

The Collective Security Treaty Organization as an Unconventional Stabilizer for Autocrats

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Abstract:

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is one of the oldest post-Soviet regional organizations, whose members are authoritarian regimes. Motivated by its membership dynamics, I present the qualitative evidence of how the CSTO is Janus-faced. On the one hand, relying on a comprehensive review of the CSTO official documents and its leadership statements, I show that the CSTO is able to help stabilizing its members against the risk of a regime change. On the other hand, the CSTO members face costs of being in the organization that could exceed benefits. These costs are related to the dominant position played by Russia, and its use of the CSTO as a tool for regional dominance.

1 Introduction

Non-democratic regimes are likely to co-operate with and learn from each other to secure their hold on power (Allison, 2008, Collins, 2009, Jackson, 2014). In the last decade, research has been proliferating on the international context of authoritarian stability, trying to explore how regimes reach this goal. Silitski (2010a) suggests modern authoritarian regimes not only undertake pre-emptive measures within the country, but use multilateral co-operation to support each other in an “authoritarian international”, too. Participation in regional integration schemes led by major authoritarian countries reinforces autocrats, who are often isolated from international organizations comprising democracies (Ambrosio, 2010, Burnell and Schlumberger, 2010). With the participation in a regional organization autocrats seek to boost their image both domestically and internationally to fend themselves from undesired criticism and imposition of norms. A regional organization can, for example, legitimize non-democratic elections. The CIS electoral observation mission, which declares all elections in the CIS region as appropriately conducted, well illustrates this point (Fawn, 2006).

Regional organizations are able to provide authoritarian leaders with a platform for exchanging information and coordinating both positions and actions. In this context, post-Soviet integration initiatives are often believed to hedge member states against external democratic influences, which could yield a regime change (Allison, 2008, Ambrosio, 2008, Cameron and Orenstein, 2012, Collins, 2009). Allison (2008) highlights that post-Soviet regionalism is virtual and lacking substance, with only partially implemented agreements, in which the main political function is to serve the regime survival and legitimacy.

Prominent examples of regional organizations in which post-Soviet countries may seek protection are the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).¹

There is still little empirical evidence on how a regional organization can effectively hedge its members against regime change. Only a few studies have addressed potentialities and instruments of regional organizations to influence the regime stability in participating countries. Ambrosio argues that values and norms underlying the SCO legitimize authoritarianism through the rhetoric on stability (i.e., absence of change) and diversity of member countries (Ambrosio, 2008). For the EEU, Libman (2015) presents mixed results: the EEU membership could increase the legitimacy of member states due to its popularity, but at the same time joining the organization with supranational authorities could limit the sovereignty.

This paper discusses the potential of a regional organization, compounded by autocracies, to hedge its members against a regime change. I explore the CSTO, one of the oldest post-Soviet regional organizations. Despite the CSTO is the sole security organization within post-Soviet boundaries, it has received relatively little attention from scholars, and no study explicitly focuses on the CSTO role in stabilizing its members.² The CSTO website (www.odkb.csto.org) and the majority of its official documents and statements are only in Russian. This could explain the relatively limited research on it.

So far, the CSTO has failed to establish itself as an effective pacifier of regional crises. Indeed, in 2010, during the sole crisis within its boundaries calling for an external mediator, the CSTO did not intervene in Kyrgyzstan, when ethnic clashes spread. This fact questions the CSTO as regime stabilizer. Nevertheless, the importance of the CSTO cannot be disregarded, as it declares to be

¹ In this study the term “post-Soviet countries” does not refer to the three Baltic states.

² For a comprehensive overview on the CSTO see Rozanov and Dovgan (2010), Yurgens (2011), and Aris (2014). For an in-depth discussion of the CSTO military capabilities see Norberg (2013). For a comparison between the CSTO and the SCO, see Allison (2008), Collins (2009), Flikke (2009), Frost (2009), and Jackson (2014). For the CSTO security practices and its role in the global security governance, see Hoffmann (2014).

ready to intervene in participating countries in case of attacks menacing their, among other things, stability and sovereignty.³ Instability is connected, among others, with pro-democracy protest movements, as follows from the organization's official documents and discourse, as discussed below.

