



Andrey Denisov

«CIS IS NOT A DEFUNCT ORGANIZATION, ITS DISSOLUTION IS NOT CONSIDERED»

Vladimir Orlov, Security Index editor-in-chief, interviews First Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Andrey Denisov.¹

SECURITY INDEX: The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation declares activities within the Commonwealth of Independent States as a regional priority of Russia's foreign policy with emphasis on the *different-level* and *different-speed* integration. Already in 2007, the Foreign Policy Review of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs defines the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) as the *nucleus* of integration. However, besides, let's call them, *Russian-sponsored* projects, there are also competing ones; GUAM, to name one. What is the probability of EurAsEC becoming the leading integration association within the post-Soviet space? Will it be able to *assemble* or *lure* those former republics of the Soviet Union that have not been encompassed by it yet? Is it probable that EurAsEC will become an efficient union resembling the European Union?

DENISOV: First, I would like to underline that *assembling* or *luring* the post-Soviet states are not among EurAsEC goals. The Community's task is to establish favorable conditions for integration processes, primarily in economic terms. I mainly mean efficiently using energy resources, establishing a transport union, also developing transport corridors and the transportation system on the whole, as well as many other things. The leading role of EurAsEC as an integration association will depend on how progressive and successful this process will be.

Now it is obvious that EurAsEC looks attractive to our partners. To give an example, last year Uzbekistan joined the Community as a full member. Armenia is considering doing the same. Another, even further integrated association is arising within EurAsEC; it is the customs union of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. Other countries of the Community can join it as soon as they are ready to do so. At present, a set of draft documents is ready that is required to establish a regulatory and legal framework and to start practical activities of the customs union of EurAsEC member states.

The Community is not going to stop its integration development at that. EurAsEC is planning to establish a common economic space, which is in fact a *common market*. Thus, the current activities are not the final stage of integration of our countries within the framework of EurAsEC.

SECURITY INDEX: EurAsEC unites the countries in economic terms. As far as ensuring security is concerned, the most efficient mechanism is the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which, geographically, in fact means the same countries. Is it possible to see some day a merge of the two organizations into one? Does CSTO fully satisfy the needs of its members regarding military security and military-technical cooperation? What countries would you like to see as members of CSTO and EurAsEC?

DENISOV: EurAsEC and CSTO are actively developing associations. Each of them is self-sufficient in its respective role. At the current stage, a merge of the organizations is not consid-



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ered. At the same time, mechanisms of their efficient cooperation are looked into: Protocol of Cooperation between CSTO Secretariat and EurAsEC Integration Committee of October 25, 2004 provides that they should complement each other's activities, not duplicate them.

In fact, it is about a sort of division of labor. While EurAsEC concentrates on economic and social issues, the pivotal activity for CSTO is the politico-military component, which includes coordination of foreign policy, military, military-technical and military-economic cooperation, joint work in personnel training, etc.

Another proof to indicate that CSTO member states are interested and prepared to take such cooperation further is contained in decisions of the Minsk session of the Collective Security Council (June 22–23, 2006), particularly it is the Declaration on Improving and Increasing Efficiency of CSTO Activities.

CSTO is gradually transforming from a politico-military union into a mechanism of comprehensive response to modern threats and challenges to the security of the member states. It is a new and principally important element in the organization's activities, which affects such areas as joint struggle against terrorism, narcotics, illegal migration, prevention and liquidation of consequences of national disasters and technological catastrophes, etc.

CSTO is a *young* international body: 15 years ago, the Collective Security Treaty was signed; and 5 years ago, the decision was made to establish the organization. However, it is developing and becoming an important factor of regional security and stability. This contributes to its international weight. Since December 2004 CSTO has an observer status with the UN General Assembly, regular working contacts have been set up and are maintained between CSTO Secretariat and UN Secretariat, Counter-Terrorism Committee of the UN Security Council, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The organization is ready to cooperate closely with other international bodies, including NATO, also on the Afghan track.

SECURITY INDEX: It is now common to view CIS as a *civilized divorce* of the former Soviet republics. What's the point then in keeping officialdom of the already decedent organization? Maybe it's better simply to dissolve the Organization?

DENISOV: Naturally, the value of CIS is not limited to the *civilized divorce* alone. I think I shouldn't repeat already known facts about the multi-facet activities of the Commonwealth. Now its reform is under way. Leaders of CIS member states have set the task of producing Commonwealth Development Concept. It has an outline of ways and methods for CIS evolution, adaptation of its work to modern-day requirements in all spheres of its activities. The key area of cooperation is still economics.

