

REGIONAL POLITICS

**POST-SOVIET INTEGRATION
THROUGH THE PRISM OF
POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION
IN THE NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES**

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**Reintegration:
An Urgent Problem**

The integration processes in the republics that acquired their sovereignty after the collapse of the Soviet Union naturally became one of the main elements in the widespread transformation process going on in the geographical expanse now known as post-Soviet. This is turning regional integration into one of the most urgent problems in the study of the new processes and phenomena occurring in this region.

Indeed, if integration is to be successful, we will be dealing with an essentially new type of unification, that is, reintegration. If it fails, the united expanse will continue to disintegrate, whereby completely.

At the current stage, it is still impossible to draw foregone conclusions and make predictions about either the first or the second scenario. Both integration and disintegration processes are going on at the same time with different degrees of intensity in the so-called newly independent states (NIS).

Of particular interest is the Central Asian region, where the local, post-Soviet, and international factors influencing the political transformation of the NIS and, consequently, the nature of their partic-

ipation in the integration processes are concentrated. In turn, interpretation of the vitally important question for the NIS—what does sovereignty mean for them?—depends on this. However, this question is pertinent and just as significant for all the NIS in the post-Soviet expanse. So it is extremely important to study their political transformation and the effect this process is having on the fate of NIS integration. Ultimately, political transformation affects the nature of the integration processes and vice versa—the integration processes are influencing the nature of political transformation in the NIS.

From the very beginning of the era of independence, political science studies of the NIS invariably concentrated on the idea of post-Soviet reintegration. Many experts have studied the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which arose in place of the disintegrated U.S.S.R. Almost all the former Sovietological centers in the West have switched to CIS topics.

On the other hand, today, in the era of globalization, the phenomenon of regional integration unions is a graphic trend in international relations. There are many relevant examples: the EU, ASEAN, NAFTA, MERCOSUR, the UAE, and others. The NIS of the post-Soviet expanse face the same historical challenge, meaning “is integration to be or not to be?” This does not simply entail a review of interrelations, it is also a question of the place and destiny of these states in the globalizing world order.

Nation- and State-Building in the Post-Soviet Expanse

After the Soviet Union collapsed and the newly independent states acquired their sovereignty, they began experiencing a transformation process of unprecedented scope and content. It is still going on, encompassing political, economic, social, military, ideological, and other vital spheres of social and state life. In so doing, nation- and state-building is possibly the most important factor in this process.

Essentially all the NIS, particularly the Central Asian republics, have never been independent states. After 1991, the monolithic post-Soviet space found itself “divided” among fifteen state formations. Not only was the former Soviet polity divided; the former common Soviet national self-awareness of the people inhabiting this space also found itself divided.

G. Gleason, an American expert on Central Asia, points out that nations have a problem with self-identification. He writes that rural residents are inclined to identify themselves with a particular family, valley, or oasis, rather than with a larger national group.¹ The American political scientist gives an interesting description of the specific requirements needed to create a nation-state in Uzbekistan (which can be entirely applied to other NIS): In contrast to the typical model, Uzbekistan began to exist as a “state” before it became a nation. Uzbekistan’s statehood was created for political purposes by the new Bolshevik regime. This subsequently led to the development of Uzbek national awareness.² The same can be said for the other Central Asian countries as well.

The process of new state- and nation-building in the post-Soviet expanse is naturally accompanied by the corresponding ideological support. Essentially all the NIS are facing the problem of creating their own national ideology. Understanding the strong mobilizing force that ideology has, the leaders of the former Soviet republics endowed this process with a certain sacral meaning. The

¹ See: G. Gleason, “Uzbekistan: from Statehood to Nationhood?” in: *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, ed. by I. Bremer, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 335.

² See: *Ibid.*, p. 334.

fact that they were all brought up in the ideologically overcharged political atmosphere of Soviet times and taught to resort to ideology and propaganda as tools of political mobilization also comes into play here. In this case, that experience was needed for nation- and state-building. Some NIS went as far as simply reanimating the Soviet ideological-propagandistic school, admittedly, readapted to the new conditions.

