mechanism of joint consultation. Article 5 also arranges for the establishment of CSTO organisational bodies based on Council decisions. Article 6 contains strict regulations regarding the use of military force and security measures abroad. “Use of force and means of the collective security system outside of the territory of the Member States may be carried out only in the interest of the international security according to the UN Charter and the laws of Member States being parties hereto.” According to Article 7, the placement and functioning of the CSTO objects are regulated by special agreements. By the modification of the agreement carried out in 2011, Russia got the right of veto about the foreign bases located on the territory of member states. Article 8 regulates the international legal aspects of the Treaty; for instance, the member states cannot conclude international

<sup>6</sup> It can be discovered an identity with NATO Article 5. “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.” The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington, D.C. 4 April 1949 ([www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm#Article%205](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm#Article%205)).

treaties incompatible with the Collective Security Treaty. Article 9 goes back to the consultation process and the mutual consent requirement, probably because of the Russian political, economic and military dominance. It also says that “any problem may arise among the member states about the interpretation or application of any decree included in this agreement, the members will solve them together in cooperation, friendship, mutual respect and understanding”. Article 10 keeps the door open for accession of all interesting states sharing its goals and principles. Finally, Article 11 deals with the validity of the Treaty which is concluded for five years with following prolongation. All members have the right to withdraw from the Treaty which shall be announced six months in advance. Although this may seem a very polite legal phrasing, the history of this agreement (joining and secessions, withdrawal and permanent departures) makes this formula lively. The last article also regulates the ratification of the Treaty which must be approved by each member state according to its constitutional procedures. Instruments of ratification shall be transferred for storage to the Secretary General (of the Collective Security Treaty Organization), who is appointed as the depositary.

The treaty was extended on 2 April 1999 in Moscow and the next revision of it resulted in the establishment of an independent organisation in 2002. The first decade of the Collective Security Treaty was successful and very useful for the founder states and they extended its validity for another five years. From the six signing countries Turkmenistan was the only one that did not sign the extension, and its place was taken by Belarus. The documents about the structural transformation (charter, legal status) were ratified by the member states before 8 September 2003 and the UN Assembly gave it “observer status” on 2 December 2004. The CSTO as an organisation was established by the Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (Устав Организации Договора о коллективной безопасности) signed by Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Armenia and Tajikistan in Chişinău on 7 October 2002. The signature of the charter was carried out on the margins of the CIS summit, as the members discussed security issues as well.

The Treaty of Chisinau<sup>7</sup> is a much longer document than the Treaty of Tashkent, it includes 10 chapters and 29 articles, and it defines the CSTO as an international regional security organisation. Chapter I declares the establishment of the organisation, Chapter II defines the goals: 1. strengthening of peace, international and regional security, and stability; 2. protection of independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty on collective basis (Article 3). In order to achieve these goals the chapter sets up principles as well: 1. cooperation with non-member states, international intergovernmental organisations operating in the sphere of security (Article 4); 2. the organisation cooperates on the basis of strict respect of independence, voluntariness of participation, equal rights and duties, and non-interference into the internal affairs of the Member States (Article 5).

Chapter III lists the different fields of activity and includes collective defence, as well as transnational internal security responsibilities. In the interest of implementing collective defence, the Organisation can take the following measures: to create a collective

<sup>7</sup> Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization dated 7 October 2002 ([https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/ustav\\_organizatsii\\_dogovora\\_o\\_kollektivnoy\\_bezopasnosti\\_/#loaded](https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/ustav_organizatsii_dogovora_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti_/#loaded)).

coalition force, regional (united) groups of armies, to establish a peacekeeping force, to build military infrastructure, to establish military, technical, economic and financial cooperation, to exercise united systems, services and bodies necessary for successful joint operations. Article 8 lists those activities which belong to collective security issues as the Organisation understands: international terrorism and extremism, illicit trafficking of drugs, organised transnational crime, illegal migration, information security, border protection and crisis response operations.

