

# GUAM: RELATIONS AMONG REGIONAL AND WORLD POWERS

## RUSSIA AND GUAM

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It would seem expedient to discuss the topic "Russia and GUAM" in the context of the integration unions existing in the post-Soviet space, that is, with respect to the CIS and, to some extent, its alternative organizations. It is very evident that the activity of the CIS, despite the obvious need, in our opinion, for its further existence, at least as a negotiation platform, does not fully meet the functions of an integration structure. There are many different reasons for this, such as the Commonwealth's diversity and the ineptness of its bureaucratic machinery, as well as the outmoded ambitions and phobias that are prevalent in some cases. So it was inevitable that integration organizations emerged that posed as alternatives to the CIS and singled out a few of the stronger nuclei within the Commonwealth. It is another matter that this demand could be and was used by external forces interested in forming all kinds of counterbalances to Russia or simply in weakening Russia as the CIS's only driving force due to its potential. At the same time, Russia's rather bumpy relations with some of the Commonwealth states prompted the latter to step up their participation in these alternative structures. Subsequently, normalization of the relations between the Russian Federation and any given CIS country led, as a rule, to the withdrawal of that state from the alternative integration union. It is worth noting that Uzbekistan, which joined GUAM in 1999, left it in May 2005 after its relations with Russia cardinally improved. Moldova, which has essentially curtailed its participation in GUAM due the normalization of relations between Chisinau and Moscow, is currently heading in the same direction.

Correspondingly, the Russian factor has a way of exerting very tangible pressure both on the emergence and on the further existence of alternative unions. So the vision we offer of the GUAM's past and present will be based on our understanding of Moscow's viewpoint on this issue, as well as on Russia's national interests.

GUAM's formation on 10 October, 1997 was essentially tantamount to an attempt to turn the CIS into a bipolar structure. It was presumed that the GUAM countries, as equal states with similar political and economic interests, would form one pole. While the other pole would consist of the countries in Russia's sphere of influence and members of the Collective Security Treaty, as well as the Customs Union, which was later transformed into the Eurasian Economic Community. The development of relations within GUAM/GUUAM was based on the conception of new regionalism, according to which special partnership relations are built keeping in mind the innate nature of relations between states, common economic interests (primarily energy and transport), and similar interests in regional security and stability. Common economic interests imply joint participation in the transportation of Caspian energy resources and the laying of new transit routes through the Caucasus and the Black Sea. The same political goals predetermined the creation of joint sub-regional security structures. In 1999, the presidents of the GUUAM countries signed a declaration which was to define the main vectors of cooperation within the Organization. The GUUAM member states viewed the creation and existence of this union as a positive alternative to the integration processes in the post-Soviet expanse.

Ukraine and Georgia, which over time became the main poles in this union and largely pursued different goals, were the initiators of this union and the vanguards of relation-building within GUUAM. Ukraine, which claimed the status of GUUAM's leading country, strove to advance those issues (primarily economic) which did not create contradictions among the union members and which could unite these states, leaving political disagreements in the shadows. In contrast to Ukraine, Georgia more actively promoted military-political cooperation within GUUAM. Ukraine and Georgia, in the form of their corresponding bodies, experts of analytical services, and some legislators, regularly put forward different initiatives aimed at expanding the bloc and at stepping up the activity of its members.

As the Georgian authorities openly admitted, GUUAM was created because of the threat they saw Russia posing to the country's security, as well as due to the desire of the founding states to bypass Russia with their transportation routes in order to gain complete economic independence from this country. These reasons, in their words, define the existence of GUUAM, but their significance could change. This broad understanding of the purpose of GUUAM's creation implied that Georgia was striving for maximum enlargement of this organization by inviting countries to join it that are located along the East-West transportation corridor and see a threat coming from Russia. Georgia acted as the main initiator of enlarging GUUAM's membership, orienting itself, in so doing, largely toward states that do not belong to the CIS (Bulgaria, Rumania, and Poland). Reports from Georgia about the possible membership of these countries in GUAM/GUUAM periodically appeared in 1998-2001. GUUAM is not an anti-Russian organization, but it is objectively opposed to Moscow's striving to dominate in the region. Russia's goal in the Caucasus is to retain its military influence, to which end conflicts are fomented. Therefore, Russia's departure from the region would automatically lead to the conflicts being settled, democratization, Europeanization of this area, and its economic growth. According to official Tbilisi, the viability of the CIS is justifiably questioned, and it is presumed that the countries which have joined it are still its members only because they have no wish to irritate Russia. Georgia openly admits that it does not see anything positive for itself in the existence of the CIS. In contrast to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, Georgia regarded GUUAM as an alternative to the CIS. Correspondingly, the Russian Federation, according to Tbilisi, did every-

thing it could to oppose GUUAM and tried to disrupt the Yalta meeting by organizing a summit of unrecognized states in Tiraspol.

Another member of GUUAM, Moldova, actively came forward from the very beginning against the development of the union's military component, intending to limit itself exclusively to economic projects, particularly the shipment of Caspian oil via the Black Sea. Moldova, which is generally moving closer to Ukraine in its vision of GUUAM's prospects, nevertheless regarded this union as a consultative forum and not as an organization with rigid structures. In the words of former Moldovan president P. Luchinsky (2001), "Moldova could have remained in this organization if it were a consultative body without any institutional structures and military aspects in its activity. We must primarily think about establishing economic relations and not about 'banding together' against Russia." Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan occupied similar positions. For example, Uzbekistan regarded GUUAM only as a means for resolving the republic's transport problems. Moreover, after declaring its withdrawal from GUUAM on 14 June, 2002, Uzbekistan retained its membership in this organization only under pressure from the U.S., and several months later, in September 2002, it took part in a GUUAM-U.S. meeting at the level of its U.N. ambassador. So immediately after this union began taking shape, differences became obvious in the goals of its member states.

