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MULTILATERAL COOPERATION
IN POST-SOVIET SPACE

Supervisor: Prof. LORENZO MECHI

Candidate: AEMILIA YDYRYSOVA

Matriculation No. 1236956

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To my Parents, who like millions of other people
in the post-soviet countries experienced the large-scaled crisis caused by the collapse
of the Soviet Union and despite that were able to give life of opportunities and dignity
to their children and generations to come.

To my Family and Friends

To Patrik for constant support and love

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Amnesty International
CA	Central Asia
CACO	Central Asian Cooperation Organization
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EU	European Union
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
GUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NKAO	Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
U.S.	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Introduction

The Eurasian region encompasses numerous and diverse countries that might not have any sort of homogeneity, and are different in terms of culture, religion, geography, economic development, security issues, and political and social issues, but have common recent history and plenty of economic, social, institutional and political problems that drive from common crisis dating thirty years back. The dissolution of the Soviet Union came as a surprise to the republics who just gained independence and despite the lack of experience in governance and nation-building were determined to retain the independence. Due to the dissolution of the post-soviet republics have plunged into economic, security, political, and social crises that required mutual cooperation and joint coordination of efforts. As a result, throughout the last thirty years the number of regional organizations derived from different motivations, such as external threats, common problems, economic interests, or regional hegemony. This thesis has a number of objectives, such as describing the development of regionalism in the post-soviet area; analyzing the key driving factors that fostered the formation of regional organizations; discovering the main reasons for successful cooperation cases, while evaluating the work of existing partnerships; as well as highlighting the major events that impacted the regional cooperation; and finally establishing the main dynamics and course of events in the Eurasian region, that will help to predict the future implications. In order to accomplish those objectives, the thesis describes regional cooperation based on two intersecting perspectives. One is focused on the scope of regional cooperation, that is, post-soviet region, and distinguished sub-regions inside of it. Another one is focused on the in-depth analysis of the most notable organizations or cooperation initiatives existing in the region. The two correlating perspectives also reflect the structure of the second and third chapters of the thesis, which is organized accordingly.

The first chapter of the thesis will be focused on a theoretical analysis of the multilateral cooperation within the region. It is noteworthy to underline that the state of regional cooperation has changed within 30 years, although not significantly. The first chapter exercises the theoretical analysis of regionalization in the post-soviet region by applying the five categories and theories of

regionalism¹ that serve to assess the extent of regionalization and environment for its formation in a given area. For the first chapter, the perspective focused on the scope of the region will be particularly useful because in order to make the assessment the five categories and most relevant theories will be applied to the whole region of the former USSR and to its sub-regions. This allows us to understand what are the prerequisites for the formation of a region and consequently regional cooperation, and also to explain the success or stagnation of certain organizations. The five categories that are utilized in sub-chapter 1.1 refer to undirected and informal cooperation between the population; regional awareness that reflects the sense of belonging to the region; regional interstate cooperation based on intergovernmental initiatives; state-promoted regional economic integration; and finally regional coherence. For a better understanding of the analysis, the sub-chapter gives a general description of the categories. The sub-chapter 1.2 takes the second perspective focusing on organizations and analyzing the existing relevant organizations in the post-soviet region. Based on the analysis of regionalization given in the first chapter we can see that there are two types of cooperation in the post-soviet area states. One is to solve issues created by the dissolution and thus has a specific purpose or problem to solve. This type includes multilateral agreements such as Caspian Sea Agreement, or an agreement dealing with the water resources division in Central Asia. The other type of organizations in the post-soviet space has a more complex structure, goals, and practices and in their role in the geopolitics of the region. In an attempt to explain the reasons for the emergence of regional and sub-regional organizations and initiatives, the neorealist and institutionalist theories will be applied in this sub-chapter. The reasons behind the emergence of the organizations could explain their stagnation or ineffectiveness.

The second chapter offers a comprehensive analysis of the largest regional cooperation initiatives, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which are necessary to understand in order to have the large-scaled overview of the main dynamics and development paths of the organizations within the post-soviet space. This chapter thoroughly describes the circumstances of the CIS creation that originally derived from the decline Soviet Union. It gives

¹ Five categories and theories described in the paper *Explaining the Resurgence of Regionalism in World Politics* by Andrew Hurrell

valuable details and important events of the very first years that substantially affected its structure, decision-making power, objectives, and eventually the implications it had on its members. The structural changes and discussed issues within the organization were in some ways decisive for the newly independent states. In addition, the analysis of the CIS is crucial to understand as it is the first attempt of regional cooperation among post-soviet republics and it demonstrates the earliest events that led to the stagnation of the organization. However, the analysis is not focused on the assessment of the success or failure of the CIS, although it evaluates its effectiveness in certain areas and highlights possible implications. The analysis of organizations in this chapter rather prioritizes spotlighting the dynamics created in the first ten years of its existence since it once united the twelve former republics. In order to reach the objectives, the chapter is divided into four sub-chapters that are describing the CIS security dimension, the CSTO, the CIS economy dimension, and the EEU, ordered respectively.

The sub-chapter 2.1 explores the security dimension of the CIS which was particularly important in the first years of its creation since the transition from the Soviet Union. It examines the CIS as a platform for security cooperation and how the decisions taken by the members and their priorities have contributed to its ineffectiveness. Within the framework of the CIS, the issues related to the Soviet Armed Forces and nuclear weapons ownership were resolved, as well as a discussion was held on the possible joint army of the CIS. The sub-chapter explains in detail how the division of the Soviet military capacity was managed and it demonstrates the priorities of certain members, such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus, as well as the role of the United States in the process of division of Soviet Union heritage. In addition, the sub-chapter discovers the efforts of the CIS administration to keep the post-soviet states united and promotion of the CIS joint army. The process and events that followed illustrate the priorities of the new member states that tried to retain sovereignty, which resulted in a substantial decline in the decision-making power of the organization. Another important agenda for the CIS has been prompted by separatist movements across the Western bloc of the former USSR. The separatist movements fostered the creation of peacekeeping missions within the CIS framework, although due to political competition and Russia's aspirations, they proved to be ineffective. The sub-chapter gives an important and comprehensive overview of the armed conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, and in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh between 1991 and 1993. The analysis of the conflicts explains the significant role of Russia in those conflicts and its contradicting strategy

within the CIS and outside of it. The details of those conflicts described in the sub-chapter help to identify the events that would have long-term implications not only for the future of the CIS but for the future of relationships between the post-soviet countries of the Western bloc and Russia. Moreover, the analysis of those conflicts demonstrates how actions taken by Russia will make the CIS security dimension irrelevant in the settlement process of the regional clashes, at the same time making it an instrument for Russia's regional foreign policy instrument. Further, the sub-chapter gives an overview of the civil war in Tajikistan that took place between 1992 and 1997, which will become a major moment for regional cooperation in the area of security. During this time, Russia's attention would be drawn to Central Asia, due to the Tajik civil war but also because of the presence of the United States in Afghanistan. In the context of geopolitical rivalry in Central Asia, the Collective Security Treaty transforms into a security organization with the aim to combat extremism and drug trafficking in Central Asia, which will mark a new stage for regional cooperation in the post-soviet area.

The sub-chapter 2.2 explores the circumstances of formation, structure, objectives, the timeline of development, the scope of work throughout its existence, criticism, and expectations from the largest security cooperation in the region – the CSTO. In the beginning, the sub-chapter describes the geopolitical context of the region from which the Collective Security Treaty Organization originated. The major actors that facilitate the formation of the CSTO in some ways were engaged in political competition between the external powers in order to exert their influence in the region. The analysis demonstrates how the role of Uzbekistan has contributed to the formation of regional cooperation and to securing influence in Central Asia by Russia within the CSTO framework. Further, the sub-chapter gives details of the CSTO role in the number of conflicts or political events across the post-soviet, and how the CSTO instruments were applied in different situations related to security. The role of the CSTO has differed since its formation being involved in political disputes regarding the recognition of separatist regions of Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as independent states. Since 2010, in the context of ethnic clashes in the south of Kyrgyzstan, the CSTO has been the subject of criticism over its inactivity during the regional conflicts which led to relative reforms in the organization. However, since 2020 the scope of actions of CSTO has notably changed as the organization engaged in internal affairs of the member states, related to protests in the countries. While during protests in Belarus in 2020-2021 the CSTO announced its readiness to intervene in case the request is issued by the president,

already during the protests and unrests in Kazakhstan in 2022, allegedly supervised by external powers, the CSTO instrument of intimidation was applied. The lesser extent of involvement was noted during the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, when the member of CSTO, Armenia, called for intervention. While in 2020 the CSTO representatives replied with denial since the organization doesn't have the grounds for intervention in such cases, in the renewed hostilities of 2022 in the Karabakh region Azerbaijan violated the sovereign territory of Armenia. In the course of a few days, the border clashes have intensified into armed conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, both members of the CSTO. Both cases have been ignored by the CSTO, which resulted in significant criticism from the Armenian and Kyrgyz governments. The sub-chapter elaborates on the sentiments and positions taken by the involved parties, and opinions expressed by experts regarding the regional security organization, its ineffectiveness and its future. The sub-chapter ends with the discourse about the future or finale of the CSTO that is taking place amid the invasion of Ukraine.

The next sub-chapter (2.3) focuses on economic division within the CIS, its origins and the main obstacle to development. The sub-chapter starts with general explanation of the economic crisis in the post-soviet space that began at the end of the Soviet Union and deteriorated after the collapse. Key factors for limited economic integration and increased crisis in the post-soviet included uncoordinated economic policies by newly independent states, ruptured economic ties after the collapse, different types and levels of industrialization, different economic opportunities, contrasting economic priorities, and lack of political will for cooperation. Those factors are elaborated and analyzed in the sub-chapter. After realizing the crucial need for collaboration, the former soviet republics attempts a number of economic initiatives, that were quite limited in results. The sub-chapter provides an overview and analysis of the initiatives and gives reasons for their non-success. Overall, the instrument of the CIS was limited in its scope and decision-making power as the members couldn't agree on its supranational nature over the member states. It was one of the reasons why the republics preferred bilateral agreements over regional cooperation. However, for Russia, bilateral agreements were the instrument of influence in the region, also because the post-soviet states were dependent either on the Russian economy or its energy export. The sub-chapter explains how Russia has been exerting influence over post-soviet states by using bilateral agreements, however, at the same time facilitating regional cooperation. As a result, by 2000 the regional cooperation on trade, the custom union, and fiscal policy harmonization was

experiencing improvement fostered particularly by Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. However, the economic relationships were often politicized and partners, particularly Russia, were violating agreements as means of punishment or persuasion. Despite that, the three have been able to develop economic cooperation with the participation of two more members, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, and, as a result, forming the Eurasian Economic Union.

The sub-chapter 2.4 provides an analysis of the economic development in the post-soviet region from 2007 until today within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union. The sub-chapters start with an overview of agreements that set the foundation for the EEU and continues with the description of its structure, priorities, the main driving actors of cooperation and progress throughout the first years. In addition, it examines the advantages of the EEU for the promotion of regional economic partnerships and for the economic growth of individual member states. The sub-chapter assesses the advantages for the larger economies of the Union, such as Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, and compares it with benefits for smaller economies that are part of the cooperation, such as Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Overall, the cooperation results in decreased barriers for trading and tariffs for internal actors which led to increased trade between the member states, although the states still prioritize the bilateral agreements over multilateral ones. At the time, the sub-chapter points out the main disadvantage of economic cooperation within the EEU, besides the limited diversity of markets, and dependence on the Russian economy. First of all, each of the member countries is particularly dependent on the Russian economy which affects the vulnerability not only of the organization but also the economies of its members. Moreover, frequently the foreign policy of Russia put its economy to a difficult position, as a result sanctions against Russia ultimately affect its dependent partners. At the end, the sub-chapter provides interesting changes in the EEU partnership due to anti-Russian sanction amid war in Ukraine, which led to closer cooperation of Russia with its allies.

The third chapter explores the regional cooperation within the distinctive sub-regions of the post-soviet space based on relatively higher extent of regional cooperation. The sub-chapter will analyze in detail the key factors of the first years after collapse that paved the way towards the political and economic dynamics until today that divided the region into three distinctive sub-regions. In order to give comprehensive overview, it is important to analyze the impact that the CIS had on a shape of regional cooperation. The chapter is structured into three sub-regions that

consist of countries in the Western bloc of the former USSR, littoral states of Caspian Sea and Central Asia. Each sub-region provides unique perspective and have particular features that shape the regional cooperation in Eurasia in general.

The sub-chapter 3.1 gives in-depth analysis of the main motivations of the countries in the Western bloc of the post-soviet space to form the GUAM, a security organization with focus on peacekeeping. The armed conflicts and nationalistic tensions in four founding members of GUAM, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, right after the collapse pushed them to unite their efforts in opposition to Russia, due to its support to separatist movements. The sub-chapter explains the reason behind the limited activity of the GUAM despite its enlarged agenda in areas of security and economic integration. After detailed overview of the members' economic and political interests, the sub-chapter concludes that different priorities, lack of political will and other existing opportunities for partnership have frozen the development of regional cooperation in this sub-region.

On the other hand, the Caspian Sea sub-region analyzed in sub-chapter 3.2 offers big potential for economic cooperation, although it's limited to the sector of energy export. After the collapse the littoral states of the Caspian Sea increased to five states instead of two, which raised number of questions, but particularly the issues on legal status of Caspian Sea that has been under discussion for almost three decades. The sub-chapter gives an overview of existing relevant bilateral and trilateral agreements related to transportation of energy resources by Caspian states to Europe mostly, along with the more detailed description of the Convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea signed in 2018. The Convention has become an important legal framework that could potentially facilitate the regional cooperation and sets the norms for utilization of the sea and its environmental protection. However, it was not the convention that notably fostered the regional cooperation in the Caspian sub-region recently but the war in Ukraine. The sub-chapter explains the increased geopolitical importance of the Caspian states and its transportation routes both for Europe and Russia.

The last sub-chapter (3.3) focuses on Central Asian sub-region and its extent of multilateral cooperation at different periods of time throughout last thirty years. The sub-chapter dives into the major factors that affected regional cooperation or more precisely the lack of it despite quite favorable circumstances for it. The reasons lie in the recent history of Central Asian region,

political disagreements, different level of industrialization and foreign policy priorities, lack of interest in regional cooperation and influence of external powers. At the beginning, the sub-chapter provides with the first agreements that served to solve specific problems between the countries, as well as Central Asian perspective on political competition between United States and Russia in the region between 2000 and 2010. Also, the sun-chapter analyzes the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that played an important role for the co-existence of the major external powers, Russia and China, but hasn't impacted much to development of regional cooperation. The analysis of the last five years suggests that there is notable change in foreign policy of Central Asian countries that mostly came with the new Central Asian leaders. With the new attempts for cooperation there are few of CA countries that are particularly active and facilitate regional partnership. At the same time, the economic isolation of Russia also moved it closer to its partners in the CA sub-region leading to a greater interdependence between them. The growing regional cooperation and rising importance of certain regional powers are suggesting either the overlapping interests of actors or more fruitful circumstances for cooperation.

At the end, the thesis gives the final overview of present state of regionalism in the post-soviet space with an updated perspective. Then it attempts to identify the future developments in the post-soviet region as a whole and in its sub-regions based on the comprehensive analysis of the dynamics defined in the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The conclusion of the thesis provides with possible future trajectories of regional cooperation and geopolitics set by latest events in political and economics areas.

Chapter I: Theoretical analysis

The collapse of Soviet Unions has created a plethora of not only economic, social, and security problems for the newly independent states but also an opportunity for cooperation. Moreover, it resulted in the regionalization of many countries that otherwise would have very little possibility to be part of one regional organization, such as Central Asian and South Caucasian states. For example, as a result of foreign policy of regional hegemony, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia are part of the CIS, the CSTO and the EEU, although they differ in terms of history, language, religion and are part of completely different geography. Despite that fact, in the same way post-soviet countries tend to be put into one group in geopolitical context when analyzed by scholars. This would raise a question, did the Soviet Union create a potential regional coherence for the regionalization of the NIS of post-soviet? In other words, do the post-soviet states form a region? Many analysts of the post-Soviet Union have a tendency to group the NIS of post-USSR in one region because the NIS has a 'common past' with commonly used language, similar structure of institution left from USSR. It is true that as a result of soviet regions' interdependency within the USSR, the new states were highly interconnected due to commonly spoken language, joint economy and military power, shared resources and so on. For example, the soviet army was distributed across the Soviet Union, while nuclear weapon between the four soviet republics. In the same way, soviet republics with natural resources such as oil and gas, that was contributing to all the soviet republics, after the collapse ended up as independent states with economic opportunities that are different from countries with no substantial natural resources. There are oil rich states, that focused their economy around the vast natural resources, such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan and so on. While, states like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia had to restructure their economies depending on their geographical location. The main questions for this thesis are: to what extent was the regionalization in the post-soviet successful and what were and are the obstacles for fruitful cooperation for the region that had so many prerequisites for multilateral cooperation?

In order to analyze the regional cooperation capabilities, it is important to understand what have been done by Soviet Union government in order to create new national identity of people

from different parts of Russian Empire that not only culturally, historically but also geographically different from each other. Despite the end of the Russian Empire with the October Revolution, the colonies didn't get independence but rather became republics within the new state of the United Socialist Soviet Republic. Following the communist path there was one important feature that was preserved – centralized power concentrated in Moscow, the main city during the Russian Empire. As a result, the republics that historically have little commonality or cohesiveness were made one country and interdependent. The Soviet Union following the Marxists ideology set a direction towards the self-sufficient economy, consequently certain sectors of development were strengthened in certain republics in order to maintain the self-sufficiency. In addition, in order to develop the national identity considerable efforts were made to create the identity of “Soviet man” and Russian became the main spoken language in each republic. After the collapse this identity was still alive for some of the nations but considering the national movement across the USSR, we can make assumption the identity of soviet man was not incorporated above the ethnicity or religion.

Analysis of regionalism and multilateral cooperation in the post-Soviet Union is an interesting case. Firstly, while newly independent states being highly interdependent on security, economic, energy, social, and cultural sectors were forced to cooperate with each other. That gives the states many possibilities to develop cooperation initiatives. Secondly, due to that interdependency and being one state before, the traditional regionalization theories work in untraditional way for post-soviet region. Therefore, it is particularly curious case to analyze. And secondly, the analysis of cooperation initiatives in the region is a good way to follow the geopolitical relationships between the states and even sub-regions. Since the “region” is relatively new, there are no established tendencies and political changes happen frequently. Finally, the former USSR region is a crossover of the world hegemonies, such as United States, European Union, Russia and China. All four states are highly invested in the region and make efforts to maintain their presence. That is one of the reasons why most of the attention on the region has concentrated around Russia and its political influence in the region. Since the collapse of USSR there have been several stages of regional cooperation that mostly surrounded around Russia's foreign policy and relation of other states towards it.