Chapters IV–VIII deal with organisational structure and membership, Chapter IX includes financing issues, whereas Chapter X describes the final provisions. Chapter IV names the most important decision-making bodies: Council for Collective Security (the “Council”), Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (CMFA), Council of Ministers of Defence (CMD), Committee of Secretaries of Security Councils (CSSC), and Permanent Council (PC) (Article 11). The work of senior bodies is supported by the Secretariat and Joint Staff of the Organisation (2013), both are in Moscow. Decision and regulations are adopted by consensus like in many international organisations (Article 12). Functions, working mechanisms and operating procedures of the bodies are regulated by the Charter and other legal acts.

Chapter VI regulates the duties of the Secretary General and the work of permanent CSTO bodies. The CSTO is an open organisation, any state that agrees with the Organisation’s goals and operating principles can become a member. The Council decides on the admission of a new member by unanimous vote. It is also possible to leave the Organisation, which must be announced at least six months in advance. Chapter VI not only regulates the enlargement of the CSTO but also gives the possibility of sanctions in case a member does not fulfil its obligations under the Treaties. This is for example not possible in NATO, but it is a *modus operandi* in case of the CSTO. The Council first suspends the membership of a not performing state, in such a case, the member state concerned cannot participate in the vote (Article 20). Then, if its activities do not change, the Council can also unilaterally exclude it from the alliance. A separate chapter deals with observer status, for which both countries and international organisations can apply. The Council decides on the invitation (Chapter VII). The fulfilment of financing requirements plays a major role in the evaluation of the activities of member states. If the member state does not pay its mandatory budget contribution for two years, the country cannot fill its quota positions in the Organisation (Article 25). The final Chapter X deals with the adoption of the Charter, determines the official and working language (Russian), and decides on unanimous voting without reservation.

The Treaty of Chisinau was adopted on 7 October 2002, and modified like the Treaty of Tashkent on 10 December 2010.

### **The controversial nature of the CSTO**

The CSTO is a collective security organisation by its name, but Article 4 of the CST has shown that it also has a collective defence character like NATO. However, there is a difference between the collective security and the collective defence concepts.

Collective security can be understood as a security arrangement, political, regional, or global (e.g. United Nations) in which each state in the system accepts that the security of one is the concern of all, and therefore commits to a collective response to threats to, and breaches of peace. Collective security is directed downwards and is more ambitious than the systems of collective defence (alliance security) in that it seeks to encompass all states within the region or globally, and to address a wide range of possible threats. Collective defence is directed outwards and referred to by the phrase “an attack on one is an attack on all” as it phrased in NATO’s Charter (BUZAN et al. 1998: 50). The functional understanding of the organisation is further complicated by terminology problems. Very likely that Moscow did not want to give openly the CSTO collective defence (NATO) character by name, just as the Warsaw Treaty was not called a military organisation either, but an organisation of “Friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance” (Договор о дружбе, сотрудничестве и взаимной помощи). But it is also possible that at the time of its formation, the founder nations still thought of a collective security organisation, only later they changed the nature of the organisation (amendment of the Treaty of Tashkent, etc.) to meet the new security challenges but they did not want to modify the name of the CSTO.

The Treaty of Tashkent was originally made to be multifunctional (RAHIMLI 2015), both for external and internal security, where internal security is connected to a collective defence function (Article 4). This is why the organisation is called “mini” UN based on its name, but it has earned the name “mini” NATO as well based on its main function expressed in Article 4.

In the nineties, for example, the organisation assisted in many civil war situations (for example, in Tajikistan there were Kirgiz UN peacekeeping forces to handle the civil war situation and after the turn of the millennium Russian peacekeepers were operating in Georgia) with the peacekeeping force expressing its collective security function. However, its latest involvement in January of 2022 when the CSTO troops were deployed in Kazakhstan to help the government keep the internal order (GLEASON–DUNAY 2022) had already collective defence function underlining that it was a terrorist attack from the outside. The main core tasks of the CSTO gradually expanded when the organisation started a combat against new types of threats too, like terrorism, drug trafficking, migration and natural disasters.