The Azerbaijani side considered territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's affairs to be the fundamental principles of GUUAM's activity. The main difference between GUUAM and the CIS, in its opinion, is the absence of the principle of coercion (although it is strange to mention coercion within the framework of the CIS). Official Baku thought it was unrealistic to talk about Russia's membership in this structure, although Azerbaijani high-ranking officials recognized the positive change in Russia's policy toward GUUAM. To be successful, GUUAM needed to execute the decisions adopted within this organization, not accept new members, and not try to develop a universal system of relations. In so doing, this formation was to be further structuralized and permanent interstate institutions created, including a structure for resolving territorial problems (that is, the problems of separatism). At the same time, as Baku believed, GUUAM, although not a military bloc aimed against Russia, was not a purely economic organization either. That is, politics in GUUAM should have gone hand in hand with the economy. Azerbaijan regarded the Baku-Ceyhan, and not the Odessa-Brody project to be a priority in GUUAM (particularly for Ukraine). This pipeline could enhance the relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as link GUUAM to the Mediterranean. While understanding the lack of prospects of the Baku-Ceyhan project for Moldova and Uzbekistan, on the one hand, and the role of Ukraine in GUUAM, on the other, the Azerbaijan leadership thought it possible to develop relations in the GUA format (Georgia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan). The need was recognized for ensuring the safe and efficient operation of the transportation corridors within GUUAM. Creating a peacekeeping battalion was considered expedient for this, but it, according to Baku, should be an efficient and flexible structure that does not function on a permanent basis. On the whole, Azerbaijan had a more realistic perception of GUUAM than Georgia, trying to create a flexible system on its basis and considering the acceptance of new members superfluous and even detrimental to the union's future.

The interest of the leading European states cooled off and the Far Eastern countries and ASEAN as a whole showed absolutely no interest in the GUUAM project because the costs were inevitably too high and the domestic political and economic situation in the Organization's member states was unstable. It became obvious that GUUAM had no internal resources and depended on foreign financial support. The priority problems were designated as the raw material economy of the GUUAM member states, the different levels of market reform, dumping, and problems with currency convertibility and reciprocal payments. In the end, GUUAM, as an economic project, proved difficult to accomplish.

Trade and economic and transport activity could only be realistically animated in the region within the GUUAM project by means of large investments from the West, particularly from the U.S. GUUAM was perceived as the most European-oriented organization in the post-Soviet expanse and as a sub-group of countries not within the CIS, but within the BSECO. There were plans to simultaneously integrate GUUAM and the BSECO into the European Union structures. In its policy toward GUUAM, Washington initially paid special attention to the development of the military-political component and to the creation of a complementary military infrastructure. In so doing, the economic and energy problems were clearly pushed into the background. Turkey also placed the emphasis on GUUAM's military-political component, which believed that the future in the economic sphere most likely belonged to the BSECO. This position was understandable, if the transportation corridor project was implemented within GUUAM involving Ukraine and Moldova, Turkey would be thus excluded. Several years later it became obvious that this unilateral policy was not yielding positive results, and the tasks being carried out within its framework could be resolved faster and more easily within the framework of bilateral relations. The West began to notice GUUAM's weakness, which was manifested in the absence of a clear position and unified policy with limited results and vague goals. Only realistic steps, small specific initiatives, and clear intentions of the GUUAM member countries could justify assistance in defense questions, in creating a peacekeeping battalion, and in forming a free trade area. With respect to continuing support from the U.S. defense department, the GUUAM states found themselves faced with the need to form a unified position in security and common interests in defense. Due to the economic weakness of the GUUAM member states, they, according to European and American experts, should have concentrated their attention on a limited range of tasks, primarily transport and telecommunications, which Europe should have also been interested in solving.

As a result of the events of the end of 2000-beginning of 2001 in several GUUAM states, the prospects for this organization became even less obvious and the role these countries played in it changed somewhat. The domestic political events in Ukraine and Moldova were the main factors of the change in the situation. In Ukraine, a profound and prolonged political crisis unfolded, which began with the "cassette scandal" and escalated into a standoff between the president and the opposition. It also became more aggravated because of interference by the U.S. and Europe. The political situation in and around Moldova underwent changes after the communists won the parliamentary elections. Moreover, the domestic political and economic situation in Georgia became more complicated, which was related to the split in the ruling elite, the weakening of Eduard Shevardnadze's regime, the aggravation of relations with Russia, and the problem of the Pankisi Gorge.

The formation of the Eurasian Economic Community also had an effect on GUUAM's development. The countries of the union were not ready for real confrontation with this organization and did not even try to place their union in opposition to it.

The main consequence of these events was that the GUUAM member states paid less attention to interrelations within the framework of this structure. The differences between the GUUAM member states and their diversified interests became all the more obvious. We can hardly talk now of a unified coordinated position of this union's states. The only question that did not appear to arouse disagreements in the Organization was the idea of establishing free trade conditions among the GUUAM member states. All the same, the ongoing economic crisis in the GUUAM states and their significant economic dependence on the outside world showed that a productively functioning and complementary system of their economies could not be created within the framework of this Organization in the foreseeable future by joining the resources of the member countries.

The contradictions among the GUUAM member states regarding the military-political component of this union also became more noticeable. The creation of a peacekeeping battalion was postponed indefinitely. In February 2001, a representative of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spoke out

against the development of GUUAM's military component and the formation of a joint army contingent. The statements of Ukrainian officials began placing the accent on creating a single all-encompassing regional security system based on the existent institutions. The military-political component within GUUAM was reduced to naught, which was officially confirmed at the Organization's summit held on 6-7 June, 2001 in Yalta. The essentially successful development of the regional security system within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty had some influence on the fact that the military-political component of GUUAM was removed, at least temporarily, from the agenda.

There was an attempt to reanimate the military-political component of GUUAM in 2002, when a session of the Organization's working groups was held in Baku attended by U.S. representatives to discuss the joint resolution of security problems, but the Uzbekistan and Moldovan delegations did not take part in this event. Nor did the other three countries (GUA) manage to reach an agreement on several issues. In particular, the discontent of the Azerbaijani side generated an agreement between the defense ministries of Armenia and Ukraine "On Military Cooperation."