On the whole, there is a wide range of ideological phrases called upon to justify particular aspects of the states' domestic or foreign policy. They consist of conservative-nationalistic, imperial, and liberal-Western trends, including so-called pan-movements (for example, pan-Turanism, pan-Islamism, pan-Slavism, and others).

We will take a look at a few of them to illustrate the nature, content, and orientation of political transformation. Revival of the ideological trend "Eurasianism" is interesting (primarily in Russian scientific and political circles), whereby Eurasian conceptions adapted to the CIS were revived during the search for a new Russian national identity.

"The basic theme of Eurasianism," writes B.S. Erasov, "is drawing up principles of civilizational unity for northern Eurasia and defining the prospects for a future world structure in this region."³ It is true that Eurasia is distinguished by a high degree of "symbiosis" and diffusion of ethnic and confessional groups, a frequent manifestation of which is the so-called "symbiotic identity" and intermarriages. It is also true that a characteristic trait of the ethnic structure of the Soviet state was the fact that in many national republics and regions of the Soviet Union, the titular ethnos did not constitute the majority of the population

All the same, the extent to which "symbiotic identity" could become a "trump card" for the Eurasians is still unclear. This identity disappeared in 1991, after revealing all of its affectation, even if we accept those who believe that the collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitable and natural. But if we believe the hypothesis that the collapse of the Union was affected and its identity intrinsic, then the latter has ceased to exist, since it was forcefully removed from the scene by Russia, the "keeper" of this identity.

At this point, we should pay attention to the fact that, unfortunately, contemporary Eurasians do not clarify the target of their ideology, that is, who, which countries and which nations should be encompassed by it. The thing is that national identity or, to be more precise, national self-determination, in the much narrower than the Eurasian meaning of this definition, became one of the main issues of political transformation and nation- and state-building in the post-Soviet countries. However, to all appearances, the neo-Eurasian movement is making claims to the entire CIS expanse. Meanwhile, the lack of clarity or, to be more precise, non-development of the geographic boundaries of Eurasianism shows that the Eurasians' (who are primarily acting in Russian scientific circles) ideological searches are incomplete or being carried out with great difficulty.

B. Erasov draws attention to the civilizational component of the Eurasian identity. When raising the question of compatibility between culture and technological development, he comes to the conclusion that Eurasia has currently encountered a new modernization challenge from the West. "In light of the growing influence of globalization, the former goals of Eurasianism are being transformed into the tasks of preserving the spiritual heritage and protecting the rights of the region's nationalities."⁴ It is obvious that neo-Eurasianism has acquired a slight anti-Western hues, but the latter will hardly serve as the basis for integration countries within the CIS space.

To all appearances, the NIS have perceived the "modernization challenge" of globalism/the West as a given fact and chosen not so much a defensive position regarding it, as a strategy for joining the

³ B.S. Erasov, "Sotsiokul'turnye i geopoliticheskie printsipy evraziystva," *Polis*, No. 5, 2001.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

global system of interrelations. They do not regard the task of preserving the spiritual heritage as something that opposes modernization.

The following conclusion is also interesting: "Using Eurasianism's potential as an ideology, spiritual trend, and real movement could remove the danger of the region becoming a 'no man's land' and of its economic potential turning into a 'prize economy' and object of technological use by the world financial community."⁵ This conclusion seems not only controversial from the viewpoint of the concept of danger, but also somewhat biased, as well as geopolitically unilateral. Let's explain this position. It is still unclear how this ideology will save the region from becoming a no man's land and being plundered by the world financial community. Will the post-Soviet sovereign states united within neo-Eurasianism stop cooperating with the IMF or EBRD and receiving loans or other financial assistance from them? Will these countries close themselves off from the world behind another Iron Curtain to prevent their economy from becoming a "prize?" And was not the economy of the Central Asian republics precisely that during the existence of the Soviet economy?

Prejudice, meaning the lack of objectivity and geopolitical unilateralism of the thesis regarding the use of Eurasianism as an ideology, spiritual trend, and real movement for opposing the world financial community, consists in the fact that Russia is somehow implicitly endowed with the function of defending these countries, since it is the bearer of the Eurasian doctrine, while itself building normal relations with the above-mentioned community.