The first part of this thesis attempts to give theoretical explanation for the regionalization potential in the former USSR. Andrew Hurrell's paper *Explaining the Resurgence of Regionalism in World Politics* provides good overview of causes and motivation for a region to form and for construction of organizations based on various contexts and motivations. Although in his paper Hurrell didn't not mention the post-Soviet Union, his overview could be useful for the purpose of the first part of this thesis. Hurrell points out that despite the most common elements that are usually used to define the regionalization such as social cohesiveness, that include race, ethnicity, religion, culture, history, language, consciousness of common heritage; economic cohesiveness that involves trade patterns, compatibility in terms of economy; as well as political cohesiveness expressed in regime type or ideology; and existence of formal regional institutions, they do not necessarily lead to successful regional cooperation. He emphasizes that regionalism almost never come in a natural way and that: "...it is how political actors perceive and interpret the idea of a region that is critical: all regions are socially constructed and hence politically contested." This is one of the crucial points to make when we talk about the regional cooperation in post-soviet, because if the analysis is made based on elements of cohesiveness that are present or not, the post-soviet region possesses most of them. However, it was different political motivations of the states that created current environment of regional cooperation in the region, that will be discussed in the next part of the thesis. Another important point of Hurrell when analyzing any regionalism, which particularly well applied to post-soviet one, is that the elements that build regionalism are not necessarily mutually exclusive but overarching. He instead emphasizes five categories facilitating the regional cooperation.

Those categories will be utilized in this thesis to outline preconditions for regional cooperation in the post USSR. However, in order to explain the dynamics of the regional cooperation it is essential to ground the analysis in terms of scope, that is across the former USSR and also its sub-regions, and in terms of time. Being relatively 'new' territory, the post-soviet went through number of stages in 30 years and at different periods require different approach of regionalism. When it comes to the scope of the whole region, it is impossible to avoid the CIS, since it is the first and largest organization that includes almost all soviet republics with exception of Baltic states. Next it is Western countries of USSR and a security cooperation initiative GUAM, which perhaps was the only thing that united those state. Another loosely defined sub-region is Caspian Sea states that were involved in cooperation initiatives thanks to natural resources. And

finally Central Asian states which at first glance have the largest potential for cooperation, however the relationship of Central Asian States are highly connected to Russia's presence in the sub-regions. It is not as much necessary to evaluate the success of chosen organizations for this thesis, but rather give an overview of geopolitical changes in the post-soviet and how those changes favored or challenged the regionalization in the former USSR.

To start with a summary of categories outlined by Andrew Hurrell on which the analysis will be based. First, regionalization that focuses on undirected and informal cooperation between the business that provide opportunities for governments for further integration of economies. It is the extend of regionalization that started with the flow of capital between the neighboring countries. It could be result of migration, or intra-state trade between the private companies. The business relationships create channels and social networks between the states and frequently result in flow of political attitudes, ideas and practices. For governments it is a great opportunity to level up the integration and further create a close cooperation. Second is regional awareness and identity that emphasizes social cohesiveness of the region, expressed in "the shared perception of belonging to a particular community" resting either on internal factors that include common culture, history, religious traditions, or on external one referring to cultural challenge form outside, or a geopolitical threat. Third, a regional inter-state cooperation based on intergovernmental initiatives, agreements in order to solve a regional problem or emphasize the joint efforts for development. Such initiatives usually start as dialogues between the heads of states, or other high-ranking authorities. The established frequency of dialogues between the official representatives on a specific topic and signed declarations eventually create the notion of a region. Fourth, state-promoted regional economic integration that derive from government policies that are related to custom unions, removing barriers and so on. Those policies promote inter-state trading and upgrade the economic integration from reducing barriers to harmonization of economic policies.

Eventually, the presence of abovementioned categories generates the regional cohesion, which leads for a regional to institutionally form. According to him, regional cohesion can be visible if "the region plays a defining role in the relations between the states of that region and rest of the world, or also when the region forms the organizing basis for policy within the region across the policy". Nevertheless, despite the region having the previously mentioned four categories it

doesn't necessarily ensure the regional cohesion and regional cooperation. With the various historical and geopolitical context, the models of regionalization are different.

1.1. Regional coherence in the post-soviet space

Since the collapse it was a given fact that the former USSR possessed the 'regional cohesion' due to high level of interdependence, particularly because the twelve newly independent states formed the Commonwealth of Independent State as a substitute to Soviet Union. However, it is important to analyze the political circumstances of the region and its sub-regions in order to evaluate the level of regional coherence and political will for cooperation between the CIS members, and reveal the dynamics within that generate new synergies of the states between the actors that have very little possibilities for close partnerships but lack any fruitful collaboration with considerable potential.

Starting with the largest institution of cooperation – the CIS – that encompasses the majority of USSR republics, 12 out of 15 states. There are number of works analyzing the efforts of the CIS, although the majority of authors conclude overall failure with some relative positive outcomes in certain areas (Kubicek, 2009). Arguably, CIS has formed the region in its structure even before the region was defined by any theoretical categories. When it comes to regionalization that refers to increasing inter-state flow of people, funds, investment, knowledge and ideas that eventually supposed to be supported by governments, the post-soviet after the collapse was like a melting pot of growing social and financial networking, due to high level of interdependence within USSR and growing migration (Weinar, 2014). Keeping in mind the fact that CIS at its planning phase was supposed to be a substitute to the USSR system, so the agreement on CIS formation included provisions that indicated more federal structure of USSR than it ended up to be later. Therefore, the CIS construction in 1991 already had a provision on free trade zone, custom union and common currency between 12 former republics, with few exceptions. Definitely, one of the central reasons of the CIS creation was economic and market interdependences, however it was not the cause of regionalization, since the definition implies an undirected and informal flow

of social networks that induced governments to institutionalize it. Instead, the states being interconnected on multiple levels required an institution to maintain the existing connection of economies and markets after the termination of USSR. That is, the institution that held the 'new' region together already existed and was substitutive with another one to manage the new social order. However, even in this case the success of CIS is questionable in terms of development of economic cooperation. When the adaptive moment has passed, the market of post-soviet space has transformed along with the motivations of the certain states. The central figure in economic development was Russia and its policy towards the member states of the CIS. Keeping in mind the geographical differences and economic capacities in terms of natural resources and population, the newly independent states have set uncoordinated and contrasting development paths. First of all, states rich with oil and gas have concentrated their economy on the natural resource export, such as Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Moreover, the destination of their export were not post-soviet countries, but outside of region. Secondly, despite being members of the CIS the former soviet republics prioritized bilateral agreements to multilateral. As a result, giving the opportunities for the cooperation and existing platform the crisis followed by collapse and overall different economics interests resulted in little motivation of the post-soviet states to invest in deeper integration within the region.

When it comes to regional awareness it is extremely important take into account the sub-regions and specific time interval that is analyzed. On the one hand, the Soviet Union was able to build the sense on belongingness across the Union and sense of one nation was still present. However, the essential idea that shouldn't be ignored when analyzing regional identity of post-soviet space is that the republics never chose to be part of Soviet Union, that is the regional identity was imposed. Thanks to *glasnost*' policy introduced in 1986, national movements started to rise which resulted the republics to declare independence even before the formal declaration on termination of Soviet Union in December 1991. After proclamation of independence new states have sought to build national identity that was separate from imposed communist ideology. The Western block of post-soviet have chosen the direction towards European Union or United States. For example, in 1991 Moldovan president talked about the common identity with Romania and topic of reunification (King, 1994). Ukraine and Georgia invested in deeper relations with the EU, while Baltic states immediately applied to EU and NATO membership. And Central Asian states have entered the organization related to Turkic and Islamic affiliation, such as the Organization of

Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). Despite the fact, all twelve states became part of the CIS.

When it comes to regional awareness it is important to include the sub-regions of former USSR in conversation. Firstly, ironically the external factor that culturally united the Western block of post-soviet was Russia's growing pressure on former soviet republics. As a result, the western block of post-soviet region, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova formed the GUAM, peacemaking and security organization. Members of GUAM didn't have much in common culturally, historically, geographically, no particular noteworthy economic or trade relations achievements. The membership at GUAM indicated the opposition to Russia hegemony and assertion of influence within CIS where Russia played leading role. Three members of GUAM were involved in conflicts indirectly supported by Russia. In addition, Uzbekistan, Central Asian state, entered GUAM after terminating its participation in Russia-led Collective Security Treaty, eventually transformed into Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Although, later leaving GUAM and joining CSTO in 2006, and exiting the Treaty again in 2012. GUAM is an example of multilateral cooperation that was formed as a regional awareness of a common threat. At the same time, Russia united its allies in deeper security organization that derived from CIS security division - CSTO, although the contingent of the organization doesn't seem much cohesive except of connection to Russia. One of the motivations for formation of CSTO was growing threat of extremism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan in 2002, therefore Russia concentrated its attention and forces in Central Asia. However, additional undisclosed motive for the Russia-led security cooperation was growing influence of United States in the Central Asian sub-region. After United States secured its presence in Central Asia with military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, Russia has mobilized its allies in the CIS and formed CSTO. Although, the CSTO was formed in the face of external challenge and threat, it expresses the little regional awareness of the sub-region. CSTO members include Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, where Armenia and Belarus are neither directly affected by the extremists or drug trafficking coming from Afghanistan, nor were anyhow significantly concerned by growing influence of US in Central Asia. Still, they were part of the regional organization that arguably lacked any convincing regional cohesion, except of Russian hegemony.

The inter-governmental cooperation based on governmental initiatives and/or agreements though is present in the post-Soviet Union with the multilateral agreements, but only one example of such an inter-state dialogue actually made a contribution to sub-region formation. Despite some examples of inter-state regional cooperation initiatives promoted by governments, they are rather result of already existing cooperation attempts and don't impact the regionalization significantly. The Caspian Sea agreement between littoral states, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran, has an objective to resolve the problem of the legal status of Caspian Sea shores due to its natural resource abundance. The topic was raised right after the dissolution of USSR when newly independent littoral states claimed the territories of Caspian Sea within their borders and finalized in 2018 with the Convention on legal status of Caspian Sea, which will be discussed in the third chapter of thesis in more details. Because the topic was discussed for almost thirty years it has formed the concept of region, in addition to other agreements relevant to the sub-region such as Trans-Caspian Route, between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Trans-Caspian Pipeline between Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia, which also will be touched upon later. All these agreements that have defined purpose constructed some type of sub-region between the states that don't have much in common except of economic interest or a problem to solve.

Regarding the fourth category of regionalization that refers to state promoted regional economic integration is although present in post-soviet but in similar way other categories derives from past connections between the states, rather than genuine initiative by the governments. The CIS was the first and the largest state-promoted regional economic integration with promising free trade zone, custom union with reduction of tariffs for members, fiscal, currency and financial relations coordination introduced in 1993. However, due to internal geopolitical issues, prioritizing bilateral agreements or markets outside of the region and occasionally abusing the economic policies the economic division of the CIS had very little success. Not after long time, most of the states announced the national currencies and occasionally breached the custom union agreements (Sakwa & Webber, 1999). For example, in 2006 Russia banned Georgian and Moldovan wine import which as a response to deteriorated relationships and alleged anti-Russian policies. (Socor, 2006) When the CIS Economic Union between the CIS members has proven to be inefficient, there were number of multilateral economic agreements between the smaller group of former soviet states, such as Custom Union signed by Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus and later joined by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 1995. Later the Eurasian Economic Community, single economic

space and single custom union agreement were introduced that included those five aforementioned members of the CIS. However, it was still a frequent practice for certain states in the region to exploit the existing economic and trading partnerships as a punishment remedy. For example, in 2009 Russia, one of the closest trading partners of Belarus, banned the import of dairy products because Belarus refused to recognize the separatist regions south Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, which was fostered by Russia (civil.ge, 2010). Frequently negative economic policies are political reactions of certain state leaders towards the other members of the organization. In 2017, Kazakhstan have increased the check point on the border with Kyrgyzstan, because Kyrgyz president expressed himself not in a positive way about the Kazakh leader amid the presidential election in Kyrgyzstan, despite both being members of Eurasian Economic Union established in 2015 (Zhamalova & Larionov, 2017). Nevertheless, the EEU has facilitated regionalization of specific states within the whole post-soviet, the same way as CSTO in security matters. Both organizations gathered the same contingent consisting of states that are in some ways are dependent or under influence of Russia.

In theory, the existence of those categories constructs the regional cohesion that leads to regionalization. The states have shared common past and were interdependent on many levels and the CIS engineers have relied on these factors. However, after the independence majority of newly formed states have worked on nation-building and constructing new identity. The regional cohesion in post-soviet has been created in some sort of way, however it provided insufficient results as the political motivation for regionalism of certain states was steadily decreasing since the collapse. The majority of states had varied motivations and different development plans which very often did not correlate with the integration or close cooperation between post-soviet states.

1.2. Regional organizations analyzed within regionalism theory framework

On the other hand, despite different aspirations of post-soviet states after obtaining independence, the multilateral cooperation was functional on many levels and due to multiple factors. Since the collapse of Soviet Union, the 12 states have been interacting on multiple levels and scopes, and simultaneously became part of Eurasian geopolitics. As Hurrell pointed out: “In the modern world there can be no wholly self-contained regions, immune from outside pressures” and post-soviet region and its sub-regions are not perfectly or institutionally defined but rather worth to analyze in order to understand current dynamics between the actors. Hurrell emphasizes two main structural theories: first, neorealist that underlines the limitations of anarchical international system and the importance of geopolitical context and competition; and another one, theories of structural interdependence and globalization that put into foreground changing nature of international system and the role of economic and technological development. When it comes to the region of post-Soviet Union, the geopolitical competition has played a decisive role in further development of regionalization. Although, at first it seems that structural interdependence of the former USSR republics had a determining role in region building of the post-soviet space, however as has been discussed before despite that convincing factor, the republics had different plans in terms of cooperation and development and either prioritized the partnerships outside of post-soviet space or bilateral agreements within the space. At the same time, the intention of the CIS was not the external challenge or aspirations to oppose the world hegemonies, but a necessary substitute to the USSR. We could also suggest that the CIS was the ‘answer’ to the external threat, as opposed to the West. Instead, the institutionalist theory explains better the intentions behind the creation of the CIS. When explaining the CIS theory of regionalization Kubicek states: “*Institutionalist theories maintain that international cooperation, including regionalism, arises out of common problems shared by states and various forms of interdependence.*” This theory describes well the CIS, since it ‘arose’ from a common problem, in this case, the maintenance of interdependence of USSR. Started as more federative variation of USSR system, the CIS was an instrument that had a very specific issue to solve, that is to keep the republics of USSR as integrated as possible. Later, when the model of federative USSR didn’t come to realization when Ukraine and other countries

that were to be member oppose the supranationally of the CIS, its functionality has been questioned. Moreover, consequently the CIS was used for individual ambitions of certain states within Eurasian region. It has become one of the first attempts of economic and security integration in the whole region, however, due to internal political issues within the region, which will be discussed further in the thesis, CIS ended up being simply a platform for “civilized” and peaceful divorce between Soviet Union States. But more importantly the influence of internal hegemony within the CIS region facilitated the formation of the organization, which fits into neorealist theoretical system. Despite the efforts, the CIS project was not able to form a region but gave a push for other regional organizations in a more direct way, such as EEU and CSTO, and in indirect way like GUAM which actually facilitated the sub-regions formation within the post-soviet space.

The sub-region defined by the CSTO and the EEU encircle states that are under influence of Russia’s therefore the organizations usually represent Russian aspiration for hegemony in Eurasia. However, the sub-region of Eurasian integration that include states like Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is not compatible with the five categories that foster regionalism. When it comes to regionalization and undirected flow of people or funds, Russia is either a destination for migrants from other members of those organizations, or main partner in terms of trade and private business investment. In the same way regional awareness is not present in those six states neither in terms of cultural or geographical sense of belongingness, with the exception of commonly spoken language, which is Russian. State promoted initiatives although are actively introduced, still are facilitated by necessary Russian participation. The EEU at first was an initiative between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in form of single market and common custom union, and Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that acceded later are dependent on Russian market. The CSTO started as a response to menace from Afghanistan introduced after the civil war in Tajikistan and US presence in Central Asia similarly led by Russia, since Belarus and Armenia that are also CSTO member do not share the same threat as Central Asian states or Russia. Security wise Armenia is backed by Russia in the conflict between Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan. Belarus is long-standing ally of Russia since the collapse of USSR. This describes the organizations like CSTO and EEU as initiatives fostered both by internal powerful hegemon, Russia, that defined its sphere of influence, but at the same time Russia formed and facilitated those organizations as a response to external threat coming from another hegemony, United States, that intended to enlarge its own sphere influence, that’s perfectly explained by neo-

realist theory. As Hurrell, pointed out: “neorealism has very little interest in regionalization or regional economic integration, believing so called 'autonomous market processes' to be ultimately determined by the structures of the international political system and the policies of major states. Regional cohesion is indeed possible, but as the result either of the power of a regional hegemon or of a sustained convergence of material interests and incentives. Little weight is given to the notion of regional awareness.” Neorealism well explained how important is “outside-in” pressure and regional hegemon for such organizations as the CSTO and EEU.

In the similar way the neorealist can explain how Russia’s aspirations also have become one of the triggers for the smaller regional multilateral cooperation between a western bloc of countries Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova that formed GUAM. Conflicts with separatist regions in Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan which were in direct or indirect way was supported by Russia, and increased tensions with Ukraine have induced the four former soviet republics to collaborate in sectors of security and peacekeeping, despite having very little basis for multilateral cooperation and lacking any of the beforementioned five categories for regionalization. Those four countries have been focusing their politics, security, cooperation motivations and trade in European Union or United States, and expressed critical standpoint on Russian foreign policy towards post-soviet states, which combined them in one sub-region. On the other hand, the lack of any sufficient characteristics of regionalization could explain the little success of GUAM in its objectives and non-existent sub-regional multilateral cooperation, since the GUAM states failed to achieve any noteworthy extent of integration.