No less important is the task to improve cooperation in the areas of migration, joint action against new threats, including terrorism, ensuring security of trade routes in international and mutual trade. We pay special attention to humanitarian cooperation, which we view as an important factor of strengthening the Commonwealth, of bringing our peoples together.

Overall, during the CIS reform the best practices will be kept and further developed. Therefore, CIS is far from being a defunct organization, as some see it, and dissolution of the Commonwealth is not considered.

It is in the common interests of all member states to make CIS space a zone of peace, good neighborliness, and prosperity. The 15 years of running the Commonwealth, though complex and controversial experience, demonstrate that there is no reasonable alternative to collective cooperation in tackling this task.

SECURITY INDEX: The majority of new organizations within the former USSR hardly ever include states that are external in relation to this region. Exceptions are few. One of them is the SCO. Together with Russia, it has the membership of China, a probable leader of the 21st century. Some understand the SCO as «China in Central Asia». What kind of competition is there between Russia and China within the SCO, if at all? Or are there as yet no clues hinting at such

competition? Again, if we remember the EU, we often see an opposition of the union's leading countries.

DENISOV: The SCO was established as an association that was not targeted against anybody, but rather aiming at implementation of the common goals of its member states. Consistent adherence to the principles of mutual understanding and equality of rights has allowed the SCO to win more and more international authority.

All decisions of the organization are adopted by consensus. Obviously, sometimes this would not add to quick agreements, but when made, the decisions are effective and viable, with a consideration to positions of all partners. In other words, the way the SCO works eliminates any opportunity for some member state to prevail over others.

Naturally, all members have their own targets, tasks and goals. It is natural and understandable. At the same time, experience shows that we have the capacity to reach a common opinion that is in the interests of all peoples of *the SCO family*.

Some may want to speculate on internal conflicts within the organization. I have nothing to make them happy: SCO countries have worked and will work together for the benefit of all. Russia and China cooperate closely with each other as well as with other partners, following the *Shanghai spirit* and guided by their strategic partnership on the international and regional arenas.

SECURITY INDEX: Let's get back to economic relations. In May 2007, a three-party agreement was signed between Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan. Under it, gas from Turkmenistan will pass through Kazakhstan to *enter* the Russian gas transmission system. Thus, Russia has confirmed its status as a country with most Central-Asian gas transit. Will this agreement be able to influence negatively the Russia-China relations; after all, China is looking closely at hydrocarbons in Central Asia? Is it possible to use this agreement as a foundation for a legal framework to govern relations in the oil and gas sphere with hydrocarbon exporting countries of the post-Soviet space, under the leadership of Russia? Or could gas-exporting countries further unite into a sort of an *OPEC*, which the media persistently reiterate?

DENISOV: During a working visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Turkmenistan on May 12, 2007, presidents of three countries—Russia, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan—agreed to sign a treaty on constructing the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline. It is about implementing plans of partners with immense experience of cooperation in the fuel and energy sphere.

There is no political background here. Increasing volumes of hydrocarbon production in Central Asian countries call for an external market, whereas implementation of the above-mentioned project will promote a prospective and profitable route.

From our perspective, worries that these plans could somehow negatively affect the Russian-Chinese relations have absolutely no ground. Today we already have long-term contracts to supply gas from Central Asia. Our cooperation is based on the universally recognized principles of mutual benefit, pragmatism, and open approach. We are convinced that the new pipeline wouldn't affect in any way the relations with China.

There is no competition with China in this respect. Given that China itself successfully cooperates with Central Asian states in the oil and gas sphere.

As far as the *gas OPEC* is concerned, indeed, this topic has been actively discussed lately, though I feel that few understand the point. Apparently, it is all about a forum of gas-exporting countries that just like the *real OPEC* would have their meetings at the ministerial level. By the way, the next one is to take place in Moscow in May next year. Russia is the only CIS country that participates in the forum.

In this connection, I would like to underline that the forum of gas-exporting countries has no secretariat and no charter. It has no instruments for export quota arrangements. Besides, given the fact that gas markets are based on long-term contracts, quotas of any kind would mean a violation of contractual obligations, which no supplier would agree to. That is why it is not feasible to establish a gas *OPEC* in the coming years and also hardly possible technically.



At the same time, we think that contacts with leading exporters of natural gas within the framework of the forum are useful as they contribute to information exchange on market conditions and development prospects for gas markets, coordination of long-term gas strategies. I think that similar approaches can also be applied to developing relations with our Central Asian CIS partners, also considering the growth perspective of oil and gas infrastructure in the whole region.