Finally, the claim that the nucleus of the sociocultural system of Eurasianism is formed from Slavic and Turanic components, which intertwine and inspire each other, seems to be very important. I think one can agree with this postulate with some reservation. Indeed, the Slavic and Turanic components were the backbone, the so-called bonding element, of the Soviet community for many decades. But it is doubtful that the Slavic-Turanic union is the basic element in Eurasianism. This union was so easily destroyed by one of its halves when the three Slavic republics of the former Soviet Union took a self-willed approach to deciding the fate of the great power. It will not be easy to return the Turanic component to the former Slavic-Turanic union due to the changed geopolitical conditions (see below).

On the whole, the idea that the Eurasian community is a community of historical destiny confirmed by the vast continent's geographic characteristics is the central theme in all the arguments in favor of Eurasianism. It should be noted that this common historical destiny is largely due to colonization of the Caucasian regions, as well as of former Turkestan, by imperial rule. Today there is no longer any doubt about this. During the formation of national ideology in essentially all the NIS, the recent Soviet past (which apparently should be presented as Eurasian) is mercilessly criticized as a period of totalitarianism to which there is no return. The most interesting thing is that throughout the 15-year period of independence, the leaders of the CIS countries, as well as political scientists, have said very little about the historical community on which the Commonwealth should be based.

At the same time, all the arguments in favor of Eurasian unity of the NIS (if of course the Eurasian conception encompasses the entire CIS space) are refuted by the absence of unity in certain parts of the Commonwealth, in particular, Central Asia, which is even more homogeneous and pure in the sociocultural and civilizational respects than the Eurasian conglomerate. The serious problems facing the Central Asian community show that they still have a long way to go before forming a broader and more ethnically diverse Eurasian community.

In addition to Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus also adhered to the Eurasian doctrine. In some cases, the concept "Central Eurasia (CEA)" is offered instead of the definition "Central

⁵ Ibidem.

Asia.” For example, a so-called Eurasian vector has appeared and is gaining strength in Kazakhstan’s foreign policy. The credo of its representatives boils down to the following: “Kazakhstan geographically borders on Central Asia, but it is not a Central Asian country. We are a Eurasian state in which the influence of Europe and Western values as a whole is extremely strong. We are not another ‘-stan’ in the understanding of some politicians and journalists. Our historical references are not Saudi Arabia, but Norway, and such countries as South Korea and Singapore.”⁶ But a more penetrating analysis of this position shows that Kazakhstan’s Eurasianism is no more than a myth.⁷

Pan-Turanism is another ideological basis of nation- and state-building. It was not articulated in the political or scientific doctrine of any organization or political power in the way the Eurasian doctrine was articulated, for example. Nevertheless, elements of the pan-Turanic movement were manifested in the policy of several countries in the post-Soviet space. In fact, the announcement that a Central Asian Commonwealth would be created (December 1991) essentially envisaged a union of Turkic states. Uzbek President Islam Karimov even put forward the conception of “Turkestan—Our Common Home.”

Talking about political transformation in the context of nation- and state-building, it should be noted that recently the fate of democracy became an important issue in the scientific and political discourses about nation- and state-building, form of rule, and national ideology in essentially every NIS. An analysis of this issue is bringing us to the thought that there are no clear prospects for democracy in the post-Soviet expanse. In other words, democracy is far from guaranteed, not only due to the mistakes or conservatism of the political regimes and leaders of the countries in question, but also due to more profound historical and geopolitical processes. And all of this becomes clearer when we analyze the consequences of the collapse of the totalitarian super state.