The lessons learned of the CSTO deployment also arise from the difficulties of a dual nature of the organisation. In 2010, for example, the organisation of the CSTO did not intervene in Kyrgyzstan when demonstrators were demanding the removal of the president and the government, although the Kirgiz president turned to the SCTO for help. The request of the temporary Kirgiz Government was similarly rejected at the end of 2010, when they asked for CSTO forces to suppress the Kirgiz–Uzbek confrontation. The organisation was not activated in 2015 either, when military confrontations reappeared between Azerbaijan and Armenia because of disputed territories (HERSZENHORN 2015; KEANEY 2017). Armenia requested military help from the CSTO in the military conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, yet Yerevan did not receive collective defence support. However, with the eastern extension of the NATO and with the deterioration of the relationship between the West and Russia, the CSTO became more and more of a collective defence type organisation.

### Structure, operation and decision-making

The central role of the CSTO is to guarantee collective defence, and after becoming an official organisation, other responsibilities, like national security and crisis response operations, were also added to its tasks. The decision-making in the Organisation is based on consensus (unanimous decisions). The structure and operation of the CSTO is characterised by its objective – collective defence, collective security, support of a fair and democratic world system; its nature – it is a political and military alliance, and its changing responsibility system – from collective security to collective defence. The creation of the institution system is resolved in two steps in the Chisinau Treaty. First, the formerly existing leading bodies are improved, then the secretariat of the organisation is established. The activities of the CSTO are based on member states' national sovereignty and a cooperative, shared operational mechanism. In this operation Russia has a more dominant role than the USA has in NATO. Today six countries (half of the CIS countries) make up the permanent member states of the organisation, almost the same ones which signed the Collective Security Treaty in 1992. Besides Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Armenia and Tajikistan, today Iran is the new potential member state. The unchanging number of member states also means that in shaping and carrying out the security policy of the CIS countries are involved in security and military cooperation on a certain level, where all the countries can find security policy advantages, even those which do not belong to the Organisation (Table 1).

*Table 1: Security policy orientation of the CIS countries*

No.	Country	CIS membership	CSTO membership	SCO membership	Notes
1.	Azerbaijan	1993	1994–1999		Member of the CIS organisations
2.	Belarus	1991	1993		Russia–Belarus Union State (1999)
3.	Georgia	1993–2009	1994–1999		After the 2008 Russian war it left, western integration efforts
4.	Kazakhstan	1991	1992	1996	Member of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)
5.	Kyrgyzstan	1991	1992	1996	Aspire EAEU membership
6.	Moldova	1994			GUAM member with western orientation
7.	Russia	1991	1992	1996	EAEU leading member
8.	Armenia	1991	1992		Aspire EAEU membership
9.	Tajikistan	1991	1992	1996	Aspire EAEU membership
10.	Turkmenistan	1991–2005			From 2005 CIS observer member, security swing policy
11.	Ukraine	1991			CIS observer member, Euro-Atlantic integration efforts
12.	Uzbekistan	2000	1992–1999 2006–2012		Changing security policy

*Source:* Compiled by Zoltán Szenes based on <http://cis.minsk.by/>; [www.odkb-csto.org/](http://www.odkb-csto.org/)

The Collective Security Council is the supreme governing body of the Organisation, consisting of the leaders of the member states. The Council deals with strategic issues, it defines the most important objectives, makes decisions about their implementation, and it also guarantees the coordination and shared actions of member states. It is entitled to create working and subsidiary bodies on constant or temporary bodies of the Organisation. The decisions are obligatory to be accepted by member states and they must be carried out within the frame of a system of national regulations. The CSTO does not have a flexibility like NATO, where the member states can decide to what extent they can contribute to the decisions. The meetings are always chaired by the president of the hosting country – unlike at NATO – by the “Chairperson”, elected on a rotational basis. The Council work is supported not only by the Secretariat but the Permanent Council, as well. The Council holds its meetings in different forms – just as it is at NATO – it can hold secret talks, too. Ministers, Secretary General of the Organisation, Chief of the Military Committee, Chair of the CSSC and the members of the Permanent Council are generally invited to participate in the Council meeting.