Unlike the EEU, which is concerned with economic issues, the CSTO has a broader spectrum of co-operation and information exchange opportunities, as our analysis shows. The CSTO has instruments for providing necessary assistance, including direct military aid, to member states in crisis, as the Secretary General of the CSTO Nikolai Bordyuzha has declared.⁴ Rather than analyzing some potential channels of authoritarian diffusion as Libman (2015), this paper looks more closely at the rhetoric and activities of the CSTO, which have a strong emphasis on sovereignty and de-legitimization of pro-democracy movements. Unlike the SCO, in which China is a dominant member together with Russia, the CSTO comprises only post-Soviet countries, with an evident Russian dominance, given the much more economic and military strength of Russia with respect to other members. Thus, unlike the EEU and SCO, the CSTO has the institutional framework and instruments to prevent or to suppress a revolution in its members. Unlike many international organizations, such as the EEU and SCO, which have not experienced, so far, a withdrawal of their members, the CSTO evolution is interesting because of its membership dynamics. The entrance and exit in the CSTO shows that the participation in this organization is connected not only with benefits, but with costs, too.

This study is based on a comprehensive review of the CSTO official documents as well as its leadership's statements on crucial issues. I present the empirical evidence on the way the CSTO can act as potential stabilizer for autocrats and as a Trojan horse upon which Russia could exercise its influence over other members.

2 The CSTO: an overview

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, an important issue for post-Soviet republics was to guarantee their security in the post Cold War

reality. In 1992 the Collective Security Treaty (CST, the previous name of the CSTO) was signed with this aim, within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In the early 1990s all actual CSTO members (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan) as well as Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan joined the organization. It was a period of great political uncertainty and there was the need to fill security gaps emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Post-Soviet republics had to restructure their national armies, and many of them found reasonable to coordinate their military and security policies with Russia, the legal successor of the Soviet Union and of a big part of its military structures (Hoffmann, 2014).

Nevertheless, during the turbulent 1990s, the CST experienced stagnation. Despite ambitious rhetoric, this agreement mostly existed on paper. In practice, the CST was inefficient, with severe contradictions among its members (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010). At the end of the 1990s, the CST found itself in crisis. An overall deteriorating security situation in post-Soviet countries demonstrated the inability of the CST to solve security problems in the region. Separatist movements and the establishment of separatist republics in Transnistria, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the war in Tajikistan and Chechnya contributed to the deterioration of the regional security.

The withdrawal of Georgia, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan from the CST in 1999, as well as the parallel development of the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, which was backed by the US, presented potential threats to the CST (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010). The CST was revitalized in 2002, and became an international regional organization: the CSTO. During its gradual construction, the CSTO displaced the CIS military cooperation, and overtook its peacekeeping functions (Flikke, 2009). Initially thought as an organization for all CIS countries, the CSTO currently has only six members. The CSTO has a flexible membership, and any country "sharing the goals and principles of the Organization and being ready to undertake the obligations [...] and other international treaties and resolutions [...] within the framework of the Organization" can join the organization.⁵

³ The Collective Security Treaty. <http://goo.gl/iWc2fa> (last access on 6 May 2016).

⁴ Bordyuzha Nikolai. Activities in the Sphere of Military-Economic and Military-Technical Cooperation of CSTO Members. <http://goo.gl/LqDHww> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

⁵ Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, dated October 07, 2002. <http://goo.gl/tS2TUF> (last access on 6 May 2016).

The commitment to the collective security is embedded in the Article 4 Clause 1 of the Treaty, stating that “[i]f one of the Member States undergoes aggression (armed attack menacing to safety, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty), it will be considered by the Member States as aggression [...] to all the Member States of this Treaty”.⁶ In case of an aggression in one of the member states, and after its formal request, the other CSTO members will provide it “with the necessary help, including military one[.]”⁷ If the CSTO decides to intervene militarily, then it has to inform the UN Security Council on its decision, but it does not need its approval,⁸ overcoming the possible veto of the members of UN Security Council (except Russia).

The aim to coordinate the CSTO members’ positions on crucial issues in international affairs, especially if they are important for Russian leadership, has been partly achieved. For example, the CSTO members have similar opinions on the current war in Syria Ziegler (2015).⁹ Nevertheless, in the case of Russia-Georgia war, no CSTO member has recognized the break-away territories, though the common official position was relatively consolidated. In a common declaration, the CSTO members were “deeply concerned by Georgia’s attempt to resolve militarily the conflict in South Ossetia” and supported “Russia’s active role in promoting peace and co-operation in the region[.]”¹⁰ As Allison (2004a) points out, the CSTO members have been generally reluctant to issue common foreign policy statements.