The Eurasian transportation corridor project was the only thing that still kept the GUUAM states together and did not arouse any disagreements. The Ukrainian president emphasized that it was not expedient to talk about the possibility of GUUAM turning into a military bloc, and this union would remain a purely economic structure. In actual fact, Ukraine's and Moldova's participation in GUUAM was justified only by their desire to find alternative sources of energy supply. Now that the impossibility of an alternative energy supply was obvious, after the Odessa-Brody pipeline had been built and stood hopelessly idle, it would be justified for these states to curtail their cooperation within the Organization (something similar happened to some extent in the relations between Moldova and the union, which was stated by the Moldovan president during the GUUAM Yalta summit in 2002). However, we can see that Ukraine continued to show a certain amount of interest in GUUAM. Based on this example, the conclusion can be drawn that economic interests are not primary elements of the integration projects in the CIS territory. As a result, GUUAM's transport-energy component continued to be in effect for only two of its participants—Azerbaijan and Georgia. The attempts of the latter to retain this transport-energy component by offering to accept Bulgaria, Rumania, and even Poland as members of GUUAM, were doomed in advance, since the significance of this component was limited to the oil supplies of the Caspian, which proved to be overestimated from the very beginning.

Ukraine, understanding GUUAM's failure, was trying, as stands to reason, to form some new union in its place in which it would play a leading role. This union would be based on a free trade area. New (the previous ones were signed in 1995) agreements about the creation of the latter were signed between Ukraine and Uzbekistan, as well as discussed by Ukraine and Moldova during the Ukrainian president's visit to Chisinau in November 2007. Discussion of this question with Moldova soon followed after tough talk by President Voronin about the future of the CIS and the Four.

Ukraine no longer perceived GUUAM as an alternative to the CIS, but as one of the complementary structures—the CIS, BSECO, and GUUAM. At the same time, the emphasis was placed on the common Euro-integration intentions of the GUUAM member states. As a result, the Organization became somewhat akin to the Visegrad group, which implied economic integration, the creation of a free trade area, coordination of positions when joining the WTO, the building of a Eurasian transportation corridor, openness of external (European) borders, as well as joint legislative work. In order to emphasize the collective European choice more, Ukraine supported granting third states the status of observer in GUUAM (Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary, and Slovakia were usually named). In November 2002, a joint GUUAM-OSCE meeting was held in Kiev, for which a joint preparatory committee was created in these organizations. The Ukrainian side also emphasized the Odessa-Brody oil pipeline's orientation toward Europe. The Baku-Ceyhan project was regarded as

complementary with respect to the Odessa-Brody project, but the deadline for implementing it was postponed until 2010.

The Azerbaijani side, which shared Ukraine's view of GUUAM posing as a European-oriented organization, was not at all in agreement with this gradation of oil pipelines. This was shown in particular by the Azerbaijani leadership's statement about the need for regular business forums within the GUUAM-EU format.

The general trend in GUUAM development, keeping in mind the political processes going on in its member states, gave reason to believe that all the more or less important initiatives aimed at strengthening the Organization could most likely be frozen in the near future, although the collapse of the union was very unlikely. GUUAM's enlargement by incorporating new members into it or by other states joining some of the Organization's projects was also considered unlikely. Moreover, Russia and the CIS entities closely associated with it could, if they showed a certain amount of caution, join certain GUUAM projects, thus "erasing" the contours of this Organization. If Russia joined the GUUAM programs they would be deprived of all their meaning. As Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze openly noted in 1999, "Russia is not asking to join GUUAM, and if it does, it will swallow us."

It would be preferable if Russia did not interact with GUUAM as a whole, but expanded its cooperation as much as possible on a bilateral basis with the Organization's member states in such a way that the latter had as many coinciding interests with the Russian ones as possible and were forced to take Russia's position into account when forming policy within their union. Attention should be paid to GUUAM's weak links—Moldova and Uzbekistan, which reduced their participation in this Organization to a minimum. Under certain circumstances it would be expedient for Moldova to withdraw from GUUAM, but if it was not ready to do this, it could possibly be used as a Trojan Horse for hindering efforts aimed at strengthening GUUAM and for gaining control over the processes occurring in this union. Without officially withdrawing from GUUAM, Moldova and Uzbekistan could ignore its forums or lower the status of their representatives to the minimum, as well as not take part in the Organization's projects.

In the historical perspective, GUUAM can be seen as an integration project aimed not at efficient cooperation, but at opposing a foreign force, in this case, Russia. The failure of this project, which existed more by momentum than based on real interests, confirms the lack of prospects for such forms of integration. In the final analysis, GUUAM existed and actively developed (or created the semblance of development) until Moscow saw it as a threat to itself and tried to fight it. One of the reasons for GUUAM's failure was also the mixing of the economic and military-political components in this project. The failure of one of them essentially discredited the entire project. It is probably impossible to create integration unions based on the economic factor alone, but nor can political factors be allowed to largely define the nature and rates of integration.

The Kazan summit of CIS heads of state held on 26-27 August, 2005 did not yield any positive results and did not give any inkling of a coherent plan for reforming the Commonwealth. The consent of all the heads of state to reformation and the creation of a "high-level group for raising the efficiency of the CIS" did not mean that any of them understood the gist of this reform or had a common vision of ways to restructure the union. Turkmenistan's statement in Kazan about associate membership in the CIS is also significant.

In the months following the summit, ways to reform the Commonwealth were discussed, which boiled down to "optimization of the structure of the CIS bodies" and strengthening of the role of the executive committee. This agenda of the talks could hardly arouse lively interest in Russia's partners in the Commonwealth. It is not surprising that the meeting devoted to reformation of the CIS attended by the foreign ministers of the Commonwealth countries held on 21 April, 2006 was unconstructive.

According to anonymous comments by Russian officials, “a specific program was not drawn up” regarding reformation of the CIS. It appears that Russia did not choose the right tone when putting forward its initiative to hold consultations on reformation of the CIS, since the inevitable absence of agreements undermined belief not only in the future of the Commonwealth, but also in Russia’s ability to lead this organization.