The Council of Foreign Ministers and the Council of Defence Ministers operate as advisory bodies to the Council and the executor as well. The CMFA aligns the foreign policy of the member states whereas the CMD develops defence policy, carries out the defence coordination, ensures the harmonisation of activities in the military structure and in military technology. The Permanent Council (PC) is made up of appointed representatives, henceforward trustees, who carry out their activities according to national procedures and regulations approved by the Council.

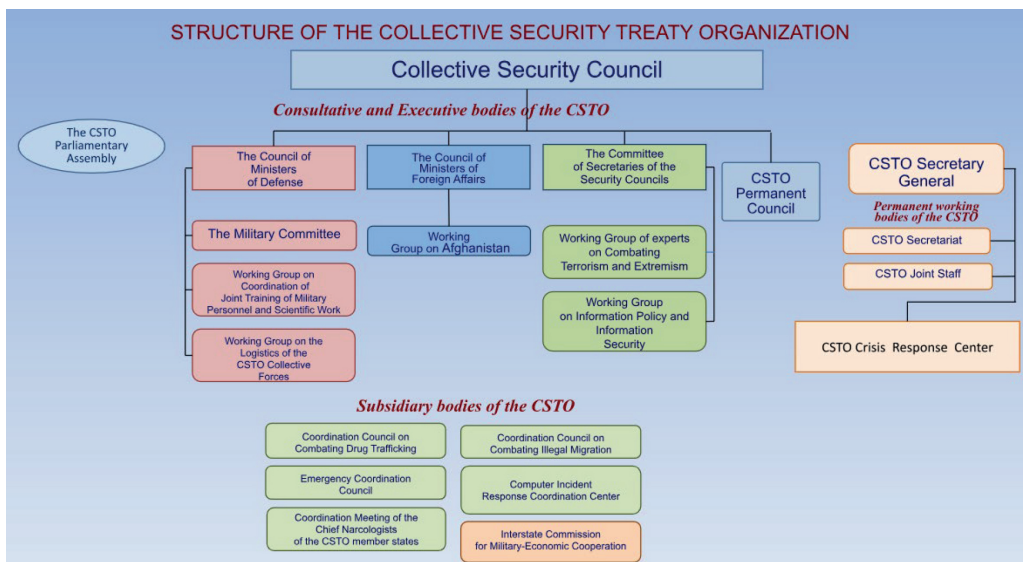


Figure 2: The CSTO structure

Source: <https://en.odkb-csto.org/25years/index.php>

The structure of the CSTO's major bodies is consequently completely identical with the structure of NATO's decision-making bodies, with one exception, which is the Committee of Secretaries. This can be explained by the fact that all countries – due to the identical political structure – are represented by the state president, who is the number one liable for security and whose work is assisted by the National Security Committee (NSC) in their countries. The CSTO adapted the Russian-like state governing model (National Security Council, NSC), which allows the NSC Secretary of all member states to take part in the work of the Organisation and ensures the implementation of Council decisions at national level. The work of managing bodies is assisted by the Secretariat, which provides organisational, informal and analytical support to the member states. The Secretariat together with the Permanent Council organises and implements the decisions of managing bodies and they prepare the necessary documents. The Secretariat includes civilians and officers of member states and its composition is made up according to the defence budget proportion of members. The financing of CSTO activities is like the one of NATO, the expenses of the CSTO HQs and other institutions of the Organisation are covered from the common budget, half of which is financed by Russia, whereas the other countries' contribution to the expenses is 10% each. The total military spending of CSTO in 2022 was 89.4 billion U.S. dollars but only some percent of it goes to the operations of the Organisation's bodies.<sup>8</sup> The functions of the Secretariat, its operational conditions and responsibilities are defined by regulations, approved by the Council. Similarly to NATO, it consists of two parts: civil secretariat and joint military staff. The secretariat is based in Moscow, but there is no information about its size on the website of the Organisation. The joint military staff is probably based in the Russian Ministry of Defence, which was set up after establishing the Military Committee (MC) on 12 May 2012. The Chief of Joint Staff position is always a Russian one but his deputies are appointed from other member state's military. The accredited national delegations also operate in the CSTO HQs. The conditions of the Secretariat's presence are regulated by international agreement on the territory of the Russian Federation.