“In a continental empire, it is impossible for only the metropolis to be democratized without affecting the colonies. Therefore, there is a direct link between democratization and the collapse of the empire; democratization poses a much greater danger to the unity of an imperial state and so, consequently, resistance to it is greater.”⁸

Talking about the nature of the political regimes that have arisen in the CIS states, D. Furman writes: “In all these countries (with the exception of Moldova), the same type of regimes of ‘imitation democracy’ are being established as in Russia, at the head of which a representative of the Soviet *nomenklatura* elite is placed. These are frequently the same people who headed the republics at the end of the Soviet era. These rulers are trying to hold onto their power and then pass it on to hand-picked heirs, using means that are not lawful, but simulated as being lawful and democratic—election campaigns in which the opposition does not have access to the electorate, falsification of election and referendum results, and so on. In so doing, they cannot count on support from Western countries, ...but they can always rely on full understanding and support from Russia and their fraternal CIS countries.”⁹

Russia

In fact, more than anything else, the state structure of the CIS’s support system proper—the Russian Federation—is experiencing the dramatic consequences of the collapse of the U.S.S.R. “Post-

⁶ D. Nazarbaeva, “Spetsifika i perspektivy politicheskogo razvitiia Kazakhstana,” *Bulletin*, No. 3, 2003. International Institute of Contemporary Politics, on the IICP site at [http://iimp.kz/index.php?action=show&art_id=150&from=5], 17 February, 2006.

⁷ See: F. Tolipov, “Central Asia is a Region of Five *Stans*. Dispute with Kazakh Eurasianists,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (38), 2006.

⁸ D. Furman, “Dolgiy protsess raspada rossiiskoi imperii,” in: *Tsentral’naia Azia i Iuzhnyi Kavkaz. Nasushchnye problemy*, ed. by B. Rumer, East Point, Almaty, 2006, p. 56.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Soviet Russia is developing as an authoritarian political system, as a market economy in which the state has a prominent role to play, and as a Great Power with Slavophilic ideas in the ideological sphere.”¹⁰ Western experts also describe Russian policy as authoritarian, aimed at strengthening the role of the state and reinforcing the personal power of the president. They evaluate the form of rule as controlled democracy.¹¹

Russia is still a unique power in the post-Soviet space: the Russian state was the backbone of the Soviet Union and is still the nucleus of the CIS, while the Russian language has always been either the state means of communication (during the Soviet Union), or the interstate language of the Commonwealth. And today, of course, Russia’s spiritual, economic, and military-political revival can raise its prestige again, particularly in the so-called Near Abroad, and open up new opportunities for the Russian language as a means of communication between different nationalities.

Moscow’s support of the Russian-speaking population is an important ideological and political tool in nation- and state-building. Giving the Russian language the status of the official means of communication at the state level and among nationalities in several countries (for example, in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) meets Russia’s interests. There is a Government Commission for Compatriot Affairs Abroad in the higher echelon of power, it organizes assistance to schools where lessons are taught in Russian, increases enrolment for native citizens in Russia’s higher education institutions, and has developed an extensive program for supporting the latter. On the whole, activity in this sphere is progressing in two areas:

- rendering assistance to Russian-speaking citizens of the CIS states and protecting their rights;
- helping to resolve the problems of people who have moved to Russia and creating conditions for the compact settlement of Russians.

In this respect, Moscow is very worried about the personnel policy being carried out by the CIS countries and the trend toward ousting Russian-language specialists from the power structures, medical, educational, art, and cultural institutions. At present, Russia is objectively interested in even the indigenous residents of former Soviet republics migrating to its territory. At the same time, the Russian Federation is even more interested in consolidating the Russian population in places where it densely resides in the aforementioned countries.

At the same time, people in Russia believe that the numerous persistent challenges and threats throughout history from the west, south, and east brought the people from North Eurasia to Moscow, which largely determines their political, economic, defense, and behavioral orientation. This state of affairs, albeit with variations, will most likely be retained in the future. This is largely what is feeding the Kremlin’s desire to keep the post-Soviet community of nations in one piece, a desire which, according to many analysts (including Russian), is sometimes acquiring the form of a neo-imperial syndrome.