Since the early 2000s, the organization has been gradually developing. The decisions of the Collective Security Council (CSC), the highest body

⁶ The Collective Security Treaty on May 15, 1992. <http://goo.gl/6GkjWo> (last access on 6 May 2016).

⁷The Collective Security Treaty. <http://goo.gl/iWc2fa> (last access on 6 May 2016).

⁸ For CORF interventions, see Collective Operational Reaction Forces. Press Release 2010. <http://goo.gl/HWhfA6> (last access on 6 May 2016). For peacekeeping operations, see Agreement on Peacekeeping Activities of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. <http://goo.gl/rJqmNT> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

⁹ A Statement to the Press After the Meeting of the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. 23 September 2013. <http://goo.gl/vjHnZw> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

¹⁰ Official Website of the President of Russia. Declaration of the Moscow Session of the Collective Security Council. 5 September 2008. <http://goo.gl/1AgPGK> (last access on 6 May 2016), author’s own translation from Russian.

of the CSTO, and the consequent implementation decisions of the Council of Foreign Ministers, Council of Defence Ministers, and the Committee of the Secretaries of the Security Councils have become mandatory for all members (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010). In his 2004 study on Central Asian regionalism, Allison (2004a) highlighted that regional frameworks with their participation “are unlikely to be principal actors in serious crises in the future within Central Asia”. Indeed, this prediction was true in the case of the non-intervention in a Kyrgyz crisis. There are different explanations of the reasons of non-intervention. Bond and Koch (2010) suggest that Russia was hesitant to engage in the Kyrgyz conflict settlement because of an unfavourable public opinion, potential legality issues, as well as concerns about financing and devising of the mission. Aris (2012) highlights that there was a division between the CSTO members over a possible intervention: Uzbekistan feared that Russia could use the intervention to establish a military basis in Osh, whereas Belarus granted asylum to the ousted Kyrgyz president Bakiyev, and refused to extradite him. Nikitina (2012) argues that, in legal terms, the request of the Kyrgyz government for the CSTO intervention did not qualify, because it directly appealed Russia, not the CSTO. She further claims that the CSTO was hesitant to intervene because it would have meant support for former oppositional and revolutionary forces.

In 2009 the Collective Operational Reaction Forces (CORF) was established, to “respond rapidly to threats and challenges of the members.”¹¹ The CORF cannot be deployed, however, to resolve disputes among the CSTO members.¹² The CORF contingents can be deployed after a request of a member state and a decision of the CSC.¹³ Since 2003, military exercises of CSTO peacekeeping forces and the CORF are regularly conducted, training anti-drug, anti-terrorist, and illegal migration operations (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010). These exercises have involved up to several thousands of military personnel, as during the exercises “Vzaimodeistvie-2009”.¹⁴

In 2007 an agreement on CSTO peacekeeping activities was signed, creating peacekeeping

¹¹ Collective Operational Reaction Forces. Press Release 2010. <http://goo.gl/HWhfA6> (last access on 6 May 2016), author’s own translation from Russian.

¹² See footnote 11.

¹³ See footnote 11.

¹⁴ See footnote 11, pp. 12-13.

forces on permanent basis.¹⁵ The CSTO also aims to create a common military policy, by integrating members' military enterprises, making them part of Russian military corporations.¹⁶ In December 2014 Putin announced that the Russian National Defence Control Center will work for all CSTO members to improve coordination and controllability of the defence systems and troops.¹⁷

As Allison wrote, after the revival of the CSTO in 2002 the main weakness of the organization was that Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan opted out, and other Central Asian members were rather sceptical about the capacity of Russia to conduct an effective and impartial military operation in the region. However, the CSTO is still a functioning organization.