Another interesting sub-region of post-soviet that derived from inter-state cooperation in order to solve the common problem is littoral states around the Caspian Sea. The Caspian Sea is a large reserve of natural resources such as oil and gas, as well as of fishing industry. During Soviet Union, there were only two states that benefited from the Caspian Sea – USSR and Iran. After the collapse there were five states littoral to the sea that claimed their parts. As a result, the topic of legal status of Caspian Sea was raised and finally was settled in 2018 with the Convention on legal status of Caspian Sea. This issue made Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Iran and Russia interdependent and fostered the cooperation without any factors of rising regionalization based on five categories mentioned before. The problem has created the need for institutional state-promoted solution that facilitated the governments of littoral states to cooperate as has been

described neoliberal institutionalism in Hurrell's article. Interestingly, as a result of strategist interaction the states attempted to push forward closer integration in terms of security and economy, and its success and usefulness will be analyzed and evaluated in more details in the next part of the thesis.

When discussing the multilateral cooperation in post-soviet and its success or failure, it is important to mention the state of multilateral cooperation in another sub-region – Central Asia, or more precisely the reasons for its little success. Central Asia has signs of most of the five categories for regionalization, also cultural and historical ties between the states. Moreover, there are attempts of all sorts of integration within the Central Asia, but due to number of factors, such as historical rivalry, political distrust and instability, economic differences and external interference, possibility of fruitful multilateral cooperation within the sub-region has been decreased and challenged. As a result, the Central Asian states participate in active multilateral cooperation projects only if there is external hegemony present in the project, such as CSTO and EEU with Russia, or SCO with China and Russia. The reasons behind limited progress of regionalization in Central Asia will be discussed in details in the next part as well.

Generally speaking, the regionalization in post-soviet didn't have enough time to develop or to form in any meaningful way. After the dissolution many post-soviet countries rushed to be integrated in world economy as independent entities, while heavily investing in nation-building, in addition to entering the global organizations such as a UN, OSCE, WTO and etc., in order to reestablish the independence, therefore were reluctant to maintain or pursue regional cooperation with post-soviet space as it wasn't a priority for them, sometimes only a necessity. With exception of Russian leadership, that had a significant experience in nation-building or foreign policy. For that reason, the main priority for Russia was not asserting the independence but to maintain the statehood of Soviet Union, where Russia was apparent superior actor, or whatever was left of it after the dissolution. In order to preserve its dominance Russia took an active role and contributed greatly in region-building within the framework of the CIS. However, while the CIS had some achievements in terms of sustain the peace and relative cooperation between the post-soviet states, it lacked the cooperative element in due to Russia's hegemonic ambitions. As a result, the same incentive of Russian dominance was fostering the regional cooperation on one side and repelled the development of regionalization on the other side. Therefore, majority of regional cooperation

initiatives lack the regional coherence or any impressive progress. At the same time, while Hurrell states that “Clearly the existence of a powerful hegemon within a region may undermine efforts to construct inclusive regional arrangements involving all or most of the states within a region” explaining neorealist approach, the regional hegemony also has tendency limiting or preventing other types of multilateral cooperation if it threatens its influence. There are such cases in Central Asia and Caspian region, or in regards to external cooperation outside of former USSR. as Hurrell pointed out, there are not natural regions only fostered by institutions, Russia facilitated a region within the CIS framework, however its action and negligence of the CIS instruments made it irrelevant for security and economic cooperation. At the same time, Russia leadership prefers bilateral agreements to multilateral in sectors of economy or security for cooperation. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to state that Russia is the main reason of the lack of effective regional cooperation. The former soviet republics gave significant difference in terms of geography, economic development, type and level of industrialization and security issues. Because of these differences post-soviet states have different priorities, economic and foreign interests, opportunities, which essentially results in lack of substantial political will to cooperate with each other.

Chapter II: The CIS as a demonstration of political dynamics in post-soviet space



FIGURE 1: MAP OF POST-SOVIET AREA

It is important to start the analysis of the multilateral cooperation within the region of post-Soviet Union with the CIS not only because it is the first attempt of newly independent states for multilateral cooperation but also it demonstrates how major dynamics evolved in the region after the collapse of the USSR and continued for the next 30 years. The Commonwealth of Independent States was established on 8th December 1991 by three USSR states – Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine as a part of the USSR dissolution process. The formation of CIS has been a consequential result of termination of the Soviet Union as a state. (the CIS, 1991) In the Agreement initiated by three aforementioned countries in Belovozhsk, later named accordingly, the parties list the spheres of activities of the CIS and responsible Coordinating institutions that will be formed on later stages. The spheres of activities include the joint coordination of foreign policy of all CIS member states; formation and development of common economic system, trade and custom; cooperation in

transport and communication systems; in environment protection; migration policies and fight with organized crime. The same year on 21st December in Almaty city, Kazakhstan, the founding members and other 8 countries of the former USSR Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan signed the Almaty Declaration confirming the previous agreement on the establishment of the organization and became formal members of the CIS. After the ethnic and civil war between 1991-1993, Georgia agreed to enter the organization later in 1993, while Baltic states, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia refused to join the agreement, demonstrating intentions to distance from any affiliation with post-soviet area and steadily move towards European Union. (Ives, 2007)

At the earliest stage of the CIS formation the nature of cooperation between founding and potential member states indicated the independence of the soviet republics after the breakup of Soviet Union, however, still demonstrated the signs of closer integration with interdependent systems. The first version of the CIS had similarities with federal state structure, which was evident from the Belovozhsk agreement that had provisions on the coordinated foreign policy, perseverance and further development of common economic systems, including banking and currency, transport and communications systems and somewhat the law enforcement, which was later complemented with the defense policies. Since the military capacity of the USSR was spread across the republics, the Almaty declaration also included the provision designed to manage the military capacity and nuclear weapon assets that were distributed between Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Russia possessing the biggest share. The parties agreed on the joint command of Armed Forces and control over nuclear weapon asset. However, on 20th December of 1991, the day before the Almaty Declaration was signed, the government of Ukraine has expressed the reservations regarding previously ratified Belovozhsk Agreement with purpose to ensure the independence of the Ukraine as a state. The Supreme Council of Ukraine, Verkhovna Rada, pointed out that the interpretation of the agreement's provisions was ambiguous, and moreover, stated that the Agreement was a basis for the creation of a new state in the form of the Commonwealth of Independent States. (SUPREME COUNCIL OF UKRAINE, 1991) Ukraine's reservations included provisions declaring Ukraine an independent state and subject of international law, denying the transformation of CIS into a state entity and granting the status of the subject of international law; the coordination of the CIS institutions cannot have authoritative character but advisory; independent exercise of foreign policy, creation of its own Armed Forces

based on former Armed Forces of the USSR located on its territory; as well as own economic system, that is own currency, banking and custom systems; own transport and communications system. Ukraine's reservations had a fundamental effect on the structure and status of CIS as an organization and political entity influencing the future of other member states as independent states. As a result, the sovereignty and non-interference were one of the central matters of the Almaty Declaration and an opportunity to secure the newly gained independence. The Almaty Declaration had a provision stating that integration of the member states will be exercised "based on principle of equality through coordinating institutions that are formed on the basis of parity, which doesn't make the organization a state or supranational entity", which was absent in the first agreement. (the CIS, 1991) Contrary to the common belief, authors of the CIS didn't intend to form an integration project for the independent states but rather at first planned more disintegrated union of soviet republics. The formation of the CIS was established in the same agreement containing the announcement on termination of the USSR and was intended as a state with looser control over the republics, which would imply only formal dissolution of the Soviet Union.

First years of the organization were mostly dedicated to the organizational issues, as a result in 1993 the member states adopted the Charter of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Nevertheless, even with concession Ukraine didn't sign the Charter of the CIS thereby has never been member state of the CIS *de jure*, and was considered as a founding member. It is evident from the reservations that Ukraine also didn't intend to develop further relationship with the CIS member state as independent states but rather perceived it as a platform for preservation of existing systems, such as migration policy, free zone trade, civil rights and environmental protection, therefore, had been signing and ratifying relevant agreements in the next three years accordingly. In addition to Ukraine, Turkmenistan also did not sign the Charter of the CIS, therefore being participating state or associate state. (CIS internet portal) Turkmenistan has expressed the intention to build neutral zone and haven't participated in the most of the activities of the CIS. Ukraine, in the other hand, will be participating in many cooperation initiatives within CIS, as well as develop numerous bilateral relationships with the post-soviet states but outside of CIS framework. The reason is Ukraine's attempt to distance itself from Russia's influence. Russia being dominant republic and administrative center of the Soviet Union wanted to preserve its influence within the CIS structure as it was intended at first but also after it's weakened version. In the next years, Ukraine was avoiding the agreements designed to deeper integrate the economies of some post-

soviet states, such as Economic Union of 1993. On 24th September of 1993, number of the CIS states have signed the agreement on formation of economic union that implied development of economic integration. (the CIS, 1995) Among the provisions were free trade zone, simplified custom procedures, joint market and currency union and so on. Ukraine adopted only partial obligations under the Article 30 of the agreement, thereby becoming an associate member of the Union and again avoiding deeper economic integration with the CIS states. While the CIS was the only major platform for the multilateral cooperation in the post-soviet space, Russia's ambitions to preserve its hegemony in the former USSR region and Ukraine's attempts to distance itself from Russia were the first causes of decreased level of integration in the CIS among many others that will be discussed later in the chapter. Uncoordinated economic conversion and policies and different motivations of the member states, the stagnation in development of ties and systems on multilateral terms, the inability to attract new members from former USSR and later the exit or indifference of existing ones have made the CIS irrelevant organization in the region and moreover failed to create the regional cohesion for successful regionalism. Some analysts express an opinion that in evaluation of success of the organization it is important to take into account that as an instrument for the USSR dissolution the CIS was quite useful and served as a table for dialogue for issues left after the dissolution that ensure relative "civil divorce", although often overused for individual political motivations. (Libman, 2007) There is number of works evaluating the success of failure of the CIS, however the assessment of the organization is quite outdated by 2022 as the main divisions of the CIS has seceded from the main structure and transformed into independent organizations. This chapter analyses the CIS operation throughout the first decade in order to highlight the relationship in the region that developed within the organization's framework and as a result of it. Particularly, the security division of the CIS as it was one of the most crucial issues in the post-soviet because with the rise of the national movements across the USSR at the end of its existence there was a high possibility of violent confrontations. Some of them took place throughout the region in the first 5 years of the collapse, which provided the CIS opportunities to demonstrate itself as a useful and practical organization for regional cooperation. However, the organizational issues and individual interests led to the weakening of the CIS system for decision-making.

2.1. Security affairs within CIS

Perhaps, the security issues within the CIS are one of the most important ones because it demonstrates the most notable dynamic within the post-soviet region in terms of geopolitics. One of the preconditions of the USSR collapse was growing national movements and sparks of ethnic protests across the Union destabilizing the integrity of the state. Some of those national movements turned into ethnic clashes and consequently into wars. Therefore, the CIS had specific goals to follow, however, in the first years of formation member states struggled with organizational matters. Moreover, in terms of security most of the member states were more concerned about the Soviet heritage, that is Soviet army, fleets and nuclear weapon. Nevertheless, analyzing the involvement and decision-making of the CIS regarding security matters, it is noticeable that the organization's role was more complementary than decisive.

During the Soviet times the USSR's military capacity, that is armed forces, military equipment, and nuclear weapon assets were distributed among 15 republics. After the termination, the newly independent states needed to manage the inheritance of the Soviet Union. It has become one of the objectives of the CIS included in the Almaty Declaration of 1991. Since at the beginning the CIS structure intended to be more consolidated, the parties agreed on joint command of the Armed Forces and control over nuclear weapon and already in couple months appointed a commander in chief for the Armed Forces. However, the members had difficulties exercising the joint command and transform Soviet Army into the CIS military, therefore the matter was one of the first things to be dealt with within the CIS activities. (Sakwa & Webber, 1999). During the earliest stages of agreement regarding Soviet Armed Forces and their future, there were two different stances. The group of countries led by Russia fostered formation of the collective CIS army based on Soviet military and that position was shared by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. On the other hand, the group involving Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan propagated the right for national armies. Previously, Ukraine included in its reservations to the Belovozhsk agreements the provision on formation its own national army based on Soviet Armed Forces. (SUPREME COUNCIL OF UKRAINE, 1991). This divided and even opposing standpoints have complicated any procedure in building the CIS army and

implementation of the objectives, as a result no clear measures were written neither for common budget for the CIS army nor for joint command planning, despite numerous meetings of the CIS members. Ultimately, the latter group's position triumphed and armed forces of the CIS were reorganized and military stationed in the republics became the national army of respective republics by 1993. (CIS, 2000) Interestingly, the standpoint on national army formation has been secured because Russian government independently took control over Soviet military and other assets on its territory and some outside even before the resolution on the topic was reached within CIS negotiations. Despite propagating for joint army of the CIS, Moscow claimed Soviet troops stationed in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia at the beginning of 1992, and in the course of next months claimed Soviet troops and air forces in Germany, Poland, Moldova, Transcaucasia, Mongolia and Cuba, as well as navy with exception of fleets in the Black Sea that were disputed with Ukraine. In the same year, Russia established its own Ministry of Defense consisting of the personnel from CIS High Command. The same happened with the military equipment of the USSR as Russian Ground Forces owned the biggest division of it. (Sakwa & Webber, 1999) Consequently, the next year post-soviet republics formed their own Armed Forces based on Soviet troops existing on respective territories. As a result, by the time when member states signed the Charter of the CIS, one of the objectives of the Almaty Declaration regarding security matter on forming joint army of the CIS has become irrelevant and therefore the provision was absent in the Charter.

Another objective under the CIS responsibility was nuclear power of the USSR spread across 4 republics: Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine. The provision in the Almaty Declaration stated that the control over Soviet nuclear reserves will be exercised by the CIS as well, which also posed challenges to the organization in its storage, control, safety and proliferation, particularly the fulfilment of the disarmament agreements, such as START Treaty 1991 signed between United States and Soviet Union agreeing to reduce and limit the nuclear weapon and other offensive arms. (START I Treaty, 1991) The issue was one of the priorities for the CIS, therefore as early as by the end of December 1991 several agreements were signed related to the topic, despite being quite vague in interpretation and somewhat incomplete. The START Treaty was signed several months before and came into force some days before the dissolution of the USSR. Therefore, following the START Treaty, four states possessing the nuclear weapons on their territories signed a Lisbon Protocol in 1992, in which Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and

Belarus were recognized as successors of the Soviet Union in fulfilling the obligations of the START I Treaty. Also, Lisbon Protocol provided an article V according to which Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan shall comply with the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as non-nuclear states, that is eliminating their nuclear arms. (LISBON PROTOCOL, 1991) On the other side, Russia wished to acquire all the nuclear arms reserves of the Soviet Union in addition to the biggest share located on its territory and planned to eliminate all possible claims outside of Russia and assumed obligations of the USSR in the START Treaty with the United States. In addition to the obligations, Russia assumed the debts of Soviet Union, the seat at the UN Security Council, and all the embassy around the world. (Vlasenko, 2021) Nevertheless, despite signing the documents the respective republics were reluctant to implement the Protocol. Although Ukraine expressed its willingness to become non-nuclear state in its reservations to the Belovozhsk Accords stating that “it will strive to acquire the status of nuclear-free state by destroying all nuclear arsenals under effective international control”, it was unenthusiastic to grant its nuclear assets to Russia. In view of the fact that simultaneously Ukraine and Russia had disputes over the Soviet Fleet at the Black Sea. In addition, due to ethnic clashed across the post-soviet, Ukraine was especially defensive of its territorial integrity when it came to borders with Russia. Consequently, the two parties came to compromise with the participation of the US and trilateral agreement was signed. Ukraine agreed to yield its nuclear assets to Russia in exchange to security guarantees, military aid, financial assistance and compensation from Russia and the United States. (newsUN, 2013) Kazakhstan also had similar fears regarding Russia, but still expressed its will to comply with the Protocol on the similar terms since it wanted to concentrate its resources on development than maintenance of the nuclear weapon, and was able to exchange nuclear possessions for security guarantees, military aid, financial assistance and compensation from Russia and the US, as Russia was unable to bear all the costs. Similarly, Belarus was reluctant to give up its nuclear inheritance, but being economically dependent on Russia had to comply with the Protocol. As the outcomes of the negotiations, all the nuclear assets were transferred to Russia by the November 1996, and Russia established command under its authority leaving the CIS the advisory role. Regarding the role of the CIS in the issue of nuclear weapon ownership, the agreements signed under the CIS included provision on withdrawal of strategic weapons in Belarus and Ukraine, while Kazakhstan will be included in later agreements.

Overall, the process of negotiations and implementation of the Treaty was done predominantly outside of the CIS scope, particularly with the active involvement of the US. The particular interest of United States in the reduction and dismantling of the Soviet nuclear weapon was an accelerating element. In the mid-December, 7 days after the START Treaty entering into the force, the Congress of the USA issued the Soviet Nuclear Threat Reduction Act of 1991, where it noted that “Gorbachev requested Western help in dismantling nuclear weapons, and President H.W. Bush has proposed the US cooperation in storage, transportation, dismantling, and destruction of Soviet nuclear weapons”, in addition to possible threats related to nuclear weapon, such as sale, theft, transfer of nuclear weapon and/or components outside of Soviet Union territory, its republics and any successor entities, that contribute to world-wide nuclear proliferation. For this purpose, the US government assisted in planning and assisted with necessary technologies and technicians, as well as was open to spent up to 400 million dollars. (Arms Control Association, 2020). It is clear, that the CIS as regional organization succeeding the USSR didn't have required organizational or financial capacity to resolve one of the most crucial issues for the post-soviet countries. Most of the signed agreements under the CIS were irrelevant for the topic of nuclear weapon, but most importantly the institution of the CIS was ignored in the scope of security by the members themselves, especially regional hegemony. Russian government actions were contradicting its standpoint regarding the Soviet Armed Forces and neglecting the processes within the CIS related to the nuclear weapon. Eventually, with the Armed Forces, military equipment and nuclear weapon assets being completely under the command and control the Russian Ministry of Defense, this objective fell out of the responsibility of the CIS. The development of future geopolitical dynamics between the post-soviet states could be seen as early as transformation of the USSR to the CIS as well as during resolutions on military and defense equipment possessions.