Other integration processes were simultaneously going on in the CIS expanse which hardly corresponded to Moscow’s interests. The idea of creating a new integration union (with the provisional name of Democratic Choice) in the post-Soviet expanse was first voiced by the foreign ministers of Ukraine and Georgia—B. Tarasiuk and S. Zurabishvili—on 31 March, 2005 in Bishkek, whereby Kyrgyzstan was also asked to take part in it. On 22-23 April, 2005, at the summit in Chisinau, GUUAM was reanimated (although Uzbekistan withdrew from it on 5 May), whereby Stephen Mann orchestrated the event. The declaration adopted called “Advance of Democracy: From the Baltic to the Black Sea” designated GUAM’s movement toward replacing the initial economic goals with so-called political intentions. In the Borzhomi Declaration of 12 August, 2005, which was a logical continuation of the Carpathian declaration, Viktor Yushchenko and Mikhail Saakashvili declared their intention to create a community of democracies of the Baltic-Black Sea-Caspian Region. On 18 August, at the meeting (Balto-Black Sea summit) in the Crimea on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of Artek (the International Children’s Center), the presidents of Ukraine, Georgia, Poland, and Lithuania were already talking about creating a Community of Democratic Choice, the purpose of which was “to liberate the member states of the new organization from human rights violations, confrontation, and frozen conflicts.” The idea of creating a Community of Democratic Choice was voiced again on 19 September at a session of the U.N. General Assembly. On 23 November a conference was held in Tbilisi called “The New Wave of European Liberation: Democracy and Transformation,” in which Mikhail Saakashvili, as well as the presidents of Ukraine, Rumania, and Estonia, took part. We will note Saakashvili’s references to Rumania: “Rumania is an example for the democratic processes in our region.”

Finally, on 1-2 December, 2005, at the summit in Kiev, the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC) was created by nine states. The organizers of the event succeeded in gathering a rather impressive showing of guests—the presidents of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Rumania, Macedonia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia (these nine countries became members of the Community), Vice-President of Bulgaria, foreign minister of Azerbaijan, marshal of the Polish Senate, and U.S. Undersecretary of State Paula Dobriansky. Several of the states invited ignored the event (Russia, Armenia, Austria, Turkey, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovakia), and some countries, as we see, were represented not by their leaders, which was also not by accident. Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, the U.S., the EU, and the OSCE were granted the status of observers in this organization. Ramaz Sakvarelidze, a Georgian political scientist close to Saakashvili, gave a very exhaustive commentary about the creation of the Community.<sup>1</sup> According to him, the CDC is an alternative to the CIS, and its purpose is to “continue the march of the democratic processes to the East” and create a counterbalance to Russia’s influence in the region. According to Sakvarelidze, “if the new organization has the same problems as GUAM, I don’t think anything will come of it. At one time, the U.S. initiated the creation of GUAM, but then it moved aside. The absence of a driving force is what reduced this Organization to naught.” This driving force could be the EU or the U.S., which should be “tougher toward Russia.” It was also emphasized that, in contrast to GUAM, the CDC is not an economic, but a political organization. In March, an international session called Community of Democratic Choice—Pros-

<sup>1</sup> Interview with RIA Novosti Information Agency of 29 November, 2005.

pects for the Future was held in Tbilisi with the participation of Mikhail Saakashvili and Deputy Assistant U.S. Secretary of State Matthew Bryza.

The second CDC conference was scheduled for March 2006 in Rumania, the third for May 2006 in Lithuania, and the fourth for the fall of 2006 in Georgia. But at this juncture a certain breakdown occurred. At the end of January 2006, first the foreign ministers and then the president of Rumania announced Bucharest's withdrawal from the CDC as an "insufficiently mature organization." At the same time, they called for the need to keep in mind Moscow's interests: "an attempt to isolate Russia from problems regarding the Black Sea is a political mistake." "Rumania will not be Russia's adversary. Rumania wants to be Russia's partner in the Black Sea region." In our opinion, the pro-Russian statements of the Rumanian leaders should not be overestimated. There were several reasons for Rumania's demarche. First, the aggravated dispute with Ukraine about whom Zmeiniy Island belonged to (as we know, in the spring of 2006, Rumania filed a lawsuit about this, whereas Ukraine sent a counter memorandum to the U.N. International Court in The Hague). Second, there were several disagreements on the problem of the Transnistria, since in this region and in Moldova, Ukraine and Rumania were pursuing not entirely identical goals. It is possible that the problem of gas transit also played its role in the problem. But the main thing, nevertheless, is something else. At the same time as withdrawing from the CDC, Rumania suggested holding a Black Sea Forum for Dialog and Partnership in the spring in Bucharest, thus wishing to create a new regional organization. We are most likely encountering not so much rivalry between the organizations here as between those who would potentially like to orchestrate them. Rumania was not able to become a leader of the CDC and considered it expedient to create an alternative structure. Running ahead, we will note that the Forum in Bucharest was held on 5 June, 2006 and the leaders of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey took part in it. The goals of the new organization were declared as assisting cooperation between the region's states and the EU, as well as regional interaction in crisis and emergency situations, post-conflict building, and the environmental protection. It is not difficult to note that the goals of the Black Sea Forum, the CDC, and GUAM essentially coincide. The official website of the Ukrainian president says: "The conceptual foundations of the Black Sea Forum for Dialog and Partnership are to a certain extent in harmony with the Community of Democratic Choice, but in the regional dimension."<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to understand the difference, keeping in mind that both organizations are regional and have essentially the same members. The Community's goals were named as "assisting the development of democracy, confirming the supremacy of the law and a liberal market economy, strengthening civil society, protecting human rights, and achieving peaceful settlement of conflicts." That is, the goals of GUAM and this organization also fully coincided.

In this way, the second half of 2005 and the beginning of 2006 were marked by an activation in alternative integration unions in the post-Soviet expanse: instead of just GUAM there were three, and a certain amount of vying began among them. But all of these unions have a stable nucleus consisting of three CIS countries—Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. At this stage, these three republics have one thing in common—the relations of each of them with Moscow continued to deteriorate regardless of any dependence on integration projects. For example, throughout 2005 and the beginning of 2006, Russian-Georgian relations steadily deteriorated, Russian-Ukrainian relations clearly, although cyclically, deteriorated and were interspersed with periods of stagnation, and Russian-Moldovan relations were in a state of protracted stagnation. The situation began to change quite abruptly in the spring of 2006.