Yegor Gaidar, a prominent political figure in the Russian Federation, once noted: “Identifying state grandeur with imperial desires makes it difficult for the national conscience of the former metropolis to adapt to losing the status of a great power. Exploitation of the post-imperial syndrome is an effective way to gain political support. The conception of empire as a powerful state dominating over other nations is a product that is as easy to sell as Coca-Cola or Pampers. No intellectual effort is required to advertise it.”¹²

¹⁰ J. Eyvazov, «Geopolitical Lessons of the Post-Soviet Caucasus: Forward to Globalization or Back to Classical Eurasian Geopolitics?» *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 1 (1), 2006, p. 36.

¹¹ See: P. Dunai and Z. Liakhovskiy, “Organizatsii i vzaimootnosheniia v evro-atlanticheskoi sisteme,” *SIPRI Annual-2004*.

¹² Ye. Gaidar, “Imperskaia missiia v Azii—vazhneishiy element natsional’noi samoidentifikatsii Rossii,” available at [www.centrasia.org], 15 June, 2006. (Source—*Vedomosti*.)

In this respect, Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent interview with the Al Jazeera Arabic television network is interesting. We will present one question the Russian leader was asked.

Question: Mr. President, you called restoration of Russia's territorial integrity one of the main results of your seven-year stint in power. Did you mean Chechnia?

V. Putin: I did not only mean Chechnia. I meant that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, centrifugal and centripetal trends naturally caused significant damage to state-building and the development of the new Russian state, and the foundations of the Russian state were undermined. These trends were out of sync, in many regions, both in national and in those where a primarily ethnic Slavic, Russian population resides, we saw different trends not only toward federalization, but toward overstepping rights within the framework of the federative state. It was precisely these trends that were stopped.¹³

Ukraine

Let us recall that this country refused to participate in the new Union. According to many local political scientists, Ukraine did not regard the CIS as an integration structure either—Kiev treated it as a form of “civilized divorce” of the former Soviet republics. The Ukrainian position looks justified against the background of the current crisis in the Commonwealth.

Head of the Main Service of Foreign Policy of the Secretariat of the Ukrainian President Konstantin Timoshenko, in turn, reminded everyone that the country has repeatedly stated its dissatisfaction with the way the CIS functions and the “activity of this organization in general.” After adding that Ukraine is reviewing its decision to withdraw from the Commonwealth, Timoshenko is nevertheless giving it one last chance: the numerous agreements signed within the CIS must begin to function. But if this does not happen, the republic will raise the “specific question about halting Ukraine's participation in this international organization.”¹⁴

The country inherited a powerful military-industrial complex and a relatively developed economy from the Soviet Union. This republic retained its membership in the U.N. even during the existence of the Union state. So, correspondingly, the national and political self-determination of the Ukrainians was expressed at rather a high level and in a developed form. Therefore, it is no accident that Ukraine is taking the lead, so to speak, among the post-Soviet NIS with respect to withdrawal from the CIS.

According to Ukrainian political scientists, today the state is in the midst of an inter-civilizational conflict, after finding itself in the role of a buffer between democratic Europe and undemocratic Russia. At present, the course Ukraine has chosen is becoming clear—membership in NATO. The republic is participating in the military campaign in Iraq as part of the international coalition forces, which is promoting, among everything else, gradual harmonization of its military standards with the European.

Many representatives of this state are explaining and justifying Ukraine's desire to join NATO and the EU as the Ukrainians' self-identification with European values and the democratic political system. In this way, Ukraine's political transformation is expressed not only in its distancing itself from any integration processes in the post-Soviet expanse, but also in its striving toward the European Union after 1991.

¹³ See: Interview with the Al Jazeera Arabic satellite television network, 12 February, 2007. (Source—InoSMI.)

¹⁴ A. Palkin, “SNG oboydetsia bez Ukrainy i Gruzii,” available at [www.centrasia.org]. (Source—Utro.Ru, 10 May, 2006.)

Belarus

Political transformation has been ambiguous in the republic since the time it declared its sovereignty. At the beginning of the 1990s, this state chose to be a parliamentary republic and conducted a relatively democratic policy. Later, when the post of president was introduced, his authoritative rule slowed down the country's democratic development.