3 Color revolutions as common threat

According to Collins (2009), security regionalism, at least in the post-Soviet space, is generally more successful than the economic one, as economic integration foresees liberalization, which could threaten the personalist rule. As she argues, patrimonial authoritarian regimes are firstly interested in preserving their rule and in maximizing their wealth, which negatively affects economic regionalism. Security regionalism is possible if countries agree on the existence of common threats. This is also assumed by much of the literature on alliance formation (e.g., Morrow, 1991, Snyder, 1984, Walt, 1987)). Nevertheless, for the case of the CST, Allison (2004a) highlights that the CST failed to establish itself as security provider because of, among others, the lack of common adversaries (except for Talebans). The CSTO members have disagreements on several issues (e.g., Norberg, 2013), and do not seem to have a common external threat (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010). What has increasingly united the CSTO members after color revolutions and popular uprisings in Arab countries is the threat stemming from within a country (viz.,

pro-democracy protests, which are, in view of the CSTO members, organized and coordinated from abroad).¹⁸ This common threat has motivated the target autocrats to adopt measures, both unilaterally and multilaterally, to avoid diffusion of pro-democracy movements, which could lead to a regime change (Silitski, 2010a, Bunce and Wolchik, 2011, Finkel and Brudny, 2012, Koesel and Bunce, 2013, Korosteleva, 2012).¹⁹ According to Allison (2013), fears of color revolutions pushed the illiberal CIS leaders to coordinate their policies with Russia, and to seek reassurance in a firm Russia's support in case of crisis.

The threat perception of the CSTO members changed after the color revolutions in the 2000s in Serbia, some post-Soviet countries, and Arab uprisings. Whereas at the beginning the common threat was the Islamist radicalism stemming from Taleban-ruled Afghanistan (Allison, 2004a), in the second half of the 2000s, the CSTO members have started to worry increasingly about a possible contagion of color revolutions, and redefined the objectives of the organization (Silitski, 2010a). For example, after the color revolutions the CSTO modified the scenarios of its military exercises, taking into account internal protests (Yurgens, 2011). After the Arab Spring, the CSTO members concentrated increasingly on collaboration in information technologies. After several informal meetings they elaborated a common plan of activities in the information sphere, aimed at "discovering the attempts of an external influence on the state or on the public opinion".²⁰ In 2010, after the Kyrgyz crisis and the inability of the CSTO to react, the CSTO members have empowered the organization to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity, not only from external threats, but from internal ones, too (e.g., Yurgens, 2011). Indeed, the member states decided to amend some articles of the CSTO Charter. For example, Article 8 was extended, by adding that

"[t]he Member States shall take measures to creation and getting function within the framework of the Organization of the system

¹⁵ Agreement on Peacekeeping Activities of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. <http://goo.gl/rJqmNT> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

¹⁶ Bordyuzha Nikolai. Activities in the Sphere of Military-Economic and Military-Technical Cooperation of CSTO Members. <http://goo.gl/LqDHww> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

¹⁷ Belarusian Telegraph Agency: CSTO States to Connect to Russia's National Defence Control Center. 23 December 2014. <http://goo.gl/CJo6OK> (last access on 6 May 2016).

¹⁸ CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha on April 10 Spoke in Minsk at the Round Table on External Interference and Color Revolutions. 11 April 2014. <http://goo.gl/yttCvB> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

¹⁹ For an empirical analysis of democratic diffusion see, for example, Gleditsch and Ward (2006).

²⁰ Kommersant Interview with Nikolai Bordyuzha on 26 March 2013 (www.kommersant.ru/doc/2154809) (last access on 25 May 2016), author's own translation from Russian.

of response to crisis situations menacing to safety, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Member States.”

Article 12 was also amended, by stating that resolutions can be adopted by a limited number of member states, avoiding the consensus vote. In August 2011, after the informal summit of the CSTO heads of states (and during the ongoing Arab uprisings), Bordyuzha announced that the CSTO members

“agreed on [...] using the CORF after an appeal of the legally elected head of state in the event of the need to protect the constitutional system in this country.”²¹

In official documents of the CSTO, internal opposition and pro-democracy movements do not figure as potential threats. The perception of these threats is, however, evident after looking at events organized regularly by the CSTO for high rank officials, bureaucrats, political analysts, and students from member states, to discuss common problems and current security issues.²² These events take part in all member states, and are often devoted to the discussion of color revolutions as initiated and sponsored from abroad.²³ External powers, in the CSTO leadership’s opinion, employ “special categories of provocateurs (mercenaries, terrorists, and extremists)” to initiate color revolutions, which are successful in countries with favourable conditions and infrastructures in form of NGOs financed by external forces.²⁴ As terrorism and extremism are among the threats declared by the CSTO,²⁵ pro-democracy protesters or internal opponents could be labelled as externally financed terrorists, therefore enabling a CSTO intervention, if there is enough political will and consensus among the

²¹ CSTO Worries about the Problem of Information Security. 30 August 2011. <http://goo.gl/MK2M5I> (last access on 6 May 2016), author’s own translation from Russian.