Collective Security and peacekeeping are another major dimension of the CIS that presented an opportunity for close multilateral cooperation in the post-soviet region. Arguably, the peacekeeping mission of the first years of dissolution are the best way to demonstrate the evolving dynamics in the region between the former USSR republics. Treaty on Collective Security initiated within the CIS has become the largest agreement on security matters in the post-soviet region. In the earliest stages it was signed by Russia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Tashkent in May of 1992. The next year three more CIS members, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus, also joined the agreement. (CSTO, 2002). It is important to remember that

many activities related to discussions on joint army and the initiatives on collective security were still under development while there were number of active conflicts on the territories of the former USSR. Georgian civil and ethnic war took place between 1991 and 1993, while the war on Karabakh region between Azerbaijan and Karabakh forces with support of Armenia was ongoing from 1992 until 1994, as well as the Transnistrian conflict that began in March, and also the civil war in Tajikistan just started on May 5th of 1992 several days before signing the Collective Security Treaty between the CIS members. With ongoing conflicts across the former USSR, the structure of peacekeeping activities within the CIS were not established yet, and it was going through organizational challenges. In addition to the discussions on the future of the Soviet army and nuclear weapon that the CIS administration together with members were highly occupied with. Number of agreements on collective security initiatives were signed by the table of the CIS between 1992-1993 regarding the responsibilities and peacekeeping forces. (The CIS, n.d.) Earlier the idea to establish joint command over the Soviet Armed Forces under the command of the CIS was not successful as Soviet army was claimed by the national republics stationed on each respective territory. Within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty the proposition on the CIS joint army was still open for discussion. The progress on the organizational matters of the command and concept of peacekeeping under the CIS was slow, as the agreements were either rejected due to the lack of consensus among the member states or if agreed incomplete or poorly implemented. One of the examples is the proposition put forward in May 1993 to create the CIS permanent Armed Forces consisting of national armies seconded by republics put forward by the Commander-in-Chief of the CIS, Shaposhnikov, appointed at earliest stages of the CIS creation. The proposition was supported by the several CIS members, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. Shaposhnikov's proposition of the CIS peacekeeping structure involved high-level military, discussions and common consent in decision-making between the member-states related to border protection and engagement in limited armed conflict. Interestingly enough, the proposition didn't go through due to Russia's objection, although it was Russia that facilitating the security integration of the CIS member states. According to Sakwa and Webber, the Russian military evaluated the CIS Command as unnecessary as Russia claimed the Soviet infrastructure and also was afraid that the financial costs for the joint armed forces would be predominantly Russia's responsibility. (Sakwa & Webber, 1999). However, other major reason for Russia to reject the initiative is the fact that Russian Ministry of Defense prioritized bilateral military

agreements with former soviet republics over the multilateral cooperation within the CIS. As a result, couple months later the CIS's Council of Ministers of Defense supported Russia proposal to terminate the High Command of the CIS and instead to establish the Staff for Military Cooperation and Coordination which was an obvious downgrade of the CIS's authority in the matters of collective security. Between 1993-1994 the organization's security dimension was going through number of propositions and administrative changes, while the members were involved in regional conflicts. The role of CIS as a regional actor in these conflicts is difficult to call essential, sometimes even irrelevant or non-existent, due to lack of consensus between the members, ambiguous decisions and apparent lack of authority in the region.

Regional conflicts and peacekeeping missions of the CIS

Not long before the dissolution of the USSR there was rise of national movements across the Soviet Union. The republics were demanding independence and implementing policies regarding national identities. One of such movements were present in Moldova around 1989 when government of Moldova issued a policy related to official languages. Moldovan government gave a status of 'state' language to Moldovan while recognizing its unity with Romanian languages and giving Russian language the status of inter-ethnic 'language of communication'. Non-Moldovan population comprising of Russian/Ukrainian speaking population in Transnistrian and Turkish speaking Gagauz minority protested against the policies. The situation intensified when Moldova introduced number of political changes but most importantly announced the state sovereignty in 1990. As a reaction, the Gagauz minority and Russian speaking Transnistria proclaimed independent republics in following months, which was immediately condemned by Moldovan government. The first clashes between Moldovan and Transnistrian police broke out in November and escalated to the war that took place until July 1992. (Vahl & Emerson, 2004). It has been said that the role of Russia and Soviet army claimed by Russia stationed in Moldova played a crucial role on the outcome of the conflict. (Waters, 2001) Although, Moldova was not a CIS member at that time yet, potential peacekeeping mission to Moldova was intensely discussed in the CIS. The discussion followed with the decision to deploy peacekeeping forces to Moldova comprising of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarus seconded forces, as well as Romanian and Bulgarian non-CIS forces. While Moldovan government sent required invitation requesting peacekeeping intervention, the following day some states engaged in the mission withdrew their consent to

participate. In addition, the CIS intervention was debated in terms of impartiality since Russia was indirectly involved in the conflict. At the end, in 1992 the agreement on immediate ceasefire and demilitarization zone was reached bilaterally between Moldova and Russia. (Allison, 1994)

Almost simultaneously in the circumstances of the transition to independence of Georgia from Soviet Union in 1989-1990, the region of South Ossetia expressed their intention to secede from Georgia and unite with North Ossetia, an autonomous region within Russian Federation. (Macfarlane, 1997) Georgian government condemned and annulated the declaration along with the status of autonomous region of South Ossetia, as a result the clashed broke out and war went until 1992. The South Ossetians were supported by North Ossetian volunteers and backed by Russia. The war ended by June 1992 when ceasefire was announced with the assistance of Russia. The peacekeeping forces were deployed in South Ossetia comprising of Georgian, South Ossetian, North Ossetian and the largest number of Russian forces with establishment of the Joint Control Commission. (Small Arms Survey, 2003) In the following months the OCSE Mission was invited by the Georgian president 'promote negotiations on a peaceful political settlement of the conflict.' (OSCE, 1994) No other regional organization was participating or issuing peacekeeping mission, including the CIS. It could be concluded that one of the reasons why the South Ossetian war ended was growing hostilities in another region of Georgia that also declared its sovereignty.

The anti-government protests started in Abkhazia in 1989 and in summer of 1990 Abkhazia declares its secession from Georgia, which was likewise annulled by Georgian government. Soon enough due to certain circumstances Georgian forces entered Abkhazia causing the beginning of violent confrontation between the parties. In September 1992 Russia initiates mediation and announces ceasefire, deploying observers to ensure the provisions of disarmament are respected by the parties (Minorities at Risk Project, 2004). In addition to Russian intervention Georgia requests the UN peacekeeping mission which was approved, but before the UN forces fully deployed on the conflict zone the clashes restart and Abkhazia retakes some territories drawing out 250 thousand Georgian people residing Abkhazia. After that there was one more ceasefire attempt initiated by Russia which also collapsed. Overwhelmed with two conflicts and potential rebellion attempt in Georgia, Georgian President, Eduard Shevardnadze, saw the resolution of the conflicts in Russia. Therefore, Shevardnadze agreed to enter the CIS in October 1993 after meeting with Russian President in Moscow. (Macfarlane, 1997). Russian forces intervened and facilitated

ceasefire in Georgia and suppressed other clashes between the parties. On 14th of May 1994 after the course of negotiations under the leadership of the UN Security Council representative the parties signed the Agreement on ceasefire and initiation of political talks.

Since the beginning of the war there were requests for deployment of the UN peacekeeping forces by Georgia and several attempt to implement the UN missions. After the Russian peacekeeping intervention and as a part of the Agreement between the parties signed in Moscow the CIS made a resolution on providing its collective peacekeeping contingent. The CIS's mission was to observe the implementation of the agreement. In 1994 the CIS collective peacekeeping forces, comprising of predominantly with Russian soldiers, deployed on the territories between Georgian and Abkhazian sides constituting 24 kilometers long to maintain the ceasefire. (Minorities at Risk Project, 2004) It is interesting to note that a year later in 1995 as a result of several discussions within the CIS heads of state issued a resolution on prolonging the presence of peacekeeping forces and more importantly expressing support of Georgian sovereignty and facilitation of the negotiations and conflict resolution within the Georgian federal state. (Cvetkovski, 1998) According to the Danish Association for Research of the Caucasus report , the support for the Georgian unity as a state by the CIS was a result of Russia's change of stance. Russia's stance probably changed because Georgia agreed to enter the CIS and to let Russian military bases on its territory, although didn't ratify using it as leverage to regain Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in addition to Russia's internal problems as secession sentiments were growing in Chechnya. Moreover, the CIS resolution on restoration of territorial integrity of Georgia was endorsed by Russian president during the number of summits of the organization as Yeltsin was making strong statements against separatism. (CIS, 1995)

Although these three conflicts are similar in their nature the CIS acted on different extent of involvement. Only Abkhazian conflict fell under the mandate of the CIS collective security and was strongly facilitated by Russian government. Another similar conflict broke out in disputed region Nagorno-Karabakh. The protest on the Nagorno-Karabakh secession started four years earlier than the formal dissolution of USSR around 1988. Within the system of USSR predominantly Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous region of Azerbaijan, and protested for accession to Armenian Soviet republic before the dissolution. With the termination of USSR and the republics gaining independence, not long after Azerbaijan announced its

independence the autonomous region of Karabakh also declared sovereignty of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh on 2nd September of 1991. (The Office of the NKR President, 1992) By the end of 1991 armed confrontations broke out in Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, while Armenia in attempts to avoid direct participation in the war assisted Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh military equipment and humanitarian aid. Later in 1992 Armenian government intervened and started assisting Karabakh separatists. (Kazbek, 2022) There were several attempts of ceasefire and peace talks initiated by Iran, Turkey, the CSCE (modern OSCE) and Russia. In summer 1992 the CSCE launched mediation and created the Minsk Group with participation of 11 countries and co-chaired by Russia, United States and France. (RadioFreeEurope\RadioLiberty, 2006) Some analysts say that OSCE failed to navigate effective resolution of the conflict. (Cutler, 2021) One of the proposals of the OSCE was to form peacekeeping forces consisting of NATO and CIS forces in order to supervise the ceasefire and shipment of humanitarian aid. However, the proposal was never implemented, partially due to the lack of agreement between Armenian and Azerbaijani sides, but also Russia's strong objection to deploy multinational peacekeeping forces of NATO in the Caucasus. Russia perceived the deployment of NATO forces as a threat and intrusion in its "backyard". (RadioFreeEurope\RadioLiberty, 2006) A year after the Russian mediator Vladimir Kazimirov initiated interim ceasefire to initiate peace talks which later was prolonged for another month, however, the next month Azerbaijan violates ceasefire and clashed resume for the next half a year. While Armenia was supporting Karabakh with military, Armenian government was under Russian influence and as a part of Collective Security agreement receiving Russian military assistance while participating in the war. (Betts, 1999) Azerbaijan refusing to enter the CIS before changed its sentiments towards the organization and joined in 1993 and signed Collective Security Treaty. As a result, Russia provided its army to train Azerbaijani military. In May 1994 exhausted by the war the parties agreed for the peace talks with Russia as a mediator. The peace talks between the representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh region on ceasefire took in place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan within the framework of the CIS. It's safe to assume that with Russia taking responsibility of mediator the CIS became a platform for the peace talks. With that the role of the CIS significantly decreased as the next rounds of peace talks were conducted outside of the CIS scope but within the Minsk Group organized by OSCE.

Analyzing the timeline and events during the Karabakh war it is evident that along with parties directly involved in the war Russia was an influential participant of the conflict. During the ceasefire in 1994 Azerbaijan allowed Russia to place its military troops on Azerbaijani territory. That is, while the conflict was engaging many interested parties, such as Iran, Turkey, Western states as well as Russia in order to establish the influence, Russia was very protective in its “backyard” and preferred to resolve the conflict on bilateral level with the states, while blocking the resolution of the conflict with participation of international community, such as OSCE. In the same way, the CIS was involved nominally for signing the agreements between the parties after negotiations with Russian side. The same model of conflict resolution was applied in Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, making the CIS merely a table for signing the agreements.

The CIS platform and peacekeeping forces were again used at the end of the civil war in Tajikistan in 1997. Civil war in Tajikistan was another violent clash that started after the dissolution of the USSR with the rise of nationalism movements. After Tajikistan declared independence in 1991 the presidential elections took place with various candidates participating. The serving government wanted to retain power and old order based on soviet institutions and form political system resembling neo-communism, while other parties presented on the elections were demanding significant political reforms. The dissatisfaction with the elections by the opposition paved a way to the first clashes in May 1992 and war went on until summer 1997. (Akiner & Barnes, 2001) Numerous international actors were present throughout the war, in some ways United States, Iran, Afghanistan, to more involved extent Uzbekistan but predominantly Russian influence was the most palpable. At the beginning Russia was not as much involved in the confrontation, as, for instance, Uzbekistan was. Both Russia and Uzbekistan were concerned with the threat of Islamic movements influence from Afghanistan, therefore, Russia had troops stationed at the Tajik-Afghan border. Although it was Uzbekistan’s worry from the beginning of war as it was also experiencing the rise of religious movements within the country, Russia was not so much involved in the internal matters of Tajikistan at the beginning, though still providing military support for the government in action. One of the ex-Soviet military divisions, 201st Motorized Rifle Division, was claimed by Russia but stayed in Tajikistan was supporting the president. (GlobalSecurity.org, 2016) Later with forced resignation of the president by the opposition forces, Russia controlled division turned its support to Emomali Rahmon, who was chosen to serve as a head of state while the post of president was temporarily abolished between

1992-1994. (Akiner & Barnes, 2001) The civil war in Tajikistan was one of the opportunities for Russia to exercise the structure of the CIS and develop deeper security integration with the former soviet republics. In 1993 Central Asian states, except of Turkmenistan, and Russia signed an agreement on deployment of peacekeeping forces in Tajikistan consisting of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik and Russian forces. According to the report of Roy Allison, while Russia already had troops under its command stationed in Tajikistan, the CIS participation was inefficient and somewhat irrelevant as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan provided insufficient militia contribution in Tajikistan for various internal reasons. (Allison, 1994) Therefore, Allison reports, Russia needed participation of CIS states in order to gain international approval or legitimacy for the military deployment. The CIS agreements on peacekeeping forces presence in Tajikistan were being extended every year until the end of the war in 1997. (Allison, 1994) Additionally, since 1993 Russia maintained its military presence in Tajikistan due to threat of Islamists groups expansion coming from Afghanistan since part of the opposition was formed from Islamic Rebirth Party and presumably supported by Islamist groups from Afghanistan. (Klimentov, The Tajik Civil War and Russia's Islamist moment, 2022) During the civil war in Tajikistan, Russia and five Central Asian states became more interested in anti-terrorism activities, as Russia itself experienced the rise of religious sentiments in Chechnya in the same way the Central Asian republics did on various extent, in particular Uzbekistan.

When the period of conflict spread across the region have passed, the states were able to develop deeper integration relationships. Most of the conflicts were resolved bilaterally with Russia, however the new period that's launched after the end of Tajik civil war presented opportunities for closer security cooperation multilaterally. At the same, by the end of 1990s clearer dynamics were visible in the region illustrated in collective security relations between the regions and sub-regions. Presumably, the possibility of Islamists threats influenced by instability in Afghanistan induced Russia and Central Asian States to form closer cooperation efforts in terms of combating terrorism. In the long run, in summer 1999 the eight CIS republics, Armenia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Russia Tajikistan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, signed an agreement on Combating Terrorism in the region with Ukraine, Belarus, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan being absent. In this context, Uzbekistan's position is the most notable one as it had withdrawn from the Collective Security Treaty earlier the same year. In the contest for hegemony in the region, Uzbekistan developed a motivation for the dominance role in the Central Asian sub-region, which

will be discussed in the next chapter. Uzbekistan withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty not long before its extension as the treaty's agreement was set to operate for five years unless extended. In spring 1999 the six out of nine previously signed states extended their participation in the treaty, with Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan terminating their memberships. (CSTO, 2002). The extension of the Treaty between the signed parties has become a major step towards the security integration and defined regional cooperation scopes of the post-soviet space. The extension has put forward the discussion on the Collective Security Treaty Organization and it was eventually formed in October of 2002 as a result of CSTO Charter approval by the respective signatories of the Treaty.

2.2. Collective Security Treaty Organization

It is important to write about the CSTO as it is the biggest security alliance in the region and its development timeline well demonstrates the nature of multilateral cooperation in post-soviet space. We need to understand its areas of activities and objectives in order to identify the dynamics between the members and evaluate its influence to other actors of the region. The CSTO structure has developed from the CIS security division, which accordingly made the CIS even weaker though it perhaps an expected move due to different cooperation environment at the beginning of new millennia. The CSTO was established in October 7th of 2002 as a result of decision to grant the Collective Security Treaty within CIS the status international regional organization. The Charter was signed by presidents of Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. The objectives of CSTO include peace-making support, air defense, development of joint systems for identifying threats related to biological and chemical weapon, and joint military exercises. In addition to military cooperation, the CSTO is set for political cooperation between member which involved coordinated foreign policy, and later in 2006 also establish the parliamentary assembly of the CSTO. (CSTO, 2002) The decision-making arrangement consists of the Collective Security Council involving the heads of member states, as

well as of coordinating organs such as Councils of Foreign Ministers and Ministers of Defense. Some experts say that the structure of CSTO is quite similar to the system of NATO, adding that it was created with attempt to counterweight its western prototype in Asian hemisphere. (J. K. Bailes, Baranovsky, & Dunay, 2007). Considering the geopolitical developments of the beginning of late 1990s and early 2000s, the political inducement of the CSTO seems more understandable. Western block of the post-soviet, that is Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, were distancing from Russia's influence and consequently with CIS associated agreements and organizations. In addition to developments in Central Asia, such as Uzbekistan challenging Russia's hegemony in Central Asian region as a result avoiding multilateral alliances with Russia-led organizations. And most notably, growing participation of United States in Central Asian region.