The euphoria experienced by the country's independence from the former empire dissipated gradually and Belarus found itself in a difficult international and geopolitical position between Russia and Europe. Belarus always placed the priority in its foreign political and foreign economic activity on strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the CIS countries. It is in favor of turning the Commonwealth into a regional organization with a high level of economic and political integration.

In December 1999, the presidents of Belarus and Russia signed a treaty in Moscow on creating a Union state, which came into force in January 2000. The document envisages further joint steps by both countries to harmonize and unite their legal, economic, financial, customs, and other systems, as well as form interstate power structures, which as a result could lead to the creation of a Union state.

The accelerated Belorussian-Russian *rapprochement* undermined the amorphous CIS and aroused suspicions in Belarus' neighbors. Within the country, it was accompanied by growing criticism and opposition from wide social circles and national-democratic forces.

Meanwhile, the authoritative rule of President Alexander Lukashenko was seriously criticized by several Western states, which placed the country in a certain amount of international isolation. On the whole, we can agree with the conclusion of Belorussian political scientist V. Snapkovskiy, who said that "the development experience of the Republic of Belarus in the second half of the 1990s shows the continuity of Belarus' domestic and foreign policy and the domestic and foreign factors of its functioning. This gives reason to presume that democratization of domestic political life will help the country to withdraw from its foreign political isolation."¹⁵

However, geopolitics, on the one hand, and economic interests, on the other, are still modifying the policy of the two allies. The "oil and gas conflict" that occurred between them in 2006 is clear evidence of this. Alexander Lukashenko's subsequent statement about his willingness to cooperate "even with a demon, even with the devil" in the West, for the sake of ensuring the energy security of his country, is symptomatic not only in the context of Russian-Belorussian interrelations. Be that as it may, the mentioned conflict between Moscow and Minsk revealed the obvious truth: if the union is economically unprofitable to even one of the sides, it will not happen, no matter how much you lament over lost "Slavic brotherhood" and other values that are too abstract for the post-Soviet generation of politicians.¹⁶

In this way, as we can convince ourselves, the specifics of the republic's political transformation and its attitude toward the integration projects in the post-Soviet space show that self-identification and foreign policy orientation are not as unequivocal as they may seem even for a pro-integration-minded state like Belarus, which is a close ally of Russia.

¹⁵ V. Snapkovskiy, "Vneshniaia politika Respubliki Belarus': pervye itogi pervogo desiatiletia," *Belorusskiy Zhurnal mezhdunarodnogo prava i mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii*, No. 4, 2000, available at [http://lib.ixbt.by/belarus/ixbt_readme.php?subaction=showfull&id=1096041141&archive=&start_from=&ucat=4&].

¹⁶ See: V. Zharkov, "Posle SNG. Postsovetskoe prostranstvo: konets istorii," *Prognosis.Ru*, 15 January, 2007.

Moldova

In an interview with *NG*, Andrey Stratan, the country's foreign minister, called the problem of unrecognized Transnistria the only obstacle in relations with Russia. This question is also being discussed in the "5+2" format (Moldova, Transnistria, Russia, Ukraine, the OSCE, as well as observers from the EU and U.S.).¹⁷

The following thesis from the draft of its foreign policy conception eloquently talks about the country's international orientations: "Moldova is recognized by the states of the world, it is a member of the U.N. and of its specialized structures, it belongs to the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, and it actively participates in regional and subregional cooperation associations, ICE, CIS, SECI, CEMN, the Danube Commission, and so on. Access to the Danube River will have a favorable effect on the development of river and sea transportation in the Republic of Moldova and will ensure its communication both with the countries of Central Europe and the Black Sea Basin, as well as with the Middle East states."

Based on the idea that in today's world, countries are consolidating around the large power poles, the mentioned conception says that "within the borders of the Old World, this pole is represented by the European Union, toward which the countries located in this zone are gravitating, including the Republic of Moldova." In addition, "membership or participation in interregional European organizations and initiatives, as well as joining the EU, also meets the security goals of the Republic of Moldova."

Moldova also believes that membership in the EU will help it to adapt to the globalization challenges: "Moldova can only deal with this problem by being part of a strong political and economic community, such as the EU; keeping in mind geographic and historical criteria, the Republic of Moldova is a country with a European culture and traditions."