Russian-Moldovan relations began to deteriorate after the beginning of the 3 March, 2006 Ukrainian-Moldovan blockade of Transnistria (the decision to institute the blockade was made in

<sup>2</sup> [<http://www.president.gov.ua/ru/news//data/1-8730.html>].



December 2005). In so doing, Russia's position and interests were not taken into account. In response (27 March), the import of Moldovan wine and fruit in the Russian Federation was prohibited, and on 7 April, the Russian Foreign Ministry announced the introduction of regulations under which entry from Moldova into the Russian Federation was possible only with a foreign travel passport. Chisinau perceived this as a threat to introduce visa conditions. At the same time, the gas talks hit a bumpy stretch—on the eve of the price increase on Russian gas promised after 1 April from 110 to, as was earlier suggested, 250 dollars for one thousand cubic meters. In turn, the Moldovan side threatened to foil Russia's acceptance into the WTO and demanded an emergency convocation of the CIS Economic Council. It is illustrative that on 21 April Moldova was represented by its deputy minister at the summit of the foreign ministers of the CIS countries.

Further deterioration of Russian-Ukrainian relations was also caused by Kiev's blockade of Transnistria. Ukraine was also irritated by certain steps the Russian Federation took on the meat products and milk market. Ukrainian Foreign Minister B. Tarasiuk, who arrived in St. Petersburg on 21 April for the summit meeting of CIS foreign ministers and to meet with his Russian colleague, brought with him several initiatives of clearly instantaneous political and anti-Russian (keeping in mind Moscow's status as the U.S.S.R.'s successor) nature. They included the question of recognizing the Holodomor (mass hunger) of 1923-1933 as genocide of the Ukrainians and a call to oppose the "trade wars." The question of the Holodomor was put aside and not included on the agenda, which the Ukrainian representative highly objected to. In his words, "today the CIS has shown its inefficiency, including with respect to executing the decisions of the Council of Heads of State in Kazan on 26 August of last year to strengthen and reform the CIS." For him, the meeting showed the "lack of prospects for the CIS in its current state."<sup>3</sup> It is important that Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Azerbaijan voted for putting the question of the Holodomor on the agenda, while Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Turkmenistan abstained.

The restrictions introduced on 27 March on the import of products from Georgia prompted a new discussion in this republic regarding membership in the CIS. We will note in so doing that as early as the end of 2005, at the CDC summit in Kiev, Saakashvili said: "I am not even considering Georgia's withdrawal from the CIS, I have no such intention." Nevertheless, a large part of the Georgian political elite repeatedly brought up the topic of Georgia's possible withdrawal from the Commonwealth over the next few years. According to a survey conducted in Georgia during the first half of the 2005 by the GORBI sociological service, 42.8% of Georgians think that the country should leave the CIS. On 31 March, K. Bendukidze said in parliament that although he did not see any particular political appeal in Georgia's membership in the CIS, the economic aspects of Georgia's presence in the Commonwealth should not be disregarded." Before leaving the CIS with its specific customs conditions, bilateral agreements should be drawn up on free trade conditions and non-visa conditions with all the members of the Commonwealth. Russia itself unilaterally withdrew from the CIS agreements on free trade and non-visa conditions. This position was voiced again by K. Bendukidze on 2 May, and in his words, the question is being "specifically" discussed. An even more cautious position was voiced by Prime Minister Z. Nogaideli (on 11 April): "The question of Georgia's withdrawal from the CIS is not on the agenda today, although the Georgian side has a critical attitude toward some of the mechanisms within the CIS." In this case, the government (or to be more precise, the representatives of its economic bloc) decided to keep a low profile, essentially refusing to take a serious look at the question of withdrawing from the Commonwealth. At the summit of the foreign ministers of the CIS states held on 21 April in St. Petersburg, Georgia, like Moldova, was represented by its deputy minister.

<sup>3</sup> *Kommersant*, 22 April, 2006.

On 11 April at the plenary session of the Georgian parliament, speaker N. Burjanadze said: "If Georgia is the only CIS country in relation to which the Russian Federation introduces visa conditions, prohibits the import of citrus fruit, tea, and wine, and tomorrow will most likely prohibit Borzhomi as well, and in the future, as already voiced in certain circles, prohibit the transfer of money from Russia to Georgia, what sense is there for us to be in the CIS?" Moreover, Burjanadze essentially turned to the other Commonwealth countries, calling on them to show solidarity with Georgia (for example, Tajikistan announced its intention to replace Georgian wine on the Russian market with its own, although it later disavowed this statement). The parliamentary opposition supported the idea of the republic's withdrawal from the CIS, promising to cease its boycott of parliamentary sittings for this cause. For example, according to D. Gamkrelidze (the Rightist Opposition), "under the current relations with Russia, our presence in this organization is absolutely unclear, since the CIS represents the ambitions of one country." As Z. Dzidziguri (the Conservatives) believes, "if Georgia leaves this faceless union, only good will come of it." G. Tsagareishvili (the Industrialists) is sure that "Georgia should leave the CIS and as quickly as possible."

But the most radical position was occupied by the representatives of the state's actual leadership (the so-called Politburo). According to G. Bokeria, the unofficial leader of the faction of the ruling party in parliament (28 April), withdrawal from the Commonwealth is a tactical question that is not a central issue for Georgia. The pluses and minuses must be weighed when resolving, whereby the only plus is the economic regime Georgia has with the CIS countries. Moreover, "belonging to the CIS does not theoretically pose any threat." But "there are more than enough reasons for us to take a serious look at this question." Later, on 2 May, Defense Minister I. Okruashvili announced that in a week Georgia would make a decision about its withdrawal from the Commonwealth. Saakashvili announced the date of 2 May in Kutaisi, thus giving the government "from a few weeks to two months" to decide the question of Georgia's membership in the CIS. Said he: "If, as I suspect, there is already practically no benefit from this organization apart from humiliation and insults," we should "continue consultations with our partners" and formulate "a coordinated policy." This is where a very interesting nuance first appeared in the statements of the Georgian leader: the talk turned not to Georgia's isolated withdrawal from the CIS, but to several states making an orchestrated exit en masse from the Commonwealth. It can be presumed that the Georgian president had precisely the GUAM states in mind.