In the context of the military operations in Afghanistan Central Asian republics, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, hosted US military bases on their territories in 2001. (Beehner, 2005). It is safe to assume, that Russia made considerable steps towards closer military integration with the CIS states in order to counterpart the growing involvement of US in the region and define "its area of influence". Indeed, Russia particularly has strengthened its relationship with the Central Asian states within the framework of CSTO. In this way, the transformation from the CIS to the CSTO is a way to consolidate Russia area of influence among the post-soviet republics. In the context of menacing Islamic extremism with its source in Afghanistan, both United States and Russia have fostered closer security collaboration with Central Asian states, as a result the region became a center of tense geopolitical confrontation. Central Asia was labeled as a region of higher instability due to threat of extremism, drug trafficking as a well as concerns over color revolutions previously taken place in Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Andijan protests followed by violent suppression in Uzbekistan in 2005. (Amnesty International, 2015) In 2005 the CSTO developed plans on enlarging the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces particularly in Central Asia which meant to strengthen the CSTO potential in the region with almost doubled number of personnel deployed, and Russian airbase "Kant" in Kyrgyzstan was chosen as strategic location for the CRDF. (Panfilova, 2006). Additionally, in the context of Andijan events and US criticism over violence towards protestors, and after Russian efforts to attract Uzbekistan to CSTO, Uzbekistan changes its stance and agreed to enter the CSTO in 2006, although it will suspend its membership again in 2012. Besides the focus of the CSTO on Central Asia, Russia was highly involved in the region on other dimensions, in addition to militarily also politically and economically. In 2004 the

Central Asian Cooperation Organization, that was established in 1991 and renamed in 2002 between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, have accepted Russia as a member. (Tolipov, 2004) Despite continuous expression of necessary CSTO presence in Central Asia and its capacity enlargement due to extremism and drug trafficking threats, the organization's activities within its scope of objectives weren't much notable. Achieved goals in those years only demonstrated rather Russia's efforts in defining its range of influence. In 2007 on SCTO Summit in Tashkent, the Security Council declared on plans to form peacekeeping forces, and furthermore its members were able to enjoy special treatment of Russia and purchase Russian weaponry with domestic prices. (Gabuev & Solovyev, 2007) With the growing geopolitical significance of the Central Asia, CSTO became the convenient platform of the multilateral cooperation for Russia with its allies, although the effectiveness of the CSTO is debatable.

At the same time, Russia's endeavors on the other side of the CSTO are less fruitful. In April 2008 the 1992 ceasefire between Georgia and South Ossetia and Abkhazia broke and violent clashes on the territories resumed. While in 2007 Russia withdrew its peacekeeping mission from Georgian territory, the peacekeeping military stayed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, later in 2008 with restart of hostilities they received more military support from Russia, as Moscow sends more troops to Abkhazia. Later in August Russia deploys tanks and soldiers to South Ossetia as well and moves towards Georgia. By mid-August presidents of Russia and Georgia sign the ceasefire agreement and Russia partially withdraws its forces from Georgia. By end of August, Russia announces the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. (CNN, 2022) Next months in September, Russia facilitated the recognition of South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence at the CSTO summit of heads of state, however failed to obtain. (Civil.ge, 2008) Despite its usual support of Russia, Belarus refused to recognize the breakaway regions in the view of European Union warnings and possible extension of sanctions. (Castle, 2009) However, as a result Russia punishes Belarus with sanctions instead by restricting the import of dairy products, one of the main exports of Belarus, which later will deteriorate Moscow-Minsk relationships. (Reuters, 2009) Other members were less expressive and doubtful at the beginning, however later each state claimed they do not recognize the separatist regions for varying reasons. (polit.ru, 2008) (Danielyan, 2008) In this situation the platform of CSTO has been used for Russia geopolitical objectives.

Already back then there was a criticism on CSTO's ineffectiveness expressed not only by international political analysts but also by the members themselves. Significant wave of criticism started in 2010 with the civil unrest and ethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan. As a result of revolution, Kyrgyz president, Kurmanbek Bakiev, was banished from the country and found an asylum in Minsk. Lukashenko, the President of Belarus, has criticized Russia for supporting Kyrgyz opposition and expressed the dissatisfaction and doubt about effectiveness of the CSTO as according to him, the organization failed to prevent the government coup in Kyrgyzstan. Lukashenko threatened to ignore the upcoming summit of the CSTO if the topic will not be addressed during the meeting. Belarusian President stated: *"What sort of organization is this one? Is there is a bloodshed in one of our member states and anti-constitutional coup d'état takes place, and this body keeps silent?"* He was not only one who shared disapproval of the CSTO reaction to the unrest in Kyrgyzstan. The 2010 revolution in Kyrgyzstan outgrew to ethnic clashes in the south of the country between Kyrgyz and Uzbek people. The interim head of state, Roza Otunbaeva, requested the Russian peacekeeping assistance, to which Moscow responded with necessity to consult within the CSTO framework. (Tynan, 2010) In addition, the ex-presidents of Kyrgyzstan called on CSTO intervention as well. (Panorama.am, 2010) However, the CSTO has failed to react fast and efficient enough. According to the CSTO Charter the decision on intervention is taken based on consensus of all heads of member states, which not only slows down the process but difficult to achieve since some of the republics of CSTO might not have enough interest in ethnic clash in another country that does not threaten their stability, such as Armenia and Belarus. Inaction of the CSTO during events in Kyrgyzstan has been criticized, and as a result paved a way for the mild reforms. It is important to distinguish the criticism that surrounds the reaction of the CSTO in the case of crises in Kyrgyzstan. On the one hand, the interim government requesting the CSTO peacekeeping mission could be considered within the scope of the organization. (CSTO, 2002) The article 7 could be applied to the situation in order to maintain the safety and stability. On the other hand, the CSTO intervention and deployment of third-party troops during violent events within certain country could become serious precedent. Some experts suggest external military intervention in Kyrgyzstan could've had long-term consequences and threaten sovereignty of the state. (Tynan, 2010) From this point of view, the criticism of Lukashenko can be regarded as the organizations inability to intervene when with the request of the head of state in case of undesired unwanted civil protests in regards to intern affairs of the state.

Keeping in mind that the majority of CSTO member states are defined as authoritarian regimes, it is a dangerous development to discuss the CSTO intervention in case of internal civil unrests and revolutions. The CSTO can be used for maintaining power of individuals and suppressing the civil protests. The intervention of CSTO during the January protests in Kazakhstan in 2022 is one of the cases when CSTO arguably was applied for such case.

In 2022 Kazakhstan experienced one of the biggest civil protests in recent years regarding the gas prices that quickly transformed into violent riots, state power change and regional security organization intervention. The violence in Almaty sparked on 4th of January as a result of three days protests throughout the country started in the west of country because of sudden increase of gas prices. (Walker, 2022) The protests quickly spread to other regions and cities where people expressed their dissatisfaction with corruption and poverty fueled by the general post-COVID economic crisis in the country. The strong riots were active particularly in Almaty, the largest city and economic center of Kazakhstan, with burned administrative buildings, looted business and banks, occupied airport, internet blackout for a week, armed groups and with more than 200 people killed. President of Kazakhstan, Kasym-Jomart Tokaev, has made an official request for the intervention of CSTO in the urgent call with Putin and Pashinyan, as the latter was a chairman of SCTO in 2021. According to Tokaev, the violent protests were initiated by terrorist groups that were prepared and provoked from outside of the country with the goal to undermine the state system. The request has been approved in compliance with the article 4 of the CSTO Charter in order to stabilize and normalize the situation in the country. (Yusupov, 2022) By 6th of January 3000 Russian troops were deployed in Almaty, in addition to some number of Armenian, Kyrgyz, Belarus and Tajik soldiers (Putz, 2022). The situation was successfully stabilized in coming days by the Kazakh forces with insignificant participation of troops sent by member states, that were directed to safeguard the periphery. By 11th of January Tokaev announced that the order was restored, protests finished and CSTO completed its mission and can start withdrawing the troops from the country. (Kim, 2023) Putin declared the mission successful and declared victory over “foreign-backed terrorist uprising”, and moreover assured other members of CSTO that similar assistance will be provided for them too (Dettmer, 2022). Considering the fact that in the middle of the protests on 5th of January, it was announced that ex-president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, has resigned from the position of the Chairman of the Security Council of Kazakhstan, which is basically the central leadership body that Nazarbaev took over after transitioning the

presidency to Tokaev to retain the power. Tokaev has taken over the leadership of Security Council as a new Chairman immediately (Reform.by, 2022). The same day the head of National Security Committee, Karim Massimov, appointed by Nazarbaev before the transition of the presidency, was detained and arrested in the first days of protests, on 5th of January. That is, the events that followed the civil protests have become opportunity for Tokaev to assume the power and undermine the influence of former president and for Russian leadership it is beneficial to support new ruling Kazakh government. In this case, the instrument of the CSTO has been rapidly applied in the internal matters of the country, while no credible evidences on existence of terrorist groups supported externally to destabilize the state were reported until today. Apparently, the intervention of the CSTO to Kazakhstan had number of benefits, such as demonstration of CSTO revival and alleged effectiveness, Moscow's image of stability guarantor, ensured relationships with new leadership of Kazakhstan and promise of support for its "friends" in other member-states.

Recalling the criticism of Belarusian President towards CSTO inaction during Kyrgyz revolution in 2010, this time Lukoshenko not just praised the organization but moreover, according to him, has participated in development of intervention mission. "This operation until the very details was designed by two presidents – Russian and Belarus – within an hour." – shared Lukoshenko (RBCnews, 2022). The excitement of Belarus President can be understood as Belarus was experiencing the wave of protests from May 2020 until March 2021 after securing a victory on presidential election before the start of protests. The question on CSTO intervention to suppress the protests was also raised by some political analysts back then after Putin expressed readiness to intervene also referring to possible "extremism" as well as Lukashenko's content with Putin's declarations (Altynbayev, 2020). He shared: "As for the military component, we have an agreement with the Russian Federation as part of the Union State and of the CSTO. These are precisely the issues that fit this agreement." (Altynbayev, 2020) Moreover, the CSTO representatives also have shared the conditions on which CSTO is allowed to step in: "In case if its [Belarus] defense is threatened by an external danger, in accordance with the Collective Security Treaty, Article 4, Belarus has the right to request help", while no formal request was filed from Belarus (Batmanova, 2020). These comments demonstrate that the instrument of CSTO has been considered as a tool for consolidation of ruling powers in certain states among members, and finally it was exercised in Kazakhstan which send quite plain messages to the organization members where six out of eight states are authoritarian. While Russia claimed the somewhat

victory in Kazakhstan over the role of CSTO on restoring the order and wanted to send a message that regional security cooperation is alive, in reality it demonstrated the limitation it has in stabilizing real regional conflicts, such as conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as border clash between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In the war between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan in 1992 although the conflict was able to attract attention of some peace-making organizations and interested regional actors, Russia's role was quite significant in restoring peace and maintaining ceasefire. In 2020 the ceasefire between the parties maintained for a decade was broken and the clashes on the border of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan resumed and armed hostilities went on for 44 days. Considering long history of Russian presence and protective policy of the region in regards to Abkhazia or South Ossetia it was expected that Russian leadership will take a noteworthy part in peacekeeping, maybe with the involvement of the regional security cooperation. Back then Armenia made a request to the CSTO based on its obligation to intervene in case if Armenia's sovereign territory is under attack, but Russian President has made it clear that Nagorno-Karabakh war is taking place outside of the territory of Armenia and therefore the CSTO instrument cannot be applied this case (Nikolskii, 2020). The Armenian side replied with new requests of assistance even after those declarations, pointing out Turkey's direct involvement and the presence of Syrian mercenaries on the ground. After the condemnations from the European Union, United States and several international organizations about the issue of Syrian mercenaries, Russia also confirmed the fact of their presence, although it did not change the decision on intervention neither within the CSTO nor on its own (Butler, 2020). Yet, it acted as a mediator inviting the leaders of both sides and assisted twice in reaching a humanitarian ceasefire, however both times it was almost immediately violated. On November 9, the final ceasefire agreement was signed and was brokered by Russia. This time it came into effect and ended the hostilities. The ceasefire included important points, among which the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces for 5 years and located along the line of contact around Nagorno-Karabakh and Lachin corridor, securing the transportation and guaranteeing safety (Peace Agreements Database, 2020). This time Russia was the only mediator without the OSCE Minsk group being anyhow involved. The peacekeeping operation in Nagorno-Karabakh was being proposed and prepared by the OSCE Minsk group for decades, however at the end of the 2020 war, the only peacekeeping forces to be deployed on the ground were the Russian ones with purpose to demonstrate Russia as a guarantor of stability in the region. However,

the stability didn't last for long this time as the hostilities resumed a year later between 12-17th of September 2022 (ICG, 2023). These hostilities differ from other from regional security cooperation point of view with the fact that Azerbaijan attacked the Armenian territory thereby breaching the sovereignty of the member state of CSTO (ICG, 2023). Despite the fact that one of the member state's territories have been occupied until 2023, the CSTO has failed to react despite the requests from Armenian side. Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, strongly criticized the inaction of the organization on CSTO summit in November 2022. General Secretary of CSTO, Stanislav Zas, shared highly ambiguous answer on assistance to Armenia and said that the relevant document and agreement is "under development and requires certain revision." Further Pashinyan has commented that "It is upsetting that Armenia's membership in the CSTO did not prevent Azerbaijan from aggressive actions and that, in fact, until today no decision has been reached on the CSTO's reaction to this aggression. These facts cause great damage to the image of the CSTO both within our country and abroad." Moreover, Pashinyan justly reminded that during the mass protests in Kazakhstan in January 2022, the CSTO took one day to come up with the solution, and added that the lack of reaction to be the main failure of Armenia's chairmanship in the organization (Kotlyar, 2022). During the last summit in Armenia, Pashinyan refused to sign certain agreements in protest to CSTO inaction and afterwards had a meeting with Russian leader to discuss the issue. However, Putin merely recognizes certain "problems" of the CSTO and highlighted the need to restore the peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan and notably avoiding to recognize Azerbaijan's aggression (Trevelyan, 2022). In the context of the war in Ukraine, Russia failed to react and mobilize the CSTO in order to "prove" the effectiveness of CSTO once again, however, some experts claim that the Russia passive reaction is explained with its unwillingness to deteriorate the relationships with Azerbaijan (ICG, 2023). Russia's indecisive stance also illustrates the ambivalent attitude of CSTO which is not able to make decision on the objectives within its scope compared to Nagorno-Karabakh, moreover being inactive and even lacking protocol of actions in case of the conflicts occurring between member states.

Within few days after the Azerbaijan attack on Armenian territory, the Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan got involved in violent clash on common border. Minor border clashes in Central Asia are quite common and trace back their roots to the Soviet times when Soviet government implemented project on shallow demarcation of borders in Central Asia. After the USSR collapse the republics claimed respective territories with some disputed enclaves on each states' side. Local

communities residing on borders of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan frequently engage in hostilities over water resources and lands, but usually they are suppressed by authorities. In last ten years particularly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan border was the center of violence ignition as there were clashes of different scope every year (Ulukbek uulu & Abdyl daev, 2022). In last couple of years, the situation has been deteriorating with significantly higher number of casualties and armed confrontation on Kyrgyz and Tajik soldiers, that began resemble international conflict even more (Ulukbek uulu & Abdyl daev, 2022). The reaction of CSTO regarding the clashes in spring 2021 was quite formal and limited. The Chairman of CSTO, Stanislav Zas, issued a statement where he called on parties to resolve the conflict with peaceful and diplomatic means (CSTO, 2021). While discussing the issue of regional security on annual CSTO summit four months later in Dushanbe, the member avoided mentioning the conflict of two member states, although the security topic in Tajikistan has been brought up but with regards to Afghanistan. Generally, the regional heads of states are insignificantly involved in settling the long-standing conflict and usually limit themselves with phone calls and calling up the parties for peace (Umarov T. , 2021). Another armed conflict between the states on the border with the larger artillery a year later received the same reaction from the CSTO (Kalykov, 2022). Even Russia was hesitant in engaging in the conflict, and according to analyst on Central Asian affairs, to could be as a result of Tajiks harsh and decisive reaction, stating that “the issue of the Tajik-Kyrgyz border was not discussed during the CSTO meeting. Activities related to delimitation and demarcation of state borders are an internal affair of the CSTO member states”, in response to Russia’s initiative to be mediator in the demarcation process in 2020 (Umarov T. , 2021). Apparently, neither Tajik leadership is nor CSTO and allies are not interested in resolving the armed conflicting between two member states. Moreover, the CSTO system hasn’t established the procedure on restoring peace and stability in the region in case of armed conflict between member states of the organization. Meanwhile, in the afterwards of the war in September 2022, the Security Council Secretary of Kyrgyzstan is planning to put forward the topic on exclusion from the CSTO in case of armed aggression towards a member state. In addition, Kyrgyzstan didn’t participate annual military exercise last year, however the 2023 military trainings “Indestructible Brotherhood” which initially was going to be held in Armenia, are decided to take place on Kyrgyz territory (RadioMir, 2023). However, in the context of Russian war in Ukraine the issue most probably is not in the list of priorities for Russia, consequently neither for the CSTO. The success of CSTO in Kyrgyz-Tajik conflict would

contribute insignificantly to the image of effectiveness of the regional security cooperation led by Russia.

The possibility of CSTO participation in Russia's war in Ukraine has been raised multiple times by analysts and media (InozPress, 2022). However, the members have expressed their stance on the invasion, modestly expressing that they respect the sovereignty and integrity of states (Kussainova, 2022). At the same time, considering the alliance group that Russia built around itself, international community is observing the member states of CSTO carefully. After declaration of separatist regions of Ukraine, Donetsk and Lugansk as independent states, like in case with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia's CSTO allies refused the recognition (Tengri News, 2022). The role of CSTO in the modern context seems not only irrelevant or fruitless for its objectives but even ironic as an organization built to maintain regional security. Analyzing its activities in recent years, there is very few events that CSTO was effective in, such as military trainings, continuous discussion of menacing threat in Tajikistan, occasional demonstrations of Russia's influence and controversial promise to assist in preventing revolutions and protests among member states. Russian invasion to Ukraine in 2022 has put the future of the CSTO under question (Gale, 2022). In case if Russia loses the war, it will forfeit its influence over Eurasian region and among the CSTO members. However, their consolidation might be breached anyway, even in case if Russia takes over in the war in Ukraine, because Russia's success in invasion, annexation of territories is a direct threat to the integrity of the CSTO countries. Russian president and parliament members have expressed their disregard to sovereignty of Ukraine, and later of Moldova (Radio Moldova, 2023). For CSTO participants as post-soviet countries it poses convincing threat to their integrity as well. Since the collapse Russian leadership has been supporting the separatist movements across the post-soviet states, particularly in primarily Russian speaking regions. For example, quite often Russian politicians and media have expressed the claims for the northern regions of Kazakhstan. Therefore, after invasion to Ukraine and annexation of Donetsk and Lugansk, the Kazakh president, Tokaev, even after Putin's demonstration of support during January protest, is trying to distance itself from Moscow (Plotnikov, 2022). The model of regional security cooperation that Russian leadership chose in the early years of the CIS has continued in CSTO but with the states that were more loyal or in other words heavily dependent on Russia. For 30 years Russia has been building its image of hegemony in the multilateral regional cooperation while in reality prioritizing more bilateral partnership over multilateral, when the

CSTO activity was put into practice only in the occasions with direct Russian involvement or interest. Perhaps, Russian dominating involvement in security issues across the region has been preventing other sub-regions to engage in security cooperation, such as in Central Asia, which will be discussed in more details in the third chapter of the thesis. Arguably, this is one of the reasons why any other or more effective regional security cooperation has not been developed between former USSR republics.

