

The role of the CIS

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The role of the CIS

The CIS is a loosely bound, inter-state organisation, comprising some but not all of the former SSRs of the Soviet Union. Following in the footsteps of the former Eastern Bloc countries, the Baltic States were determined to move closer to the West. The logical conclusion of this trend came with membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union in 2004.

The CIS Charter, which sets forth the basic rules for its operation, was adopted in 1993. That same year, the Member States signed an Agreement on Economic Union in order to develop economic and trade cooperation. In 1993 the increasingly unsettled political situation in Abkhazia and the region of Tskhinvali forced Georgia to apply for CIS membership.

Between 1994 and 1999 the CIS, with its headquarters in Minsk, was paralysed by tensions between Member States. Following a Russian initiative the executive bodies of the CIS were reformed in the first decade of the 21st century to give it renewed impetus. But most of the projects launched within the framework of the CIS have come to nothing. The 1992 Collective Security Treaty, which was signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, purports to enshrine the military strength of the CIS. Its official aim is to combat terrorism and organised crime. But the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) is often seen as an instrument designed to guarantee Russian control over its 'near abroad'. Azerbaijan and Georgia, which signed the original Treaty, have left the CSTO. Uzbekistan also left, but, yielding to Russian pressure, rejoined the organisation in early 2006.

Despite the patent failure of the CIS, some former Soviet Republics maintain trade links through the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), established in October 2000 between Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In September 2003 Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan signed an agreement setting up a Common Economic Space.

Since its inception, several States have opted to leave the CIS prompted by fears of Russian interference in their domestic affairs. Ukraine gave up membership when it rejected the organisation's Charter on 22 January 1993. In accordance with the Charter, Turkmenistan applied for observer status within the CIS in 2005. But its application has been held up by the Council of Heads of State, so Turkmenistan is still officially a full member. On 14 August 2008, following the Russian intervention in Georgia and the conflict in South Ossetia, the Georgian Parliament voted to take Georgia out of the CIS.