In so doing, Moldova recognizes the immense importance of good relations with the Russian Federation: "Russia occupies first place in trade and economic relations with Moldova. Taking into account these close relations, as well as the fact that most of Moldovan society is made up of people who speak Russian, and keeping in mind Russia's political and economic significance in the international system, it remains one of Moldova's strategic partners."

Nevertheless, the country supports integration processes in the CIS: "The Republic of Moldova will carry out an active policy of efficient economic cooperation within the CIS, which is an important sales market for goods from Moldova and will remain a favorable field of further development of mutually advantageous relations with the CIS member countries in different spheres. Our country is in favor of cooperation based on the principles of equal rights and presumes the formation of a united economic space based on the principles of a market economy as an end goal."¹⁸

The Caucasian States

Azerbaijan has been in the focus of international attention due to its oil resources since the moment it acquired its independence. It is precisely this natural resource and the prospects for transporting it to the world markets that largely enabled the geopolitical processes in the Caucasian region to be restored. These also became important factors of the state's domestic progress. The country is placing

¹⁷ See: A. Zhelenin, "Moldavia integriruetia s Evropoi, a ne c Rumyniei," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 16 April, 2007.

¹⁸ *Kontseptsiia vneshnei politiki Respubliki Moldova*, available at [http://www.profitclub.md/consulting/readit/interactiv/2002_04/30_02.html].

great hopes on the imminent transportation of Azerbaijani oil via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and the benefits this promises.

On the whole, this Caucasian republic is undergoing the same political transformation as the other post-Soviet states. Azeri analyst A. Iunusov notes three orientations in the country's political elite—pro-Western, pro-Russian, and pro-Iranian, which are competing with each other with varying success.¹⁹ Meanwhile, President Ilham Aliiev called the republic's integration into NATO one of the priority areas in Azerbaijan's foreign policy activity. To all appearances, the country's armed forces will be able to bring their standards into harmony with the Alliance's by 2015. In so doing, Turkey, a member of NATO bonded by close cultural ties with Azerbaijan, is willing to act as mediator in the reform of the Azerbaijani army.²⁰

Armenia, according to Armenian analyst Sergey Sarkisian, has found itself at the intersection of a whole series of large integration plans during the past few years, in particular:

- the Greater Middle East project;
- Russia's integration programs in the post-Soviet expanse and, in particular, the Single Economic Space (SES), CSTO, and EurAsEC;
- enlargement of the EU and application of the “Enlarged Europe—New Neighborhood” conception to the region.²¹

Armenian politician Tigran Torosian believes that for the three South Caucasian states—Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia—“there is no alternative to Euro-integration either with respect to development and a qualitative change in the standard of living or to the search for ways to resolve the conflicts in the region. The prospect of membership in the European Union will open up new and real possibilities for resolving the conflicts that are acceptable to both sides.”²²

Georgia possibly experienced the most dramatic political transformation of all the NIS in the post-Soviet space, which was expressed in its attitude toward the integration processes. According to some theoreticians, the country can even be categorized as a so-called failed state.²³ Abkhazia and South Ossetia are formations on the republic's territory where their own institutions of statehood are developing, whereby many residents of these areas have already received Russian citizenship.

In November 2003, in Georgia, the so-called Color Revolution took place, the first in the post-Soviet space—the Rose Revolution, which brought the opposition headed by Mikhail Saakashvili to power. In the West, this revolution was evaluated as a precursor of dramatic democratic change. As we know, later similar Color Revolutions occurred in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. But in the CIS countries they were perceived as attempts inspired and supported by the West to overturn the existing governments. Nevertheless, according to some observers (including Georgian analysts), the republic seems to be recoiling from the democratic conquests and promises of the new government.²⁴

¹⁹ See: A. Iunusov, “Azerbaidzhan: integratsiia v evropeiskie struktury v svete vnutripoliticheskoi situatsii,” in: *Iuzhnyy Kavkaz kak chast' Bol'shoi Evropy*, Spektr Strategic Analysis Center, Erevan, 2005, pp. 90-100.