2.3. Economic division of the CIS

Long before the dissolution the USSR was experiencing economic crisis, one of the reasons was the single-market economy that prioritized the domestic production in centralized market controlled by government. Further reconstruction of economy and market policies introduced by Khrushchev referred as ‘perestroika’ were not able to recover the crisis and moreover plummeted the Soviet Union in more debts, and eventually led to collapse of Soviet Union. After the collapse economic crisis across the post-soviet space intensified as each of the republics that before were controlled by centralized leadership were able to focus on national economies and be introduced to world economy and new markets. Since the authors declaration never wanted to completely dissolve the Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States was formed to substitute it and to preserve economic, political, and cultural ties among the republics. Already in the Belovozhsk Accords, where the three founding members declared the termination of USSR and established the CIS, included provision regarding the economic integration. The provision underlines the cooperation in establishing and developing common economic space, pan-European and Eurasian markets, and in custom policy sector. That is, the CIS has set the direction on decentralized open market system with close coordination between the newly independent states. However, the economic objectives of the CIS has faced many challenges since its formation. The transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one one of the main challenges for the CIS. Because Soviet Union had a centralized economic system the newly independent states struggled to adapt to the new economic realities. During Soviet Union the decision making on economic and

foreign policy was exercised by central leadership and new republics, except of Russia, lacked experience in dealing with new issues. Despite the provisions listed in the Accords, there were no measures or instruments developed for coordinating the common economic space. Plus, since the crisis was ongoing last two years and after Soviet Union, the newly intendent states prioritized tackling national economic crises. The economic multinational cooperation in Eurasian region was jeopardized and deteriorating in the first two years because of uncoordinated policies and additionally was complicated by the fact that the CIS countries had different levels of economic development and different economic opportunities. Economic opportunities and levels of economic development were determined by the number of factors, such as geographical location, natural resources, the specialized sector of economy established by Soviet Union leadership and internal and external politics.

In the need to establish new trade relations with other countries different states took different set of actions based on those factors. For example, certain states of the Western bloc of USSR being in the neighborhood of European Union were able to access the European market and prioritize it to Eurasian market where the former soviet republics were experiencing economic crisis. The opportunity to actively cooperate with the developed and stable economies was open to such states as Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Azerbaijan or Baltic states. At the same time, Georgia having the same geographical opportunity was not able to focus on its economic development due to ethnic and civil war that took place until 1993. Likewise, the littoral states of Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russian and Turkmenistan being rich in natural resources were able to build their economies around export of resources and attract foreign investment. Uzbekistan being blessed with the significant reserves of gas, also focused its industry on export of cotton, since during Soviet Union times the USSR located its cotton production particularly in Uzbekistan. However, other Central Asians states without vast amounts of natural resources like Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan were not able to boost their economy, and moreover Tajikistan has plunged into civil war until 1997. Furthermore, the CIS countries faced significant economic problems, including high inflation, low productivity, and a lack of investment. Many of the CIS countries also faced significant debt problems, which made it difficult for them to attract foreign investment. The diversity of former USSR republics, forming new trade relations with the countries outside of Eurasian region, which required significant effort and resources with inexperience in governance, in addition to still strong interdependence have resulted in even profound crisis.

The crisis pushed post-soviet states for contribute to economic consolidation and development of integration. After the Charter of CIS was signed the number of agreements were initiated that led to formation of Economic Union Treaty in 1993. In order to address the challenges, in 1994 within the framework of Economic Union Treaty, the CIS established various economic integration agreements, such as the CIS Free Trade Area (CISFTA), Custom Union introducing reduction of tariffs on trade within CIS space with the common tariffs for external partners (Sakwa & Webber, 1999). However, these agreements were not very successful in promoting economic integration, and the CIS countries continued to face significant economic challenges as a result of issues in constructing cooperation platform. Despite the overall understanding for the need of platform for cooperation, such as Economic Union, its structure was rather loose and central elements of integration were incomplete. The next step was made in the form of 'the Concept of Economic Integration of a CIS States' in 1997, and though this initiative has made few steps forward in setting the target date for achieving the CIS common space, it was still inconsiderable progress as it was merely listing and emphasizing the lack of coordination of existing problems in terms of fiscal, custom and investment policies (Sakwa & Webber, 1999). Despite the efforts, the Concept didn't give much result as mechanisms for implementation were weak or incomplete. However, one of the main reasons for lack of progress in development of multilateral cooperation is poor or absence of political will from the member states.

The lack or meager political will can be explained by number of factors. First of all, most of the states still prioritized the national economic interests over regional interests. In the earliest stages of CIS formation, states agreed on retaining joint currency zone, with few exceptions. Therefore, when hyperinflation due to oil prices have risen, the republics introduced their own currency disrupting the monetary area of the CIS. Most of the states withdrew the ruble by the 1993, which also contributed to the economic crisis. The ruptured economic ties between the CIS states at the beginning impacted greatly the trade and overall economic decline in the post-soviet. Based on the study where the share of trade between the post-soviet republics were compared before and after the collapse and showed that between 1990 and 1996 the commodity circulation within the CIS area decreased by about 40% (Sakwa & Webber, 1999). Although, the largest share of the trade decline among the post-soviet were caused by Baltic states, particularly Estonia dropped the trade by 65% after leaving CIS and setting trade barriers. Other portions of trade disruptions were caused by some conflicts in post-soviet areas, such as war in Nagorno-Karabakh,

as a result of which the trade between Armenia and Azerbaijan dropped by 53%. Russia being the biggest trading partner of the majority of CIS states, its share of inter-republican trade fell significantly from 65% to 23% (Sakwa & Webber, 1999). Moreover, even the inter-republic economic relations, the same was as security, were solved on bilateral terms between the states. Despite the fact that the CIS members recognized the necessity to focus on restoring the economic ties of post-soviet area, the new republics feared the dominance of Russia in supranational institution, so the members preferred to work on bilateral terms as it was the most efficient way to reach the agreements and sizable results, at the same time caused stagnation of multilateral cooperation. For example, the bilateral trade between Russia and number of other former soviet republics was dominating their economies. 52% of foreign trade of Belarus in 1996 was accounted to the trade with Russia, Ukraine around 44% and Kazakhstan about 49%. As a result, prioritization of the trade outside of the CIS, uncoordinated economic policies, border controls and emphasis on bilateral agreements within the region were still predominant in national policies (Mazhikeyev & Huw Edwards, 2021).

Another reason is general lack of consent between the CIS states on the role and extent of decision-making power of the organization over the domestic policies. In general, the supranational power of the CIS was a reason of strong debate between the states. Apparently, the CIS administration believed that lack of serious decision-making power was the reason of ineffectiveness of the organization, while the republics were strongly protective of just acquired sovereignty. The search for balance between the domestic interests and regional development have resulted in loose consolidation of efforts and general lack of consent among the member states of CIS over the essential topics in the cooperation development. For that reason, the Concept for Economic Integration faced insurmountable issues on the stage of adoption of Concept. In one of the meetings in March 1997 the participating states expressed the doubts over the effectiveness of the document, while number of states, such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, voiced their concerns over the potential impingement upon domestic economic sovereignty if the Concept to-be properly implemented (Sakwa & Webber, 1999). As a result, at the meeting of the CIS Council of Head of States, the Concept didn't receive much support and signed only by Russian president -El'tsin. While more ambitious project on economic integration was experiencing unpopularity among the participants, more specific steps towards the integration and development of trade were made as an alternative.

One of the reasons of disrupted trade between the CIS members was introduction of trading barriers and tariffs. Despite the provision on custom union in the Charter of the CIS signed by the majority of participants except of Ukraine, Moldova and Turkmenistan, the republics have introduced the border checks and custom barriers for other members. Therefore, throughout 1996 several agreements were signed tackling those problems in more detailed set of actions, such as establishment of common legal principles of customs policies on national level, common trade *nomenklatura*, as well as common railway tariff. Despite that Russia has been less enthusiastic about multilateral agreements within the CIS, however at the same time developing closer bilateral cooperation with its closest partners. During the late 1990s the largest economic partners of post-soviet space, Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan, have made considerable steps towards deeper economic cooperation in the form of Custom Union. In 1996 the group, enlarged with Kyrgyzstan, have agreed on creation of single market for goods, services, labour and developing common transport, energy and information systems by signing the Treaty on Increased Integration in the Economic and Humanitarian Fields (EEU, 2015). By 1999 the number of members increased with Tajikistan participation and the group have signed the Treaty on Custom Union and Single Economic Space and moved further with the Economic integration. The role of Russia is particularly noteworthy as Russia maintained the largest economy in the post-soviet and served as a central trading destination for post-soviet states (CIS, 1995).

Taking into account the geopolitical context of the post-soviet space, Russia has played an essential role in constructing the economic environment in the region. It was one of the reasons why pro-economic integration camp was becoming scarcer in members, in addition to little progress in the new integration initiatives. For example, Russia has used the Custom Union as an excuse to pressure Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to impose tariffs and other barriers on trade with Ukraine (Sakwa & Webber, 1999). In addition, while fostering the multilateral organizations on the one hand, Russia and Belarus were developing Union State on bilateral basis and formed economic and security cooperation in 1997 on the other. Generally, Russia's preference of bilateral agreements over multilateral agreements between the CIS states reflects its plans to retain political and economic influence over individual CIS states. While Russia has played a key role in the formation and development of the CIS, its policies illustrates that it considers bilateral agreements as a more effective instrument to achieve its foreign policy ambitions. Overall, the period between 1991 and 2000 was a challenging time for the economic division of the CIS. The transition to a

market-oriented economy was difficult, and the CIS countries faced significant economic problems. While the CIS established various economic integration agreements to address these challenges, these efforts were not very successful in promoting economic integration.

Period after 2000 is notable for the new wave of attempts to reinstate multilateral cooperation in the region. However, the Eurasian cooperation has changed its shape and the hegemony of the region re-established its 'territory' using both economic and security policies. While in the security cooperation Russia has focused on Central Asia at the beginning of new millennia due to growing threats from Afghanistan and advancing of United States to the Central Asian region, the economic integration had its start in 2000 between the same group of allies as the security cooperation the CSTO, except of Armenia. Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan established Eurasian Economic Community and introduced common market system between the members. However, the new re-integration project was not much popular among the post-soviet states, and the organization failed to attract new members for number of reasons. Firstly, it was difficult for the EurAsEC to compete with European Union in developing economic ties with some post-soviet states. For example, the countries of South Caucasus managed to sign agreement with larger and stronger market of the EU and with greater economic benefits.

Secondly, the hegemonic ambitions of Russia were prompt distrust among the post-soviet states, as it frequently prioritized its own interest over its partners in multilateral cooperation, and being the main energy suppliers for post-soviet-states often utilized its energy exports to impose influence or punish former soviet republics. One of the examples is Russian gas supplies disruption to Ukraine in 2006 and 2009. In 2003 Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine signed the Treaty on a Single Economic Space and ratified it in 2004. However, the protests in 2004 in Ukraine resulted in Orange Revolution and the fall of new Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich, which caused the paused of the Treaty. After the revolution, in 2006 and 2009 Russia interrupted gas supplies to Ukraine, causing European states that relied on Ukrainian pipelines experience shortages of gas supplies. Russia blamed Ukraine of pumping gas meant for Europe, and Ukraine accused Russia of using its gas exports for its political needs. The crisis ended when Ukraine agreed to pay higher prices for Russian gas (Pirani, Stern, & Yafimava, 2009). Similar situation happened in Georgia in 2006 which was perceived as warning signs to Georgia due to increased tensions between Georgia and Russia amid conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia where

separatist regions were backed by Russia (CNN, 2006). Later, tensions resulted in war between Georgia and Russia which induced Georgia to leave the CIS in 2008. On the other side of post-soviet in 2006 Uzbekistan joined the EurAsEC due to change of stance towards Russia, caused by deteriorated relationships with the United States and total removal of its Karshi-Khanabad air base amid the events of Andijan massacre in 2005. However, already in 2008 Uzbekistan withdrew from the EurAsEC, allegedly in order to avoid Russian influence (Walsh, 2005). Moreover, at the same as developing closer cooperation within the Treaty on a Single Economic Space in the western CIS, Russia also joined the Central Asian Economic Cooperation in 2004 in order to assert its influence in Central Asia. Later, Russia suggested to merge the Central Asian Economic Cooperation in the EurAsEC. The deteriorated relationships with Russia or attempts to avoid Russia's domination have made other CIS states reluctant to join new Eurasian economic organization. But overall, the EurAsEC lacked considerable transparency on decision-making so it was less trustworthy for new members and even made the organization to be seen as a closed club. Significant decrease of trust in Russia and in the EurAsEC, overall lack of interest and utilizing the organization as a tool for foreign policy caused the stagnation of the EurAsEC, and later termination by merging it to new project – the EEU.

2.4. Eurasian Economic Union

Between 2007 and 2012 the three largest economic allies in CIS have made yet more significant steps to build effective economic integration platform and signed an agreement on establishing the Custom Union (2007), the Eurasian Economic Space and Eurasian Economic Commission (2012), and Eurasian Economic Union (2011) (Sakwa & Webber, 1999). In 2014 the three founding members signed the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union, which was later acceded by Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. Considering the fact that Armenia already signed number of more beneficial agreements with EU within the Eastern Partnership initiative, Yerevan was not enthusiastic about joining EEU, however Russia utilized its energy export. Armenia is heavily dependent on Russian gas and had long been a Russian ally, consequently Moscow used the leverage to pressure Armenia to join the Eurasian Economic Union. In 2013, Russia raised the price of natural gas exports to Armenia, by 40%, and consequently Armenia signed the Treaty in 2014 (Aslanian, 2013). Generally speaking, Russia's efforts to facilitate multilateral cooperation could be considered as more or less fruitful. Although the EEU has become the tool for influence exertion over dependent states, still it has developed notable coordinated cooperation in the sector of economic integration. As an organization there is not much regional cohesion, except of Russian dominance, but the EEU has some noteworthy benefits for the regional cooperation and for its members.

One of the main benefits of the EEU is the removal of trade barriers between member states. This has led to an increase in trade between the member countries, which has boosted economic growth and created new business opportunities. According to the Eurasian Economic Commission, the total trade turnover between EEU member states increased by 11.4% in 2020, reaching a total of \$62.7 billion. Armenia has seen significant growth in its exports to other EEU member states since joining the union in 2015 (the EEU, 2018). In 2019, Armenian exports to EEU member states increased by 22.7%, reaching a total of \$1.6 billion (Akepanidaworn, Karapetyan, Reyes, & Ustyugova, 2022). In 2019, the total value of trade between Armenia and the other EEU member states was \$2.8 billion, representing a 9% increase compared to the previous year. This was driven by increased exports of Armenian agricultural products, as well as greater demand for Armenian-made jewelry and textiles (A. Knobel, 2019). Another member of EEU with smaller

economy and population, Kyrgyzstan saw notable increase in trade with EEU states. In 2020, the trade turnover between Kyrgyzstan and the EEU increased by 14.5% compared to the previous year, according to data from the Eurasian Economic Commission. This was largely due to an increase in Kyrgyz exports to EEU member states, which grew by 27.6%. Although the EEU can provide significant benefits for some member countries, the difference in growth and advantages between larger and small economy states is feasible. For example, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan are relatively small economies that may struggle to compete with larger member states like Russia and Kazakhstan. Therefore, the largest increase in trade experienced three largest and founding member of EEU, Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan, and notably mostly on bilateral terms. In 2019, Russia and Kazakhstan signed a \$5 billion agreement to boost trade in agricultural products, including wheat, sunflower oil, and meat. This agreement was aimed at increasing bilateral trade between the two countries, as well as promoting the export of these products to other EEU member states. According to a report by the Eurasian Development Bank, trade between EEU member states increased by 9.1% in 2020, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This was largely due to increased trade between Russia and Kazakhstan, which accounted for 70% of the total trade turnover within the EEU. Another advantage that membership in EEU offers are common market and access to larger market. The EEU creates a single market for goods, services, capital, and labor, which facilitates the free movement of these factors between member states, which helps to attract investment and talent, and can lead to economies of scale for businesses. Moreover, the EEU has a population of over 180 million people, which provides member countries with access to a larger market than they would have individually. Larger markets are particularly necessary for smaller countries like Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, which may have difficulties to attract foreign investment on their own. In addition, the EEU provides a platform for member states to coordinate their economic policies, which can help to ensure that they are more effective and efficient. This can be particularly important for issues like trade and investment, where there is a need for common rules and regulations.

Nevertheless, despite the benefits of the EEU on trade and larger investments, there are significant negative sides of the EEU. First of all, the limited diversity of economies to cooperate with for the members. The EEU is primarily focused on trade between its member states, which include only five states, which makes it difficult to harmonize regulations and standards, which can impede trade, because the members have different levels of economic development and

industrial capabilities. As it is seen on previously given statistics some of the states set preference over trading partners within the union based on bilateral conditions. As it is with the CSTO, Russia is a center of the economic relationships and maintains the trade with all five members, while it is not always the case for other members. Limited diversity also limited development of multilateral trading within the union. This can make them more vulnerable to economic shocks and downturns, or geopolitical changes. There are also some challenges to further increasing multilateral trading within the EEU. The EEU has come into conflict with other trade agreements, particularly the European Union. This can create tension between member states that are trying to balance their relationships with different trading partners. One example is the ongoing dispute between the EEU and the EU over the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative, which has Armenia and Belarus as member. The initiative includes a free trade agreement between the EU and the EEU member states, which has been a source of tension between the two blocs.