Mikhail Saakashvili went on to designate repeatedly and quite clearly two vectors of Georgia's further actions with respect to the Commonwealth. First, the Georgian government should "figure out what the benefits and advantages are for us if we remain in the CIS." Second, the Georgian government should "understand whether there might be any benefits in the future, hold consultations about this with our partners in the CIS, and clarify their positions."<sup>4</sup> That is, the accent was placed on two key aspects—calculating the pluses and minuses for Georgia if it leaves the CIS, blackmailing Russia with this possibility, and holding talks with several other countries to create a group of states that could play the role of a Trojan Horse in the Commonwealth. In the event the decision is made to leave the CIS, these states will exit en masse, and their exit will essentially bring down the CIS. Judging from everything, Saakashvili, or, to be more precise, his overseas patrons, are very well aware that Georgia's withdrawal from the CIS on its own will not create any particular problems for the Commonwealth.

In his interviews after meeting with Vladimir Putin on 13 June, 2006 in St. Petersburg, Mikhail Saakashvili actually motivated Georgia's membership in the CIS and its entry into NATO by Russia's role in resolving the problem of the country's territorial integrity. In his words, "I do not know for

<sup>4</sup> M. Saakashvili, "Gruzia popala pod razdachu," *Russian Newsweek*, 29 May-4 June, 2006.

sure if Georgia will leave the CIS and in what specific form it will consequently interact with NATO," although "we, of course, will continue to be part of the Euro-Atlantic space."<sup>5</sup> This placed a slightly different nuance in Tbilisi's course aimed at blackmailing Russia, which of course should not be overestimated.

Against this background, the forum (within the framework of the Community of Democratic Choice) called Common Vision of a Common Neighborhood held in Vilnius on 4-5 May, 2006 also fueled the discussion on the future of the CIS. This event was not isolated: before it began, a Youth Forum was held in Vilnius (1 May), as well as a Forum of NGOs and Intellectuals. As a result, quite a large number of representatives of the political and intellectual elite of the East European and CIS countries gathered in Vilnius. The resolution adopted by the Forum of Intellectuals placed priority emphasis on the need to overthrow the Belorussian regime, resolve the conflict in the CIS expanse, and assist the development of democracy in the Russian Federation. The resolution of the Forum of Intellectuals focused on a call to enlarge the EU to the East, named Chechnia as one of the frozen conflicts, and mentioned the force of coercion coming from Russia. The text of the resolution itself was of an openly anti-Russian nature. Support of the need to enlarge NATO and empathy for the Community of Democratic Choice were expressed. The level of representation at the Forum is interesting: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Poland, Georgia, Moldova, Bulgaria, and Rumania were represented by their heads of state, Azerbaijan by its prime minister, Sweden by its vice-premier, and Armenia, Great Britain, Germany, and Spain by ministers. Representatives of the U.S. (Dick Cheney) and the EU (Xavier Solana) were also present. The forum was clearly anti-Russian mainly due to the speeches by Dick Cheney and A. Illarionov, as well as the absence of official Russian representatives, but it did bring up the topic of the CIS. This topic was also raised, again, by the presidents of Georgia and Ukraine. According to Mikhail Saakashvili, "The CIS is not encouraging the free movement of people, goods, and services, the union has become closed." "The CIS as a forum has lost its purpose. Hardly anything is discussed at the Commonwealth meetings, there is no rotation of representation, it is impossible to uphold one's viewpoints, and no public statements have even been made lately." So Georgia "is looking for a better alternative" to membership in the CIS and "we understand that withdrawal from the CIS does not mean we will perish." Viktor Yushchenko said that Ukraine is convinced that current CIS policy "will never become successful" and "Ukraine cannot remain in this zone of vagueness." The goals of the CDC were clearly designated by Head of the Georgian Presidential Administration G. Arveladze: "To create an axis of democratic countries that do not want to be in the orbit of Russia's geopolitical interests."

New statements followed the Vilnius forum about the possibility of Ukraine and Georgia leaving the Commonwealth. In so doing, statements from Ukrainian representatives became much harsher than before. On 5 May, K. Timoshenko, the head of the Main Service of Foreign Policy of the Secretariat of the Ukrainian President, made a corresponding statement. In his words, the republic is considering the possibility of withdrawing from the CIS, but this question "is not very urgent on the agenda." On 4 May, after the Russian-Ukrainian consultations on the Black Sea Fleet, First Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine V. Ogryzko said that the CIS is increasingly losing its attractiveness; "it is turning from a structure that could accomplish things into a structure that is engaged in socioeconomic problems. We are interested in real things." So Ukraine will continue "to analyze the pluses and minuses of its participation in the CIS." Foreign Minister B. Tarasiuk noted that Ukraine's participation in the Commonwealth is a topic of the consultations, but the CIS is inefficient as an institution. His emphasis was slightly different in an interview on 12 May: "We have no plans to withdraw from the CIS. It is another matter that Ukraine, as many other CIS member states, is dissatisfied with how

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<sup>5</sup> *Izvestia*, 20 June, 2006.

the organization is developing in its current framework. The CIS is essentially churning out decisions that no one is executing. Frankly speaking, we have not seen the CIS as playing any creative role from the very beginning, apart from as a mechanism for alleviating the divorce process and as a mechanism for assisting the establishment of bilateral relations." According to Tarasiuk, "nothing came of the EurAsEC," "Russia is obviously not interested in anything coming of this idea (the EurAsEC)." The words of Ukrainian Security Council Secretary A. Kinakh were rather dissonant in this respect: "Whenever it is possible for heads of state and government leaders to meet, hold a dialog, discuss a problem, this makes some sense, this is positive. Equal bilateral and multilateral cooperation conditions must be formed. Then we are in favor of this kind of CIS." According to Kinakh, Ukraine has no intention of leaving the CIS. At the GUAM summit in May, Viktor Yushchenko limited himself to vague comments about "the great shortage of beneficial action in the CIS."