The Secretary General is selected from foreign policy or military senior leaders for three years (it can be prolonged once) based on the suggestion of the CMFA and adopted by the Council. However, he does not have the same powers as in NATO, he does not chair the meetings of the leading bodies, just takes part in them. He is accountable to the Council and has the obligation to report to the Council. He is the supreme administrative official and spokesperson in the Organisation, responsible for managing the Secretariat and performing coordination in the CSTO HQs. He coordinates the development and approval of the draft documents submitted for consideration to the Organisation bodies. The Secretary General represents the CSTO before other states and international organisations, mass media. He is the depositary of the Charter, other international treaties concluded within the framework of the Organisation and the accepted documents (CHAUSOVSKY 2017).

<sup>8</sup> CSTO military expenditure (Statista 2023).

The consensus decision-making is assisted by Committees in the CSTO too, behind each Committee there is a secretariat operating. The Defence Ministers are supported by the Military Committee – which means that its role is significantly smaller than in the NATO – the Foreign Ministers are backed by the Working Group dealing with Afghanistan, whereas the National Security Secretaries are supported by the Information Security Working Group.

The work of the Secretariat and the Committee of Secretaries is assisted directly by several Coordination Councils, which support the harmonisation of such activities as military industry cooperation between the countries, the fight against drug trafficking, the suppression of illegal immigration and joint actions in critical situations and improve the skills of the member states in these fields. The Secretariat does not have any subordinate supporting agencies, like in NATO, just a Research Institute and Information Institute of experts from member countries to support the analysis and evaluation work. The CSTO does not have a permanent command system either, the military command and control tasks in crisis and war are probably – just as it was in the Warsaw Treaty – carried out by Russian military leadership bases.

The CSTO does not have its own military force, but since 2009 several constant military formations were established with immediate intervention capabilities (Figure 4). A quick response force of 20,000 members was established to handle armed conflicts in 2009 (TOLPOV 2018). The Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF) is based on constant national contribution, and its members are provided by Russia with 8,000 members, Kazakhstan with 4,000 members, whereas Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Tajikistan guarantee 1,000 members each. The CRRF was used just once, in January 2020 in Afghanistan when they supported the Kazakh authorities to maintain law and order and the unit was recalled after two weeks operation. In 2010, the permanent CSTO Peacekeeping Force (PF) was set up, and in 2014 the Collective Air Force (CAF) was established. The CSTO created three regions (Eastern European, Caucasus, Central Asian) for the Collective Force and built combined regional troops in each region. The CRRF, the PF, the CAF, the combined joint regional troops, military systems and infrastructure created together the basis of the CSTO Collective Force. The Organisation also set up an ‘interior’ department of 3,000 members to handle the cross-border conflicts and encounter terrorism and drug trafficking issues. Russia keeps constant forces and bases in the member states to maintain the military capabilities of the alliance, but it is hard to decide whether these operate as part of the alliance or based on bilateral agreements. Furthermore, Moscow supports the national army reforms too with shared and/or Russian financing (border defence forces, special forces, airborne forces).