²⁰ See: “Azerbaidzhan beriot kurs na integratsiiu v NATO,” 19 March, 2007. (Source—[www.eurasianet.org].)

²¹ See: S. Sarkisian, “Vliianie nekotorykh aspektov novoi geopoliticheskoi situatsii na Armeniiu,” in: *Iuzhnyy Kavkaz kak chast' Bol'shoi Evropy*, p. 101.

²² T. Torosian, “Evropeiskaia integratsiia—iskliuchitelnyy shans dlia resheniia problem Iuzhnogo Kavkaza,” in: *Iuzhnyy Kavkaz kak chast' Bol'shoi Evropy*, p. 10.

²³ For more detail, see: M. Malek, “Primenenie teorii ‘provalivshikhsia gosudarstv’ na Iuzhnom Kavkaze v kontekste evropeiskogo proekta.” in: *Iuzhnyy Kavkaz kak chast' Bol'shoi Evropy*, pp. 50-59.

²⁴ See: Sh. Pichkhadze, “Gruziia posle noiabria 2003 goda: dostizheniia i tendentsii,” in: *Iuzhnyy Kavkaz kak chast' Bol'shoi Evropy*, pp. 79-89.

As for its foreign policy orientation, Georgia is essentially one of the first CIS countries to openly move toward integration with the European Union. Well-known Georgian analyst and diplomat Alexander Rondeli believes that it is Tbilisi's strategic goal to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic and European structures. "Becoming a Russian satellite would mean that Georgia would lose its historical opportunity to build a contemporary democratic nation and state, that is, it would lose its national perspective."²⁵

A. Rondeli claims that it is just as strategically important for Russia to remain in Georgia, so the Russian Federation is putting constant pressure on the latter. He presents a whole series of advantages that control over Georgia gives Russia—beginning with creating a barrier in the south to fend off Turkey's influence and obtaining access to Azerbaijan's rich energy resources, and ending with its military presence in the Black Sea and the possibility of having an influence on the Middle East countries.²⁶

At an international conference held in Vilnius devoted to cooperation of the Baltic and Black Sea states, Mikhail Saakashvili again touched upon the topic of withdrawing from the CIS. "The example of Lithuania shows that, after leaving the CIS, Tbilisi will not fall by the wayside," he notes.²⁷ In this way, Georgia's political transformation and foreign policy orientation have become the strongest upheavals for the Commonwealth.

On the other hand, the absolute majority of Russians regret that the Soviet Union fell apart, which is regularly confirmed during public opinion polls. And they lament over this not because they are nostalgic for communism, but because they no longer have any confidence in the future or in the safety of their own lives. They do not share the almost unanimous opinion of the West that the collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitable due to the U.S.S.R's fatal congenital defects. Instead they believe, and not without justification, that the country's collapse was caused by three subjective factors:

- 1) Gorbachev's political and economic reforms;
- 2) the power struggle, during which Yeltsin destroyed the Soviet state in order to get rid of its president, Gorbachev; and
- 3) the seizure of property by the Soviet official elite, or *nomenklatura*, which was more interested in privatizing the nation's huge fortune in 1991 than in protecting it.²⁸

In conclusion, let us turn to Gorbachev. He wrote the following about the Soviet people: "If the national question had not essentially been resolved in the country, there would have been no Soviet Union ... in the social, cultural, economic, and defense respects. Our state would not have survived if there had been no essential leveling out of the republics, if a community had not arisen based on fraternity, cooperation, respect, and mutual assistance."²⁹

²⁵ A. Rondeli, "Russia and Georgia: Relations are Still Tense," *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 1 (1), 2006, p. 69.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ A. Palkin, op. cit.

²⁸ See: S. Cohen, "The Breakup of the Soviet Union Ended Russia's March to Democracy," *The Guardian*, 13 December, 2006.

²⁹ M. Gorbachev, *Perestroika i novoe myshlenie dlia nashey strany i dlia vsego mira*, Political Literature Publishers, Moscow, 1988, p. 118.