SECURITY INDEX: The dissolution of the Soviet Union was not as painful as that of Yugoslavia, but here we still see dangerous trouble zones as frozen conflicts in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria... Such conflicts have demonstrated how acute they are, at the price of thousands of people's lives, the controversy of peoples' right to self-determination and the territorial integrity of states. How can this or that decision on the status of Kosovo influence conflict settlement in hot spots within the CIS? Are we to expect a new stage of confrontation or will a solution of the Kosovo problem become a key to solving the above collision?

DENISOV: Our position regarding the Kosovo status is well known, and many times was brought to the notice of our partners in full detail. One of its pivotal elements is that Kosovo status settlement will become a precedent for other similar conflicts. If Kosovo has the right for independence, how can this right be denied to the peoples of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria? A unilateral declaration of independence by Pristina will inevitably cause a chain reaction in the world; will lead to chaos in international relations.

Russia stands for a negotiated solution of the Kosovo issue under international law. Only this outcome can be backed by the UN Security Council and will not create a negative precedent. Our efforts significantly contributed to renewed talks between Belgrade and Pristina. We will actively participate in it as part of the troika of international mediators: Russia, EU, United States, aiming at a balanced approach, strict adherence to UN Security Council resolution 1244 and positions of the parties. Besides, we have a compelling stand against predetermined results of the talks or any time limit.

SECURITY INDEX: In his Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of 2007, Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, announced a course to build up «the common humanitarian space within the CIS, making our work with Russians abroad more effective, and making greater use of cooperation between civil society organizations that has proven its worth.» What is it, the cooperation that has proven its worth? And how is the work with Russians abroad made more effective? Are there any issues in CIS countries similar to those that keep appearing in the relations with our Baltic neighbors?

DENISOV: At the World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad, which took place in Saint Petersburg in October 2006, Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, declared that cooperation with the diasporas, support, and protection of rights of our compatriots as one of Russia's national priorities.

The tasks set by the President are handled by the Government Commission on Compatriots Abroad (GCCA) chaired by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Special attention is given to coordinating work of the concerned ministries and bodies, regions of Russia, NGOs handling the ties with compatriots.

The Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots established by decision of the congress, started its practical work with the first meeting in Moscow in March 2007. The Coordination Council is to become the central body to consolidate and represent interests of Russian compatriots. On their behalf, it maintains dialog with GCCA, concerned bodies within the legislative and executive branches in the Russian Federation and its regions, society, religious, and other non-governmental organizations. It incorporates representatives of the European Russian Alliance, as well as the International Council of Russian Compatriots, and the World Congress of Tatars. Other organizations have declared their intention to cooperate with the Council, e.g. the World Congress of Russian Jewry.

The leadership of the Coordination Council and the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation have agreed to establish a joint working group to coordinate efforts and projects for legal support to compatriots in their countries of residence. Another task for the group is to shape a

mechanism of public control on the part of civil society institutions over the implementation of the National Program to Assist the Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad to Russia.

A frontline task is in consolidating compatriots on the basis of agreed common positions on protecting the ethnic and cultural rights and interests in countries of residence. A contribution is made by 60 national and seven regional conferences of compatriots held around the world. Meetings between representatives of the leadership of Russia during their trips abroad with leaders of compatriots' organization are becoming more common.

The strategic goal of mutually beneficial partnership with compatriots is the following: while remaining full citizens of their countries, they would preserve and strengthen ties with Russia.

The situation in which Russian compatriots find themselves is specific for each of the CIS countries. However, there are problems common for the Russian-speaking community. It is the status of the Russian language, which varies from *an official language* in Belarus to *a regional language* and *a language of a national minority* in other countries. Here we can also mention reducing the number of schools and universities with education in Russian, cutting down on Russian-language publications, and limitation on broadcasts of Russian TV channels. This situation is to be improved with the help of the federal program titled «The Russian Language 2006–2010». In some countries, there are social problems, e.g. connected with a high level of unemployment among compatriots, their financial situation. Great contrast is seen in such question as the degree of representation in local legislative and executive bodies. Regarding issues that we face, for instance, in relations with our Baltic neighbors, fortunately, we don't encounter them in CIS countries. 

Note

¹The interview with Andrey Denisov was taken by Vladimir Orlov on August 10, 2007.



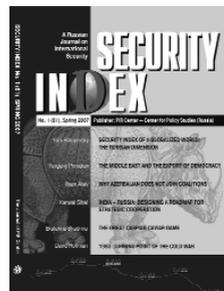
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