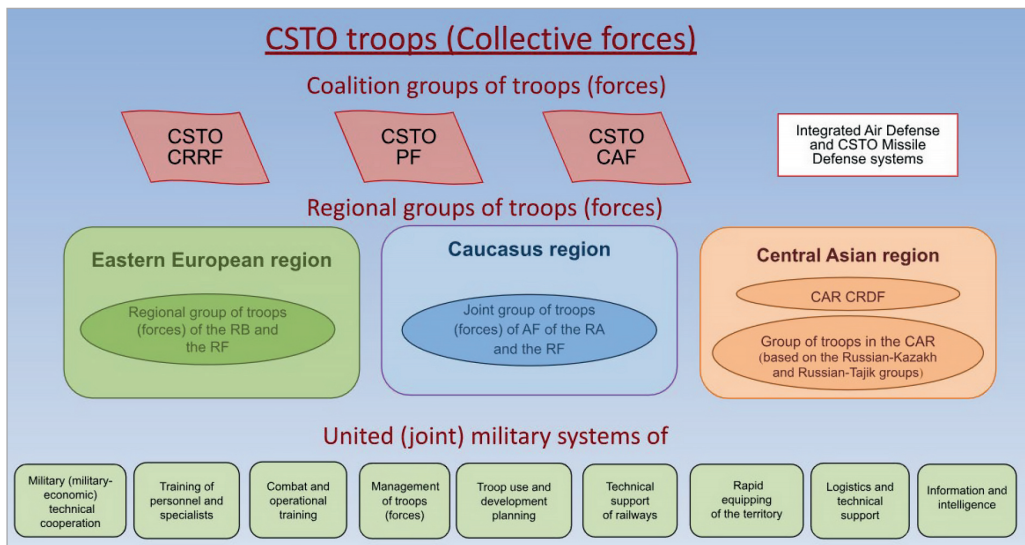


Figure 3: The SCTO force arrangements

Source: <https://en.odkb-csto.org/25years/index.php>

The activities of the CSTO is financed by the member states and a new budget is made every year. Although the academic literature does not include details of financing, the operation of the Secretariat is ensured by a separated budget (like the NATO's civil budget), and the military budget is provided by the financial contribution of the member states. The size of the organisation's annual budget depends on its tasks, the proportion of national contributions is fixed, but there must not be a deficit. The annual budget is approved by the Council. The expenses of the attendance of conferences and meetings, as well as the payment of experts on other events within the organisation is financed by the member states. The principals of financing are identical in this respect with the ones of the NATO.

Although there is no information about financial debates in the alliance, according to academic literature (KROPATCHEVA 2016: 1530–1532) there are burden sharing debates in the CSTO. Russia is the most consistent about observing the rules, because “free riding” countries usually try to shift the financial burden of operation and preparations to Russia. There is information about this kind of attempts in studies analysing the bilateral relations of individual countries (JÓJÁRT 2016: 102–110).

### **The characteristics of the CSTO's operation**

It is not easy to understand the everyday operation of the organisation, as the webpage of the CSTO is not informative enough to allow the tracking of regulations, provisions, programs or plans. Another factor which makes difficult to assess the functioning of the Organisation is that military cooperation among the nations is practiced not only within the CSTO, but as a part of the CIS activities, especially before 2002. The structure is even

more complicated by the fact that sometimes regional organisations serve only as a frame for Russian politics and the real cooperation works in multilateral and bilateral forms (Figure 5). Russia practices all forms of integration which serve the realisation of its own interests and aims, but if this is impossible, it enhances its leading role on multi- and bilateral bases. In 2016, for example, Moscow took advantage of the signs of crisis in the West – like Brexit, the election of the U.S. President, migration crisis, extreme nationalist parties – to strengthen the CSTO’s connections by creating bilateral agreements. With the new bilateral agreements with Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan the Russian leadership used the momentum to satisfy the individual military demands of the member states more easily than through the CSTO cooperation mechanism. This “field of game” means constant advantage for Russia as it can control and shape its regional, multilateral and bilateral contacts so that it can always make the best of different situations. Then Moscow communicates these efforts to international communities (especially to the UN) as Russian contribution to maintaining the peace and stability in enormous Eurasia, the Central Asian region. In 2018, for example, the CSTO agreed to support the appeal of the UN to the member states to increase the amount of their contribution to peacekeeping and conflict handling operations of the international organisation (GORKA 2018).