²² See, for example, the round table “Color Revolutions: the Role of the External Factor and the CSTO” in December 2013. <http://goo.gl/GpHn35> (in Russian), and the round table in Minsk “Cooperation of Government and Society to Counter External Interference and Color Revolutions” on 10 April 2014. <http://goo.gl/It1BOr> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

²³ See footnote 22.

²⁴ The CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha Spoke on April 10 in Minsk at the “Round Table” on Countering External Interference and “Color Revolutions”. <http://goo.gl/s362kI> (last access on 6 May 2016).

²⁵ Collective Operational Reaction Forces. Press Release 2010. <http://goo.gl/HWhfA6> (last access on 6 May 2016).

CSTO members. The CSTO Secretary General confirms this hypothesis:

“The line of the CSTO is non-interference in the political process and political life of our countries. We are interested in [...] ‘color revolutions’ only from the viewpoint of external interference [and] [...] on the formation of necessary conditions for overthrow by force of lawfully elected governments, or conducting various protests.”²⁶

Similarly, the Belarusian president Lukashenko said that an external military intervention in a CSTO member is highly unlikely in contrast to a coup d’état.²⁷

Information war increasingly figures as a threat for the CSTO members. At the round table of the CSTO Analytical Association and University League,²⁸ the information war was described as

“rapid spread of specially selected information aimed at the modification of people’s behaviour and mind of people that is similar to terrorist activities.”²⁹

According to the participants of the meeting,³⁰ in this form of information warfare, specific misinformation is prepared and distributed using “methods of massive psychological treatment of users of the social networks and population”, aiming at

²⁶ Secretary General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization N.N. Bordyuzha on 19 December 2013 on the Round Table - “Color Revolutions: the Role of the External Factors and the Line of the CSTO”. <http://goo.gl/I2vwHF> (last access on 6 May 2016), author’s own translation from Russian.

²⁷ Belarusian Telegraph Agency: Belarus and Russia Have a Common Position on the Further Development of the CSTO. 30 August 2011. <http://goo.gl/7H3wTO> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

²⁸ The CSTO Analytical Association is a network of think tanks from the member states. The University League was set up in 2014 as a network of research institutions at different universities across member states. The research institutes carry out research on different aspects of security. See, for example, the Russian government-owned newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta: The University League of the CSTO Will Be Created in Yekaterinburg. 14 February 2014. <http://goo.gl/IOsa42> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

²⁹ “Round Table” at the CSTO Secretariat by the CSTO Analytical Association and the CSTO University League. 18 October 2014. <http://goo.gl/osG4Mo> (last access on 6 May 2016), author’s own translation from Russian.

³⁰ See footnote 29.

“the distortion of moral values, blocking civilized code of the nation and ultimately the destruction of the security of the state.”³¹

To address cyber-security problems, the CSTO has set up a common coordination center to combat cyber threats, in which the CSTO members will exchange information on channels, trying to disrupt their informational networks.³² The real purposes are likely to be hidden behind Bordyuzha’s declarations on the coordination center. He has highlighted that nowadays

“you do not need armed forces, special units, or subversive groups. Internet and [social] networks are enough to explode the situation in any country. [...] Many times we have seen how technology helped to overthrow regimes by force. By the way, this happened in Ukraine.”³³

4 The CSTO as unconventional stabilizer

4.1 Benefits of being into the CSTO

The major benefit of being part of the CSTO is its declared ability to guarantee security (via Russia) to its members, as many of them have weak national defence structures (e.g., Hoffmann, 2014). Moreover, the CSTO provides a legal framework for obtaining weapons and military equipment from Russia at preferential (discounted) prices (e.g., Cooley, 2012).³⁴ In 2014 the CSTO members bought Russian weapons for US\$650 millions, and the orders for discounted weapons and military equipment have increased ten times from 2004 to 2014.³⁵ Nevertheless, this

³¹ See footnote 29. Ironically, the level of media of the CSTO members fits well into this category. The actual CSTO members rank in the Freedom House’s Freedom of the Press 2015 global ranking (<https://goo.gl/458zTA>) between 135th (Armenia) and 194th (Belarus) out of 199 countries under analysis.