Another significant disadvantage of the EEU is dependence of all five members on Russia and its economy, and frequent politization of the economic relationships by the members. Russia frequently uses dependence of other countries as a leverage in its foreign policy and exerts influence over the EEU members. One of the examples, is another 'Milk war' between Belarus and Russia in February 2017 and continued during 2018 and 2019. The dispute was centered around the price of milk and dairy products from Belarus which is the largest importer of dairy products to Russia. In 2017 Moscow banned import of dairy good due to concerns about the quality of Belarusian dairy products, while Belarus denied the accusations, pointing that Russia uses the ban as a political tool. The ban could be Russia's form of punishment in the context of Belarus' reconciliation with the West and for its refusal to support the annexation of Crimea in 2014, as Lukashenka called it a 'bad precedent' (RadioFreeEurope\RadioLiberty, 2014). In the next two years, the closest allies were restricting dairy products and energy exports in 2018 and 2019. According to Belarus, the ban of dairy products was violating the terms of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). At the same time, the relationships of the closest allies have been improving since then, and sometimes the EEU has been a platform for exerting political influence on Belarusian decision-making process. For example, during the widespread protests in Belarus in 2020 sparked by alleged fraudulent presidential elections Lukashenko faced criticism and demands to resign from the position. Russia expressed support for Lukashenko criticizing the protests and accused Western countries of interfering in Belarusian internal affairs. During the EEU meeting in Moscow

in October 2020, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that it would provide Belarus with a \$1.5 billion loan to support its economy (Rainsford, 2020). The loan was widely perceived as a way for Russia to exert influence over Belarus and to support Lukashenko's government. As a result, in November 2020, Lukashenko signed a decree that authorized the integration of the Belarusian and Russian economies, which many saw as a move toward closer ties with Russia and away from the West.

In addition, Russia's foreign policy frequently causes economic drawbacks and issues for the member states of the EEU. Numerous economic sanctions were imposed on Russia by the EU and the United States since 2014. For example, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 affected the EEU significantly in multiple ways. Since the EEU members economy is heavily dependent on Russian economy, therefore economic damages that Russia experienced automatically affected the EEU states, their economies and financial systems (Jansultanov, 2022). In addition to sanctions, the external trading of the EEU was affected by the annexation. For example, in 2014 that New Zealand abandoned negotiations on the developing a free trade zone with the predecessor of the EEU - the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (Korolev & Kalachigin, 2022). The annexation of Crimea created political tensions between Russia and its neighbors, particularly Ukraine. These tensions spilled over into the EEU, which was founded in part as a way to strengthen economic ties between former Soviet republics. The annexation of Crimea highlighted the challenges of maintaining a cooperative economic relationship in the face of political disputes. Moreover, Russia neglected the participation of the EEU members in decision-making process when it unilaterally decided to impose embargo against the European Union and a number of other Western countries. In addition to the economic consequences, Russia's partners expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the restrictive measures were not discussed within the EEU, since Moscow did not inform the Eurasian Economic Commission about its plans, which directly contradicts the agreement on integration. In the similar unilateral manner Russia makes political decisions on development of cooperation with external partners. One of the examples is the Russia and China's joint statement on cooperation to integrate the EEU and the Chinese initiative "The Economic Belt of the Silk Road", adopted in May 2015. The members of the EEU also did not participate in negotiation and preparation processes (Korolev & Kalachigin, 2022).

Overall, the foreign policy and hegemonic ambitions of Russia caused by its confrontation with western parties are deteriorating, however the state of economic cooperation within the EEU has experienced some controversial changes. While the previous sanctions on Russia by some representatives of international community has not been yet lifted, the invasion on Ukraine caused more sanctions on Russia. One of the ways the sanctions on Russia as a result of the invasion and annexation of Ukrainian regions is secondary sanctions imposed by US and EU. Secondary sanctions are meant to prevent the third parties from indirect assistance to Russia. The secondary sanctions were already applied on Belarus for involvement in the war in Ukraine, on Iran for assisting Russia military equipment such as delivery of military drones (Szczepański, 2023). Accordingly, the EEU states that are indirectly assisting to Russia are potential subject of secondary sanctions. Besides, the sanctions, the dependence of the EEU states on Russian economy and infrastructure also caused considerable negative effects now and in future. In this regard, anti-Russian sanctions and retaliatory measures of the Russian government have caused the increase in prices and inflation. In order to stabilize domestic prices, the Russian government have limited the export of a number of key food products to foreign markets, including the EEU partners, causing the rise in prices for imported goods in EEU states (Jansultanov, 2022). At the same time, since the access to main external market are restricted for Russian producers, they are entering the remaining open markets, particularly the EEU states. Considering that Russian economy is larger and stronger compared to its neighbors, the producers from the EEU countries are struggling to maintain the competition. Some of the EEU partners experience particular damages amid anti-Russian sanctions, such as Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan oil and gas rich country heavily depends on its export of the oil to foreign markets, and to do so it strongly relies on infrastructure of Russia exporting more than 90% of its oil. About 80% of Kazakhstani oil passes to foreign markets through the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) only. Since the beginning of 2022, the activities of the CPC have been disrupted three times due to various reasons, which had a negative impact on the socio-economic situation in the country. Other negative side effects on the economies of the EEU members are related to the currency devaluation, since Russia makes interventions in order to stabilize the ruble prices, and introduced policies that are prioritizing the trading in its national currency, which affects the currency rates of its partners and their economies (Jansultanov, 2022).

On the other hand, the specialists of the EEU member states are underlining significant benefits that are following the anti-Russian sanctions and its increasing isolation from the world economy. First of all, since the invasion, Russia actively developing economic relations with its EEU partners. As a result, the trade turnover has significantly increased between the Russia and its economic partners. Experts report about record breaking levels of export to Russian market, which has experienced the loss of considerable amount of imported goods from western countries after multiple companies left the country amid the war. Even smaller EEU states like Armenia and Kyrgyzstan indicating the notable growth in exports and tourist visits from Russia. However, despite the significant growth and closer economic integration between the EEU, it might potentially deteriorate the multilateral regional cooperation in the post-soviet space. In this context, Russia has increased the integration with the countries that are especially dependent on its economy, besides Belarus it includes Central Asian states. On the other hand, with more isolated Russia and further weakening its dominance in Eurasia, there are republics in the region that speculating about challenging the hegemony of Russia. Uzbekistan has a history of zigzag policies towards Russia and ambitions of hegemony in Central Asia. While Kazakh experts state that because of increasing isolation of Russian economy, Kazakhstan is potentially could to replace it as the main exporter of good, oil and gas in foreign market from Eurasian region that Russia dominated before (Jansultanov, 2022). In addition, despite the increased economic relations between the EEU states and Russia that some states are favoring, at the same time creates more inter-dependence which means the weakening Russian economy will further affect negatively economies of its partners.

Chapter III: Sub-regions of the post-soviet space

The third chapter examines the regional cooperation in the distinguished sub-regions of the post-soviet space that are defined by the existing multilateral cooperation initiatives. In order to give comprehensive overview, it is important to analyze the implications that the CIS had on the shape of regional cooperation. The events of the first years after collapse have set the course towards the current dynamics in the Eurasian region that divided the region in three distinctive sub-regions based on relatively higher extent of regional cooperation. The chapter is structured into three sub-regions that consist of countries in the Western bloc of the former USSR, littoral states of Caspian Sea and Central Asia. Each sub-region provides unique perspective on the regional cooperation and have distinctive features that shape the regional cooperation in Eurasia in general.

3.1. GUAM sub-region

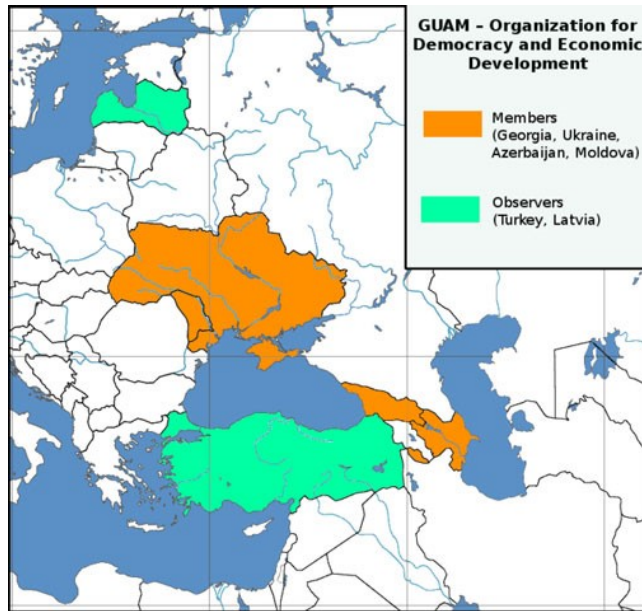


FIGURE 2: MAP OF GUAM STATES

As a response to Russia's influence assertion in the post-Soviet Union, the four states, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova, of the Western part of the former USSR formed GUAM in 1997. One of the main factors that led to the formation of GUAM was the desire of its member states to reduce their dependence on Russia and to pursue a more independent foreign policy. Russia had traditionally played a dominant role in the region, and its influence continued to be felt after the collapse of the Soviet

Union. While Russia had taken an active role in the region by leading CIS, it sought to maintain its areas of influence by supporting separatist regions in the western sub-region of the former USSR. Each of the members of GUAM had a separatist conflicts or movements that was backed directly or indirectly by Russian leadership. Moldova had an armed conflict with Transnistrian region between 1991 and 1992, which is still unresolved and is considered as one of the frozen conflicts. The collapse also sparked the breakaway of Nagorno-Karabakh region from Azerbaijan. Same years Georgia had armed conflicts with its regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while Ukraine had separatist sentiments in Crimea. GUAM was a way to assert the independence and somewhat the opposing stance towards Russia. Additional factor that led to the formation of GUAM was the attempt of its member states to promote regional integration and cooperation. The main objectives of GUAM are facilitation of regional stability that includes counterterrorism, border security, and the fight against organized crime, as well as economic development, and cooperation in various fields, including energy, transport, and tourism.

As an organization that was created in the circumstances of security concerns, the most notable course of the work was peacekeeping. One of the main areas of focus for GUAM has been the Transnistria conflict. While Russia was leading the CIS peacekeeping intervention, GUAM also took an initiative to participate in peacemaking process. However, the same way as the CIS, the GUAM achievements in the armed conflict were limited, and Russia and Moldova came to agreement bilaterally. Later in 2005, GUAM with leadership of Ukraine decides to more active role in conflict resolution process, and even call for political support of US and EU. One of the taken measures was tightening custom control from both Moldova and Ukraine. Also, in order to counterpart the peacekeeping forces of Russia in Transnistria, GUAM established the Peacekeeping Battalion, which has been deployed to the Transnistria conflict zone to help maintain peace and stability in 2006. During the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 and following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, GUAM's reaction was somewhat restrained with issued statement condemning Russia's actions and calling for an end to the hostilities respect for territorial integrity of states (GUAM, 2009). In 2022 amid the Russian invasion to Ukraine, GUAM issues statement condemning the recognition of self-declared independence of the separatist regions People's Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk (GUAM, Statement of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly regarding the decision of the President of Russia to recognise the independence of self-declared People's Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk, 2022).

When it comes to other objectives of the organization such as counterterrorism and economic integration the progress is quite limited overall. Regarding the fighting there were made some notable steps in developing the legal and organizational framework within GUAM, however considering the insignificant level of terrorist activities in the region there wasn't much to be done. While GUAM has established institutional frameworks for economic cooperation, such as GUAM Free Trade Zone (1999) and the GUAM Transport Corridor (2000), however the progress on actual economic integration has been relatively low (SIPRI, 2007). In addition to these institutional frameworks, GUAM member states have also pursued bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation initiatives. For example, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine have established the Silk Road Transport Corridor, which aims to connect Europe and Asia through a network of transport links and infrastructure. However, progress on the implementation of the initiatives has been slow, and trade between GUAM member states remains relatively insignificant. There are number of reasons for the lack of notable achievements, such as economic differences, limited resources and

most importantly different priorities and lack of political will. The main motivation of member states to promote integration within one organization is to contest Russia pushing influence in the sub-region. In some ways, the participation in GUAM has been widely seen as a change of political stance in the post-soviet region. For that reason, when in 1999 Uzbekistan refused to renew its participation, it joined the GUAM as a sign of challenging Russia's dominance in Central Asia. Later, after Andijan events in 2005 with the changed political stance on Russia, Uzbekistan withdrew from GUAM and joined the Russia-led CSTO.

In addition, the GUAM as an organization, as well as some of its member states, keeps more pro-Western stance as oppose to Russian. However, besides this objective, the member states of the GUAM were not homogenous enough in their economic development, political and economic priorities and policies to form a coherent region. All four states are members of EU Eastern Partnership, which aims to build stronger political and economic relations between the European Union state and its eastern partners. That is, the four countries are more interested and focused in developing closer cooperation with larger and stronger economies than GUAM. As a result, the sub-regional cooperation in the western part of post-soviet space lacked the necessary level of interest and involvement, since the members, in particular Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, were pursuing not only economic but also security support from Western allies, such as EU and US. As a result, the possible menace from one side pushed the countries with common challenge to cooperate, while the promise for better option from another side has prevented the regional cooperation to develop.

3.2. The Caspian Sea sub-region



FIGURE 3: MAP OF CASPIAN REGION

The Caspian Sea sub-region is a great example of the institutionally formed regionalization based on multilateral agreement that has a specific problem to solve, which can also lead to further development of cooperation. The Caspian Sea is the largest inland body of water in the world with vast reserves of natural resources, fishing industry and transportation possibilities. For almost three decades the Caspian Sea has been a subject of dispute among the five littoral states, while also offering the foundation for regional cooperation. Until the

dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Caspian Sea was divided into zones between the USSR and Iran. After the collapse the Caspian Sea suddenly ended up with five countries at its shores, Russia, Iran, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. Those bordering countries for many years were engaged in the negotiations of legal status of the Caspian Sea and the rights and responsibilities of its littoral states. The final decision on definition of the Caspian Sea as ‘a lake’ or as ‘a sea’ would define the proportions of territories each state would be entitled to which determines the natural resources and fisheries for each state. On the one side are Iran and Russia arguing that it should be considered a lake, with each littoral state entitled to an equal share of the resources. On the other sides is group of newly independent states, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan arguing that it should be recognized as a sea, which means that each state will have a share of resources proportional to the length of its coastline (Shonbayev, 2003).

The dispute over the legal status of the Caspian Sea was one of the obstacles for development of regional cooperation or its limited progress. For that reason, majority of the agreements in the region were signed bilaterally or trilaterally that only involved some states of

the Caspian sub-region, such as the North-South Transport Corridor (Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan) and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey), and project on halt – the Trans-Caspian Pipeline (Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan). In August 2018 after almost thirty years of negotiations, the five littoral states signed the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which addressed many of the legal issues regarding the Caspian Sea management (Whitney, 2018). The convention recognizes the Caspian Sea as a special body of water, with a status that is distinct from both a sea and a lake. It establishes a territorial sea, a fishing zone, and a exclusive economic zone for each littoral state, and beyond those zones are international waters. The convention also allows for the construction of pipelines and underwater cables, and regulates the use of the Caspian Sea for military purposes.

Overall, there are two notable projects in the region that worth to mention in the context of the regional cooperation in the Caspian sub-region. One of the most ambitious projects exercised in the sub-region is the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) that connects Europe with China through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, before reaching Turkey and onward to Europe. The annexation of Crimea and anti-Russian sanctions complicated the trading routes that run through Ukraine and Russia, as a result Ukraine decided to join the TITR as an alternative transit route to redirect trading flows to the East circumventing the Russian territory in 2016 (Parkhomchik, 2016). In the context of new sanctions against Russia amid the invasion to Ukraine the TITR project might experience considerable upsurge in investment. Increased isolation of Russia from trading in Eurasia are raising the issue of alternative transporting routes beyond the sanctioned territory. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are promoting the TITR as a long-term alternative for new economic and geopolitical realities (Alejandro Sánchez & Auyezova, 2022). And the EU already expressed the intention to invest in the development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) (The Astana times, 2022). These changes indicate the new stage of regional cooperation in the sub-region of the Caspian Sea.

At the same time, the current geopolitical situation in Eurasia and Russian economic isolation stimulated the rise of another case of regional cooperation. In 2019 at the anniversary of the the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, the president of Turkmenistan initiated the First Caspian Economic Forum that aims to be a platform for improving trade and investment of the littoral states of the Caspian Sea. The first forum that took place in the capital city of

Turkmenistan was attended by representatives of the member states of the Convention, plus Prime Ministers of Uzbekistan and Bulgaria. The Turkmen president highlighted the importance of economic cooperation, particularly due to anti-Russian sanctions (Staikos & Dartford, 2019). Amid the war in Ukraine and Russia's growing need of new partners in 2022, the Second Caspian Economic Forum was held in October 2022 already in Moscow. Considering the fact, that Russia moved closer to its economic partners in the EEU, it also enthusiastically used the platform proposed by Turkmen president in order to develop its partnership in the Caspian region. Moreover, the EEU partners of Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, also attended the forum this time indicating the growing importance of the region for foreign policy of Russia. Despite the increased interest of Russia in the newly developed partnership, analyzing the forum outcomes it seems like Turkmenistan is intending to take the leadership in this cooperation as it urges to develop partnership in energy sector and removal of transport barriers between the Caspian countries. In addition, the Kazakhstan ambitions in the region are also rising, although seems like the interests of Kazakhstan lie in European Union. In the new geopolitical and economic realities, the regional cooperation in Caspian Sea is experiencing increasing popularity by its regional countries as never before.

3.3. Central Asian sub-region



FIGURE 4: MAP OF CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

When it comes to Central Asian regional cooperation its rather surprising to see the lack of any considerable multilateral cooperation in the sub-region, taking into account the cultural similarities, interconnected historical background, common economic and security challenges. The reason of the limited cooperation between Central Asian states lies in number of factors, such as different levels of industrialization, economic growth, external influence, as well as low political will due to lack of consent between regional leaders. Soviet Union has left significant impact on Central Asian states that still contribute to present foreign policy choices, in terms of territory demarcation, spots of internal conflicts, type of industrialization and Russian as commonly spoken language. After the gaining independence the Central Asian states have entered into talks about the future of the region and states (Pannier, 2018). One of the main issues and reasons for dispute that CA states had right after the dissolution is share of water resources which causes occasional hostilities between the population of involved states on the orders (Wegerich, 2009). The issue has its origin from the fact that the region's major rivers, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, originate in

the mountains of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and flow downstream through Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, draining into the Aral Sea. Historically, the Soviet Union managed the region's water resources through a centralized system that allocated water in the way to increase the production of cotton in Fergana Valley neglecting environmental considerations. However, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the five Central Asian states inherited this system but lacked a clear agreement on how to allocate water fairly and sustainably. Despite the 1992 agreement between parties, tensions have arisen over the allocation and use of water resources, with upstream countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan seeking to build dams and hydroelectric power plants to boost their economies, while downstream countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan fear the potential for reduced water flow, which could threaten their agriculture-based economies and lead to environmental degradation. These issues are further complicated by political and economic factors, such as corruption, lack of investment in water infrastructure, and geopolitical rivalries between the countries. The issue remains unresolved, with periodic flare-ups of tension and conflict over water resources, highlighting the need for a comprehensive and sustainable solution.