The military cooperation between member states started in 1995, after the ratification of the Collective Security Treaty, when the state presidents made decisions about the improvement of the cooperation in security policy. As part of this decision, they adopted the document *The Basic Directives of the Intensification of Military Cooperation* as well as the working document with the title *Plans for the Realisation of Collective Security Concepts*. In 2000 – after the 1999 extension of the collective security cooperation – the Collective Security Council published its memorandum under the title *About the Improvement of Efficiency of the Collective Security Treaty* and the adaptation of the new geopolitical situation, which marked the beginning of the establishment of the independent organisation. The ratified document included the structural model of cooperation and the coalition strategy.

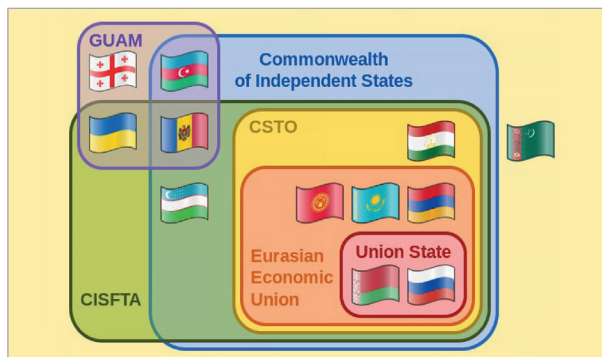


Figure 4: The regional structure of the CIS countries

Source: Voltaire Network 2016

Abbreviations: GUAM (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova), CISFTA (Commonwealth of Independent States Free Trade Area), Eurasian Economic Union, Union State of Russia and Belarus.

During the two-year preparation procedure, member states adopted the agreement about the presence and building of military forces in their countries. In 2001, the setting up of quick reaction forces began in Central Asia. In 2005, the Council approved the decision on Organising the Command and Control of the CSTO Collective Force. One year later, in 2006, it made a new decision to improve efficiency of the Organisation's activities. The publication of the Declaration about further improvements of the organisation's operations and its efficiency was the beginning of the CSTO's reform. The decisions (6 October 2007, Dusanbe) addressed four different fields for improvement: 1. peacekeeping; 2. military-economic cooperation; 3. improvement of military technology cooperation; and 4. the improvement of collective military formations. After 2008 the alliance turned its attention to non-military risks and threats, like terrorism, illegal weapon and drug trade. Besides these issues, the question of information security came also to the political agenda. The new agenda had a significant institutional novelty as well: the establishment of the Crisis Reaction Centre of the CSTO in Moscow in 2016 (OSCE 2017). In October 2016, a ten-year security strategy was adopted by the Organisation as a kind of directive for dealing with the future security challenges. The member states agreed to develop and implement a joint set of preventive and special measures to counter terrorism and religious extremism. It is an interesting fact, however, that even though the fusion of the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have allegedly been on agenda since 2014, the strategic document does not include this long-term alternative.

Although the decisions are always made by the Council of Collective Security (CSC) or by the Council of Foreign and Defence Ministers, it is still not true that the major results of the CSTO are exclusively their own achievements. A good example for this is the United Air Force, which was established in 1997 under the aegis of the CIS with the participation of 9 countries. Although the air force is a military component of the CSTO, its maintenance and operation are mainly carried out by Russia. There are regular collective military exercises, but not all countries participate in them. Turkmenistan, for example, excludes itself regularly and several other countries, like Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Belarus prefer bilateral solutions. The situation is similar about peacekeeping missions, too. Although there were several CSTO peacekeeping missions – in Georgia in 2008 with UN mandate, on a bilateral basis in Moldova, Georgia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic – the funding of the collective activity and other technical problems are still not resolved. In non-military danger and threat prevention the secret agencies play an important role, but the cooperation in this field is also carried out within the CIS, with the control of the Federal Security Service (FSS). The Anti-Terrorism Centre (ATC) of the CIS, founded by the country presidents in 2000 against Central Asian terrorism, operates under the control of the Council that includes the leaders of security bodies and special services.