³² The CSTO Press Release. 10 April 2015. <https://goo.gl/rGDGIX> (in Russian) (last access on 25 May 2016).

³³ See the Russian government-owned newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta. Bordyuzha: CSTO Does Not Consider NATO as an Enemy. 26 December 2014. <http://goo.gl/wTTtMa> (last access on 6 May 2016), author’s own translation from Russian.

³⁴ Dmitry Medvedev Has Simplified the Supply of Weapons to the CSTO Partners. 8 May 2009. <http://goo.gl/GXYhJ6> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

³⁵ Press Conference of CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha on January 30th, 2015, in the International Multimedia Press-Center of the Agency “Rossiya-Segodnya”. 30 January 2015.

is also one of the decisive levers of Russia over the other CSTO members, who cannot afford expensive weapons.

Besides tangible benefits, the CSTO can be seen as legitimacy provider for its members (e.g., Allison, 2008, Aris, 2012). It is rather unlikely that autocrats directly advocate autocracy through an international platform, and publicly acknowledge their rules as undemocratic. On the contrary, they often pay lip service to democratic forms of rule (Börzel et al., 2015). Nevertheless, autocrats try to discredit Western democracy promotion, local pro-democracy movements, NGOs, as well as to promote the notion of non-intervention (D’Anieri, 2014). The CSTO members publicly promote state sovereignty and the importance of socioeconomic stability, which are likely to favour regime stability. In the CSTO official documents as well as in the discourses of the Secretary General and the CSTO heads of states, the notions of sovereignty, stability, and non-interference in domestic affairs is fundamental.³⁶ The CSTO members believe that pro-democracy movements are none other than actions planned by external powers for destabilizing target political systems.³⁷ As the CSTO members have control over the media, they can manage what is reported about the CSTO, shape public opinion, and de-legitimate norms of other organizations, such as the OSCE and NATO (e.g., Jackson, 2014). Indeed, much attention is devoted to the common information policy. For example, the journal “Soyuzniki” (Allies), the TV program “Soyuzniki” at the TV channel MIR, and the radio program “ODKB. Global’naya Politika” (The CSTO. Global Politics) at the radio station “Goloss Rossii” (The Voice of Russia) inform the population about the cooperation in collective security.³⁸

The CSTO promotes a positive image of itself through different initiatives. For example, the CSTO Secretariat with the Gorchakov Fund or-

<http://goo.gl/XIYIXe> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

³⁶ The Concept of Collective Security of the CSTO Member States. <http://goo.gl/kkztlI> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

³⁷ The CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha Spoke on April 10 in Minsk at the “Round Table” on Countering External Interference and “Color Revolutions”. <http://goo.gl/s362kI> (last access on 6 May 2016).

³⁸ Speech by the CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha at the International Workshop Academy CSTO on 20 November 2012. <http://goo.gl/T0jc0j> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

ganizes seminars for young experts and political scientists from the CIS countries.³⁹ In 2013 the CSTO Analytical Association was set up. It builds a network of think tanks of the CSTO members to strengthen

*“informational potential of the CSTO” and to develop strategies for a coordinated information policy, which is “beneficial for the CSTO members[.]”*⁴⁰

Since recently, the CSTO provides a platform for exchange among university students from the member states. In 2015 the CSTO organized the CSTO simulation model in Armenia, similar to the famous Model UN. It has been announced that the most active participants of the CSTO simulation will be given them the opportunity to study in Russia.⁴¹ There is already an intensive exchange between students of military schools and military personnel of the member states. Since 2005 there is an agreement on studying of military personnel of the CSTO members in Russia, with the aim to create a common system of military education for operative compatibility of the national troops.⁴² Every year up to one thousand students from the CSTO members enroll in Russian military and civilian schools with waived fees.⁴³

There are regular sports competitions among military staff of member states, which could be trivial, however they are an effective system of integration for the multi-cultural CSTO members (e.g., Frost, 2009). In 2013 a motorbike parade with a slogan “Vместе - My Sila” (Together We Are Powerful) started in Belarus and went through Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and ended in Tajikistan. This event was dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the CSTO with the aim