Besides the problem-solving nature of this cooperation case, Central Asian also attempted the regional cooperation based on economic needs and security concerns, which eventually could contribute to resolution regarding water resources management as well. In 1991 Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan established the Central Asian Union – an intergovernmental initiative to promote economic integration. Throughout the decade the countries have engaged in talks about number of issues, such as establishing single economic space, Interstate Council with Executive Committee, and military dimension amid the growing threat of Islamic extremists and drug-trafficking coming from Afghanistan through Tajikistan. Due to civil war Tajikistan joined the Union in 1996 as an observer, while Turkmenistan have expressed its neutrality and refused to bind with other Central Asian states. Despite the numerous issues and summits during 1990s the state leaders were not able to come to an agreement leading essentially to inactivity of the Union by the end of millennia, except of changing its name to Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) (Tolipov, 2004).

At the same time, Central Asian region was becoming the intersection of geopolitical interest of external powers, Russia, United States, China. Russia within the framework of the CIS,

in which Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are members, initiated the peacekeeping process during civil war in Tajikistan, and engaged in security issues of the region. Within the Collective Security Treaty, Russia and Central Asian states conducted missions to fight Islamic extremists that infiltrated into Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. With the growing influence of Russia in the region, Uzbekistan refused to participate in renewal of the Treaty and enters the GUAM. In 2001 Uzbekistan signed the strategic partnership with United states, giving permission to install its air base on the territory. This marks the new period for Central Asian cooperation, as the regional cooperation will become limited in scope by the participation of external powers. After that, the US was established military bases also in Kyrgyzstan, while China entered with the proposal of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001.

However, the geopolitical situation changes dramatically since 2004, when Russia enters the only regional cooperation of Central Asian states – the CACO – which was proposed by Uzbekistan. At the same time, the relationship between Uzbekistan and the United States deteriorates after US expressed criticism on human rights violations and anti-democratic policies during the Andijan massacre events in 2005, leading expulsion of the US air base from Uzbekistan the same year. The next year the CSTO accepts the new Central Asian member – Uzbekistan, although it withdrew from the organization in 2012 again. With increased influence of Russia, which participated in all four existing regional cooperation projects, the CSTO, the EEU, the SCO, and the CACO. It was decided to merge the CACO in the EEU in 2006 as a result the only Central Asian cooperation initiated by the CA states ceased to exist (Tolipov, 2004). Despite the significant role of Uzbekistan's foreign policy in shaping the Central Asian sub-region, it was still relatively closed for regional affairs, such as trade and investment development, security issues, development of transport and financial systems. It was a considerable obstacle for the regional development since Uzbekistan is located at the center of Central Asia, has the largest population, well industrialized economy and natural resources.

Overall, any sort of cooperation between the CA states has been in stagnation since the end of 1990s until 2016. the security and economic relations were dominated by Russia, since the economies and trading of CA states were heavily dependent on Russian economy mostly through bilateral agreements with Russia or within framework of the EEU. The same situation was on political dimension, since the CA states had authoritarian regimes, except of Kyrgyzstan. The

authoritarian leaders being in power since the independence have developed bilateral relationships with Russian president. This all greatly contributed to lack of political will for regional cooperation. Kazakh long-time president, Nazarbaev, although had attempted to push the regional cooperation initiatives, focused on economic cooperation within Eurasia with larger economic allies, Russia and Belarus. However, in 2007 Nazarbaev proposed the Central Asian Union the renaissance uniting five CA states (IWPR, 2007). But Uzbekistan leader of that time, Karimov, generally distrustful towards all the leaders both sub-regional and external, such as Russia and US, rejected the idea due to anxiety of potential dominance of Kazakhstan in the cooperation. Tajik leader, Rahmon, has been loyal to Russian leader since the end of civil war, when Moscow supported Rahmon's regime. The same way, Kyrgyzstan heavily dependent on Russia economically, was in addition plunged into internal political instability as it went through three overturns of power since the independence, which made it unattractive for cooperation for other CA leaders who have been in power since the collapse. While Turkmenistan has declared total neutrality and hasn't engaged in any sort of cooperation neither with CA states, not with Russia. As a result, the lack of interest of regional leaders and internal distrust, in addition to Russia's ambitions of total hegemony has made the regional cooperation almost inexistant, until 2018.

Before the first steps towards the integration, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have signed number of bilateral agreements. But only when previous Uzbek leader, Karimov, has passed away and new president, Mirziyoyev, came to power in 2016, the idea of Central Asian Union revival was again on the table. In 2018 the first Central Asian Summit took place in Astana, Kazakhstan, and was initiated by the president of Uzbekistan and was attended by presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and by Turkmen Parliament speaker. The president of Turkmenistan didn't attend the first summit instead making visits to Kuwait and UAE. However, the second CA Summit was already attended by the Turkmen president himself, which might indicate his increased interest in regional cooperation. The Third Summit in 2020 was supposed to be held in Bishkek but due to pandemic and forceful change of power in Kyrgyzstan, it was postponed. The third CA Summit took place in Avaza, Turkmenistan in 2021 and set an important precedent for regional cooperation in Central Asia. Despite the pandemic, change of leadership in Kyrgyzstan, lack of substantial agenda, and presence of both Kyrgyz and Tajik president after the armed conflict on the borders, the fact that the 2021 summit happened demonstrates notable increase of political will of Central Asian leaders for developing multilateral cooperation (Umarov A. , 2020).

The fourth CA Summit took place in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan in July 2022, in the context of important events for CA sub-region, such as the January protests in Kazakhstan, Russian invasion to Ukraine, elections in Turkmenistan, and the recent instability in Uzbekistan in the beginning of July, which illustrates the consistent nature of the summits and growing determination of states for cooperation, despite still avoiding legally binding relationships (Nuriddanova, 2022).

One of the important documents signed the heads of countries is the concept for interaction between Central Asian states in multilateral frameworks. The concept states that the cooperation is open for strategic partners outside the sub-region, and representatives of neighboring countries could participate as invited guests (Nuriddanova, 2022). It would mean that the Summit and its Consultative Meetings are not exclusively for Central Asian states, which makes it similar to the CSTO or the SCO. This stance could be explained by the current geopolitical context in the Eurasian region as a careful expression of stance and as an attempt to balance between the relationships with Russia and more independent cooperation initiative within Central Asian sub-region. Overall, the Summit was fruitful in regards to opening a dialogue related to the old issues of the sub-region. The Central Asian presidents highlighted the need to diversify trade routes in the context of new geopolitical circumstances and discussed alternative routes. Another important topic that is crucial for CA is close cooperation and coordination regarding the security issues of the region, as well as urgent cooperation in environmental issues. The Summits are taking place in the context of generally improved relationships between the CA states with active participation of Uzbekistan and its numerous bilateral agreements since the new president has come to power.

Moreover, in his message to the parliament, Mirziyoyev has emphasized his intention to develop economic closer cooperation with Central Asian states, which reflects the notable increase in trade and construction of transportation systems between Uzbekistan and CA states. (Kutbidtinov, 2021) While these events reflect promising prospects for Central Asian cooperation, it is important to take into account Russia's new geopolitical position. Due to the economic isolation and sanctions, Russia has moved closer to its CSTO and the EEU partners, particularly Central Asian states. In October 2022, Astana held the first summit of the Central Asian countries and Russia, attended by Putin and five CA presidents, where leaders discussed the old topics from the CSTO and the EEU agenda but on a new platform (News Central Asia, 2022). So, the question arises, is developed regional cooperation in CA beneficial for Russia and its aspirations and to

what extent it contradicts to Russia's own regional cooperation interests? Considering that fact and apparent readiness of the CA leaders to open dialogue not only with each other but with external actors indicated growing importance of CA region in general. Ten days later Astana hosted the First EU-Central Asia Summit attended by four CA presidents, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan and The President of the European Council who discussed wide range of topics (News Central Asia, 2022). In any case, in a new dialogue on Central Asian cooperation there are few ambitious actors that are changing the course of CA cooperation development, that is Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which is different from the beginning of 2000s, and could challenge the dominance of Russia in Central Asia.

When discussing regional cooperation, it is difficult not to mention the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, (SCO), that was established in 2001 on the basis of the Shanghai Agreement on Confidence Building in the Military Field in the Border Area, in 1997 followed by the Agreement on Mutual Reductions of Armed Forces in Border Areas, uniting China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. (SIPRI, 2007) Originated from tensions between the USSR and China over common border the agreements followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union collapse, and China ended up bordering with four newly independent states. The SCO is a regional intergovernmental organization comprising eight member states in Asia, including China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, as founders, India, and Pakistan became members in 2017, and Afghanistan, Iran, Belarus and Mongolia as observer states (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2001). While the initial objectives included promotion of stability and tackling security issues of the Central Asian region such as extremism, terrorism and separatism, later the framework of SCO will be complemented with development of economic cooperation and cultural exchange. One of the largest projects is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative, a massive infrastructure and development project launched by China in 2013. (McBride, Berman, & Chatzky, 2023) The project aims to promote economic connectivity and cooperation across Asia, Europe, and Africa through the construction of new transportation networks, energy pipelines, and other infrastructure projects. Since the launch of the project the organization expanded in members and its importance is growing along with the development of Asia and its economic value. Generally speaking, the SCO activities were quite irrelevant for the security cooperation in CA, although in some ways contributed to the economic cooperation, although not within the CA, but rather 'through' it. In overall assessment,

the main point of the SCO was not development of Central Asian regional cooperation, but in essence served as a platform for peaceful co-existence of two regional powers, Russia and China, in Central Asia.

In the context, the recent initiatives between the Central Asian countries are particularly important for regional cooperation. Although they are still mild in nature, they mark the new era for multilateral partnership for the sub-region. With the new issues driving from new geopolitical, economic circumstances, environmental problems that don't have borders, with the revival of Taliban, there is need for closer integration and coordination of efforts for further development, when there are still number of unresolved old issues. Thirty years ago, the CA leaders didn't manage to come to an agreement on the future of the region, due to lack of experience in the foreign policy and governance, and the desire to assert their independence have affected their political will for cooperation. This new stage indicates another chance for regional leaders to cooperate in new circumstances, and most importantly with new people at the governance, since there are four new leaders, out of five, as heads of states that have fresh view on the future of the region.

Conclusion

When discussing the regionalism in the post-soviet space it is crucial to take into account the historical past of the that region, that is the circumstanced in which Soviet Union was formed. From this point of view the polarization of the Eurasian region can be better understood as there are number of states that are completely different from each other in terms of history, culture, geography, economic and security issues and priorities. This thesis explored those differences thoroughly and applied relevant theories of regionalization in order to understand if there is regional coherence in the CIS region. Regional coherence as a combination of five categories outline by Andrew Hurrell exist in to some extent in CIS region, which offers multiple possibilities for regional cooperation, however newly independent states lacked the essential component, which political will for cooperation. As new republics that just gained the independence the majority of states lacked the experience in governance and foreign policy that is necessary for building long-term multilateral partnerships. In addition, after the collapse the republics ended up with different economic growth and priorities, contrasting level of industrialization, unrelated security issues, so there wasn't significant room for collective agenda when it comes to the whole CIS region, and to some of the sub-regions. As a result, the first years of independence despite the membership in the CIS and existing platforms for cooperation, the republics exercised uncoordinated individual economic and security policies, which resulted in significant rupture of ties. However, despite those actions, there was some extent of regional cooperation that set its foundation in CIS.

The thesis analyzes the main driving forces of the regionalization on the CIS level and in smaller scopes. As the neorealist theory explains, the main facilitator of the Eurasian regional cooperation is the existence of the regional hegemony. Russia and its ambitions to retain the former influence of Moscow over the post-soviet space after the collapse has significantly fostered the regionalism and its present shape. Ambitions of Russian leadership prompted it to balance between keeping the post-soviet states within the regional cooperation framework, and developing dependence on Russia on economic and security level on bilateral terms. Such foreign policy of Russia caused two contrasting reactions from its CIS partners. One the one side, there were former soviet countries, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, and especially Baltic states, that wanted

to distance themselves from Russia, and more importantly had opportunities to do so, as they are geographically close to European Union which had stronger economy, larger market and, overall, better conditions for cooperation. At the beginning of the post-collapse period there were number of armed conflicts, particularly on the Western side of the post-Soviet Union, followed after separatist movements that were indirectly or directly supported by Russian government. The states that were involved in armed conflicts, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova, formed the organization GUAM, which was essentially prompted by external threat coming from Russia. Having common security issues, GUAM countries have united in order to oppose Russia, but also develop closer ties in area of economy, transportation. However, the organization didn't manage to become more than a declaration of political stance against Russian influence, due to different political priorities of the members. On the other side, the hegemony of Russia has created some sort of regionalism by uniting its partners and mostly heavily dependent states. As a result of it, two notable organizations were formed with little homogenous contingent. The members of security organization – the CSTO, Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, essentially have only one thing in common – close partnership with Russia. The Collective Security Treaty Organization originated from the Collective Security Treaty that initially meant for maintaining stability in Central Asia, amid the civil war, and combating extremist movements that infiltrated to Central Asian states, as well as preventing drug-trafficking. The changing nature of geopolitical situation and growing presence of the United States in Central Asia pushed Russia to mobilize its partners in one organization. However, in almost a decade the CSTO wasn't able to demonstrate its efficiency in maintaining the regional stability, as there were number of conflicts with participation of the member states where the CSTO was inactive, or any notable regard to the security affairs that were outside of Russia's interest. While last couple of years the CSTO relevance in security issues of the Eurasia has been declining, with particular expressions of disappointment by some member states, the war in Ukraine seems to reinforce those sentiments.

Interestingly, the war has had the opposite effect on the economic union binding those states – the Eurasian Economic Union. Initially started as a Custom Union between Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan, the EEU has accepted two more members that are particularly dependent on Russian economy or its energy exports– Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. Frequently, the EEU was becoming politicized as the members would breach the agreements in order to punish or prompt

certain policies. Moreover, despite this multilateral platform, the countries of the region were prioritizing bilateral economic relationships within the organizations and outside. However, the economic isolation of Russia due to sanctions has fostered the of economic cooperation of Russia and its allies in Central Asia and Armenia, resulting in growth of trade and investment and warmer political attitude.

The Russian isolation has also stimulated sub-regional cooperation in the Caspian Sea, where the cooperation was mostly centered around the energy exports of the littoral states while still being limited in its scopes. The thesis explores the reasons of limited progress in terms of regional cooperation as well the factors of its recent improvements. The Caspian multilateral cooperation has been relatively frozen due to issues related to the legal status of the Caspian Sea, which eventually was resolved in 2018. The Convention on Legal Status of the Caspian Sea potentially became the platform for regional cooperation since, in addition to legal status of the Caspian Sea and its utilization, construction of transportation infrastructure and environmental protection, which resolved one of the obstacles for cooperation between the littoral states. In addition, the thesis offers two perspectives on regional cooperation developing within the sub-region that was prompted particularly by anti-Russian sanctions. One the one side, one of the largest projects of the region - the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) has appeared to be more appealing recently as the EU and its Eastern Partners are in need of alternative routes for trading that circumvent Russia's territory, have expressed their intention to financing the development of the route. At the same time, Russia, being part of Caspian sub-region and Convention, recently has focused its attention at its Caspian partners within the framework of the Caspian Summit initiated by the president of Turkmenistan in 2019. In the turn of recent geopolitical events the importance of the Caspian Sea sub-region is growing along with the interest for regional cooperation.

The case if regional cooperation in the Central Asian sub-region is particularly interesting as it has gone through the highest number of stages in last thirty years. The thesis analyzed those stages that refer to the apparent need and prospects of regional cooperation and then almost complete lack of it, being the center of geopolitical rivalry, then being united in number of regional agreements led by external powers, and the prospect of revival of regional cooperation. The last sub-chapter explains the main reason of significantly low political interest of CA countries at the

beginning of their independence, which basically comes to lack of political homogeneity between the CA leaders. The main factors that led the CA states to be part of regional organizations, that primarily led by external powers, Russia and to lesser extent China, such as the CSTO, the EEU, the SCO, mostly come from dependence of some of the CA states on Russia, as well as contrasting priorities in foreign policy. However, the events of recent years within the CA demonstrate the change in foreign policy priorities of certain states, such as Turkmenistan that before emphasized the neutrality but recently has slightly changed its once non-negotiable stance on regional cooperation in CA. In similar way the new leadership of Uzbekistan took the path towards building stronger ties with CA states, while Kazakhstan is balancing between the partners in EU, Caspian, Central Asia as well as Russia. Those sentiments have been expressed in number of Central Asian Summits in last five years that are particularly important for regional cooperation as the consistency of meetings indicate the determination the new leaders of CA countries for improving relationships. However, despite the determination the states are taking into account new foreign policy of Russia in new geopolitical context and are balancing the regional cooperation with external powers.

The thesis has made an in-depth analysis of regional cooperation in the post-soviet space after the collapse until today. The analysis demonstrates that the main geopolitical dynamics in the CIS region has been progressing proportionally for thirty years. Therefore, current events and state of multilateral cooperation in Eurasia has been shaped by the hegemonic aspirations of Russia, but also by considerable inexperience of newly independent states and their contrasting economic and political priorities. The war in Ukraine has become the eventual result of Russia's foreign policy in the western bloc of the former USSR, but also has changed the economic cooperation in the whole Eurasia. The event has drawn even more distinctive line between in the so-called CIS region, which perhaps soon will be an outdated expression as the instrument of the CIS has lost its purpose long time ago. It indicates that new period of regionalism in the post-soviet is coming, where the Eurasia will be even more polarized, as Russia will be distancing from Europe and facilitating the cooperation in the Asian faction. Which could lead to further division between the West and East, depending on Asian powers stance in the current geopolitics. At the same time, there is real possibility of Russian dominance decline in Eurasia, which increases the tendencies towards China's hegemony in the region. However, the current dynamics in regional geopolitics

demonstrate that the Eurasia is about to have more regional actors that will play an important role in geopolitics and in multilateral cooperation in post-soviet space.

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