A major feature of security policy cooperation is the harmonisation of border security and immigration work, which demands an increasingly intensive intergovernmental cooperation of the member states. As a possible consequence of this, the fight against illegal migration, human and drug trafficking and crime outside the borders is getting to be present rather under the aegis of the CSTO and less and less in the territory

of the CIS. The reason for this is that it is easier to handle sovereignty problems of the shared supervision of country borders within the frames of a closer military integration. A similar operation within the military body is the development of quick-deployed forces, which means the constant readiness power of the alliance. These days the constant-ready allied forces maintain their combat readiness by doing regular training (in 2022 the Combat Brotherhood training included 12,000 members, 1,500 combat vehicles and 90 fighters) and this proves the CSTO's readiness to any military intervention. Moscow, however, could still not succeed in getting these forces to be applied outside the member states' area of influence, for example in Syria (Armenpress 2016). So now the Organisation needs to be satisfied with the modest military objective of forming a counter balance of NATO in Eurasia. This is especially so now when a war is going on in Ukraine and member states would not support the possible participation of the CSTO troops in the special military operation.

### **Conclusions**

The CSTO celebrated the 30th anniversary of the signature of the collective security treaty on 30 November 2022 and the 20th anniversary of the organisation's establishment. The ceremonial statement of the heads of state emphasised the organisation's collective defence and security features, it declared the importance of the Alliance's activity in maintaining international peace, global security and regional stability. The CSTO is open to any country or international organisation which adopt their own collective security treaty. There are, however, only few of them, like the UN, the OSCE, the CIS and the SCO, declared as primary partners. This points to the fact that the CSTO is going to carry on its operation as a multifunctional regional security organisation, controlled by Russia in the future, too. The security policy character of the CSTO is just as changeable as the one of the NATO. Although it is a military organisation of collective defence, its schedule includes collective security responsibilities as major tasks, especially in Central Asia and in the South Caucasus. The long-term future of any regional organisation depends on the fact that the members states need to be aware of their situation and accept that their security hazard can be reduced more effectively within the framework of an organisation than independently. The opinion of the academic literature about the Moscow-based organisation in this regard is varied, depending on the articles' point of view. Sometimes the organisation is described as a Transatlantic Anti-Cooperation, an Anti-NATO, and sometimes as a chaotically operating incoherent regional organisation. The reality, however, is that the CSTO is one of the successfully operating regional organisations in the Post-Soviet region, whose existence and work is recognised by the UN, last time in 2023. There is an organised cooperation between the Secretariat's and the world organisation, and the UN would increasingly like to rely on the Eurasian organisation with respect to the fields of crisis management and peacekeeping in the region. The CSTO is undoubtedly a Russia-controlled regional organisation, but the predominant role of Moscow is reduced by the fact that the organisation meets all the

requirements of international standards and the membership is optional for all countries. By all accounts the leading Russian leadership is just as important in this region as the one of the USA in the NATO. Although the organisation's willingness to adapt has spectacularly been proved in the past thirty years, as it proved in 2022 in Kazakhstan. Moreover, its contribution to the international peace and security has also been quite humble. The CSTO will have to face continual challenges of cohesion and efficiency, although its regional bodies with numerous numbers and the bilateral and multilateral features provide Russia a large margin to achieve its goals. The tensions between the member states as well as the differences between European and Central Asian activity orientations will probably not allow the foreign consensus-based application of the CSTO's collective forces in the future either. Therefore, the CSTO's sphere of action and its skills will stay limited. Nevertheless, this Organisation will keep functioning as a viable platform for carrying out collective military activities and for dealing with non-military security challenges, risks and threats.

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