On 5 May, speaker of the Georgian parliament N. Burjanadze said that the prohibition on the sale of Borzhomi in Russia was another argument in favor of Georgia's withdrawal from the Commonwealth. On 6 May, Georgian Foreign Minister G. Bezhuashvili expressed in no uncertain terms that "there are countries in the CIS with which we have strategic relations. It is clear to everyone that this organization is long inefficient, so we are seriously thinking about withdrawing from the CIS. We are beginning to hold consultations on this question with our partners, and the first such country will be Ukraine." These consultations began on 7 May. Head of the Georgian parliament's international committee K. Gabashvili clarified that efforts to draft bilateral agreements with other CIS states on non-visa conditions had been going on for two months, and they were 90% ready, since "before leaving the CIS, all problems should be reduced to the minimum." G. Targamadze, the head of another parliamentary committee (on defense and security), stated that the decision to leave the CIS would have to be made before July 2006 at the same time as discussion of the question of Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia (that is, the Russian peacekeepers would automatically be acting outside the law), "would not bring the country additional difficulties," and "the parliament would be unanimous." Another parliamentarian and also Deputy Chairman of the BSEC Parliamentary Assembly committee for economic, trade, technical and environmental issues David Saganelidze believed that "today the CIS is providing Georgia with absolutely nothing and is even blocking the development of relations with European countries."<sup>6</sup> At a meeting with Estonian president Arnold Ruutel, Mikhail Saakashvili noted the importance of the support from Estonia during the transition period "after Georgia announced it was thinking about leaving the CIS." Georgia participated in the Council of Heads of Government of the Commonwealth (Dushanbe, 25 May), but its representative, G. Baramidze, refused to sign the documents stating that "membership in the CIS had lost its meaning for Georgia."

On 11 May, Moldovan Foreign Minister A. Stratan said that "the government would voice its opinion about the deputy initiative regarding the republic's withdrawal from the CIS after it receives the conclusion on this question from the republic's departments." The largest opposition faction, Moldova Noastra (Our Moldova) Alliance (BDM of Serafim Urecheanu), came forward with this initiative. As a result, and after some thought, the country's government did not support the opposition deputies, although at the Kiev GUAM summit (22-23 May), the Moldovan president did not exclude this possibility.

The new activation of forces in favor of the withdrawal of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova from the CIS immediately after the Vilnius forum was not accidental. Revitalization of the discussions on this topic was probably rehearsed. It is indicative that several months later the fervency of the debates had essentially fizzled away to nothing.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with REGNUM Information Agency of 7 June, 2006.

As early as April, preparatory work began in Kiev to arrange a GUAM summit (22-23 May, 2006), for which an organizing committee was created headed by First Vice Premier S. Stashevskiy. In his very first statement he said that Ukraine is GUAM's "unofficial leader." According to B. Tarasiuk,<sup>7</sup> thanks to GUAM and the CDC, "Ukraine is acquiring features of a regional leader." Georgia approves of Ukraine's leading role. According to Foreign Minister G. Bezhuashvili, "Ukraine is of course the regional leader and we are doing everything to ensure that Ukraine remains the leader. We need a strong leader, a leader which, instead of applying levers of pressure, is engaged in realizing its own potential. We, as Ukraine's strategic partners, are doing all we can to ensure that this leadership is successful." Saakashvili played up Ukraine even more directly: "Russia has forgotten that Ukraine is not a village in the woods, but a leading country of the Commonwealth." Through its activity in GUAM and the CDC, Kiev has positioned itself as a regional leader and the advocate of a Euro-Atlantic and European model of integration in the region. What is more, this was important for Yushchenko's regime in light of a very possible new gas war with Russia, which Kiev was preparing for, trying to draw not only the U.S., but also the more cautious European Union onto its side.

At the summit on 22-23 May, GUAM was transformed from a regional into an international organization, after acquiring the name of Organization for Democracy and Economic Development—GUAM. Moldovan President Voronin suggested renaming GUAM the Commonwealth of European Choice. The summit was preceded by meetings of foreign ministers (20 May in Strasbourg) and interior ministers (22 May in Kiev) of the GUAM member states. GUAM's headquarters were moved to Kiev; and Ukraine assumed chairmanship in the organization. Moreover, a decision was made to create a free trade area in GUAM, although it stands to reason that the importance of such an area is not every high (with the exception of Ukrainian-Moldovan relations). The possibility of enlarging GUAM was also discussed, in particular Voronin expressed the hope that Rumania and Bulgaria would join the organization. Rumanian ambassador to Azerbaijan Nicolae Ureke stated the possibility of Rumania joining GUAM several days later.

Ukraine was attracted to GUAM and other similar organizations primarily by the purely economic and, to be more precise, transit-energy aspects. At the June summit in Bucharest, Viktor Yushchenko suggested founding an Energy Dialog of Three Seas within the CDC with the participation of representatives of Central Asia. The sense of this is difficult to fathom other than as an attempt to draw Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan into the CDC and even decrease Ukraine's energy dependence on Russia. Yushchenko's initiative, which he put forward at the same time, to find funds to build the Donuzlav Crimean Sea Transport-Industrial Complex (terminal) with the capacity to handle 60-70 million tons of freight a year appears to be pure daydreaming. At the GUAM summit in Kiev, Yushchenko suggested creating an Energy Council and put forward the conception of a Danube Energy-Transport Bridge, which presumed doing away with reverse use of the Odessa-Brody oil pipeline, building branches from it and extending it to Gdansk, and drawing Kazakhstan into this project. This idea inspired the Poles (Minister of Economy Piotr Woźniak), but could not arouse particular enthusiasm in Ilham Aliev, who was hoping that Kazakhstan would join the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline (which happened on 16 June). The following words by Ilham Aliev hit Yushchenko like a ton of bricks: "There is no talk about any specific new energy projects." A blind eye was turned to Yushchenko's initiative at this stage. In exchange, an economically unpromising idea was offered about the delivery of Ukrainian electric power to the Caucasus.

A trend was also noted toward developing GUAM's military component. On 30 May—in the wake of the decisions of the Kiev GUAM summit—the Georgian and Azerbaijani defense ministers came to an agreement at a meeting in Baku to hold a meeting of the deputy heads of the GUAM states general headquarters in mid-July to discuss the creation of a joint peacekeeping contingent. It is possi-

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Internet publication *DW-WORLD.DE* of 12 May, 2006.

ble that this topic was brought up due to the talks going on and the probing regarding the peacekeeping operation in Nagorno-Karabakh. (The idea of creating a peacekeeping battalion was discussed again at the GUAM Baku summit in June 2007.)

Later, by the end of 2006, the integration processes relating to the CDC and GUAM had abated to some extent, and the Black Sea Forum for Dialog and Partnership proved to be a still-born organization that gave no signs of life. Between 30 November and 1 December, 2006, another CDC forum was held in Tbilisi, an international conference called the Development of Democracy: Strengthening the Role of Parliamentary Diplomacy, at which the founding of the Community's Parliamentary Assembly was announced. It is worth noting that far from all the nine Community member states were represented at this forum even by deputies. Chairman of the Lithuanian Sejm, speaker of the Polish senate, deputies from Estonia and Holland, and President of the National Democratic Institute (U.S.) Kenneth Wallack participated in it. No breakthrough decisions or vibrant statements were observed at this forum, it proved to be an entirely mediocre event that did not arouse any lively interest among either journalists or politicians.

A certain amount of integration animation was noticed the following spring and was enhanced by the energy summit on 11 May, 2007 in Krakow. The presidents of Ukraine, Poland, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Lithuania participated in the event and adopted a declaration on the creation of an energy corridor based on the Odessa-Brody pipeline. It is illustrative that the Moldovan and Rumanian leaders failed to show at the summit: the implementation of this project in no way corresponded to their interests, and the transportation routes of energy resources (as in the case with the Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline) bypassed these countries. On 18-19 June, 2007, another GUAM summit was held in Baku at which Moldova was represented by its prime minister, V. Tarlev. The presidents of Poland, Lithuania, and Rumania, the vice president of Bulgaria, representatives of Latvia, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, the European Commission, and U.S. State Secretary Advisor D. Kramer took part in the event. The forum participants again focused on the project for launching the Odessa-Brody pipeline and its extension to Plock. The energy problem was a central theme in the speeches of the leaders of all the states, apart from Mikhail Saakashvili who again opposed the CIS and GUAM, stating that the GUAM bloc, in contrast to the CIS, has made impressive achievements. The new energy resource transportation route demanded new suppliers, so it is no accident that immediately after the Baku summit the question was raised again of the possibility of Kazakhstan joining GUAM. It seems that Astana did not refuse outright, but made its consent hinge on its gaining access to oil-refining enterprises. As a result, the main question remained unresolved, and the summit was essentially unconstructive.

The energy topic was discussed again at the Vilnius energy summit on 10-11 October, 2007, at the same time at which the GUAM summit was also held. The presidents of Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Rumania, the prime minister of Estonia, the ministers of energy and mineral resources of Kazakhstan, the energy minister of Turkey, the deputy prime minister of the Czech Republic for European Affairs, and the EU commissioner for energy participated in the forum. It speaks volumes that not only did the Moldovan president fail to show up at this meeting, but no authorized representative from this republic at all attended. It is obvious that Chisinau, which was not interested in implementing energy projects that bypassed Moldova, decided to isolate itself from GUAM. It seems that the GUAM format is beginning to gradually transform: as Moldova distances itself, Poland, the Baltic countries, and to a certain extent Rumania are essentially joining this organization. This format could be used both to resolve the energy security issues of these states in keeping with their lawful interests and to create a kind of "cordon sanitaire" around Russia and Belarus. The second alternative of course does not correspond to Russian interests. For the time being, the energy security dominant that moved to the forefront at the end of 2006-2007 predominates. But what will be the fate of this format if the Odessa-Brody-Plock project proves unfeasible? And this is very likely keeping in mind that at the Vilnius summit Kazakhstan actually refused to participate in this project.

So, in 2005-2006, against the deterioration in relations between Russia and several CIS states, the West (particularly the U.S. and the “New” European countries) rendered significant support to the integration unions that are alternatives to the Commonwealth in the post-Soviet expanse. Thanks to the rivalry among the Central European countries that would like to orchestrate these structures (Rumania, Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine), in addition to the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development—GUAM, another two unions appeared—the Community of Democratic Choice and the Black Sea Forum for Dialog and Partnership. These formations have essentially identical goals and almost the same member states. Their main functions, in our view, are to create a “cordon sanitaire” along the border with Russia, as well as draw the Central Asian countries (primarily Kazakhstan) onto their side.

Activation of the integration trends created without Russia’s participation in the CIS expanse does not mean that the Commonwealth is about to collapse. Moldova and Ukraine are unlikely to withdraw from the CIS in the near future, particularly since Russian-Moldovan relations have essentially normalized and the political crisis in Ukraine has forced Kiev to turn to its own problems and distracted it from its senseless standoff with Moscow. Ukraine has obviously weighed up the pros and cons of its withdrawal from CIS, but it is not ready to take the risk and deal such a crushing blow to its own economy at the moment. All the same, under certain circumstances, the country might return to a discussion of these issues (continuation and aggravation of the gas wars with Russia, Moscow’s acutely negative reaction and retaliatory measures in the event Ukraine is invited to join NATO, and aggravation of the situation in the Crimea). It is obvious that Ukraine’s overseas patrons are not excluding the possibility of its withdrawal from the CIS along with Kiev’s entry into NATO either. Georgia is the closest to withdrawing from the CIS, but its willingness was quickly undermined by Russia’s abrupt steps, which gave it to understand that Moscow may reconsider its position regarding the republic’s territorial integrity. Moreover, Georgia is not risking withdrawal from the CIS alone and will continue to urge Ukraine and possibly Moldova to make a similar decision in the future. Nevertheless, Georgia’s role in the CIS is definitely disruptive.