*“to popularize the ideas of collective security, the ideas of joint activities in the field of security, the common defence of national interests, territorial integrity, sovereignty.”*⁴⁴

The CSTO also collaborates with charity organizations, and carries out projects for orphanages, Nakhimov naval schools, and Suvorov military schools.⁴⁵ As the CSTO members have a weak collectivity and a few cultural ties, there are attempts to create artificially a collective identity, shared norms, a sense of we-ness, by referring to the common Soviet past. Many CSTO collective events are devoted to the Great Patriotic War to revive feelings of the Soviet glories as an integrating factor, and to preserve “the spiritual unity of Russia and the countries of the CSTO”, such as the international youth action “The Waltz of Victory”, on 9 May 2015.⁴⁶

Although post-Soviet regionalism is often described in realist terms, namely when a regional organization is represented as controlled by regional hegemonies, liberal interpretations offer useful insights (e.g., Jackson, 2014). Jackson (2014) highlights that, in the framework of post-Soviet security organizations, there is an increasingly high socialization among low-level bureaucrats. Institutional links facilitate the exchange of opinions and create long-term institutional ties. This is especially relevant for the CSTO, as it has a narrow focus on military issues, and particularly affects military officials in the member states.

4.2 Membership dynamics: theoretical underpinnings

So far, the role of the CSTO as regime stabilizer can be associated with Uzbekistan’s membership dynamics in this organization. Bohr (2004) calls Uzbekistan a “regional chameleon” whose “interest in selected regional bodies has waxed and waned”. The country joined and withdrew twice from the CSTO. In 1999, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan withdrew from the CST. In 2006 Tashkent decided to restore its CSTO membership after facing Western critics and sanctions

³⁹ See, for example, CSTO Academy (2012). <http://goo.gl/Ze7exn> (last access on 6 May 2016).

⁴⁰ On the Establishment of the CSTO Analytical Association. 11 March 2013. <http://goo.gl/7NIScX> (last access on 6 May 2016), author’s own translation from Russian.

⁴¹ On the Results of the Model-Conference CSTO Held in Armenia from 17 to 20 February. <http://goo.gl/pnj3VA> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

⁴² Bordyuzha Nikolai. Activities in the Sphere of Military-Economic and Military-Technical Cooperation of CSTO Members. <http://goo.gl/LqDHww> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

⁴³ Speech by the CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha at the International Workshop Academy CSTO on 20 November 2012. <http://goo.gl/T0jc0j> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

⁴⁴ See the report on the Belarusian channel CTV. <http://goo.gl/B1AEwS>, author’s own translation from Russian; see also International Motorbike Parade on Motorcycles MINSK by the CSTO Member States. <http://goo.gl/HG4HzJ> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

⁴⁵ Secretary General Spoke at the Council of the Parliamentary Assembly of the CSTO in Saint Petersburg on 17 April 2014. <http://goo.gl/IW4rUf> (in Russian) (last access on 6 May 2016).

⁴⁶ See <http://goo.gl/5yELB2> (last access on 6 May 2016), author’s own translation from Russian.

following the massacres in Andijan in 2005, where hundreds of civilians were killed by security force (e.g., Miller and Toritsyn, 2005, Fumagalli, 2007, Pikalov, 2014). This case is a good illustration of the alliance theory of David (1991).⁴⁷ His theory of omnibalancing highlights that Third World states often face internal threats, besides external ones, to their leadership. Thus, they join alliances guided by rational calculations “as to which outside power is most likely to do what is necessary to keep them in power” (David, 1991, p. 235). Uzbekistan’s return to the CSTO in 2006 could indicate that the CSTO membership was perceived by the Uzbek regime as able to stabilize its political situation in a certain period (e.g., Yurgens, 2011, Aris, 2014). Hence, the CSTO could play a role in diffusion proofing of protest movements and regime change. Even if the CSTO were just a paper tiger, it could still hedge its member states from criticism of Western countries.

Nevertheless, it has often been a fear in Tashkent that Russia could seek to intervene in Uzbek politics during regime transition, and to install a pro-Moscow leadership. Indeed, in 2012 when Western sanctions were lifted Uzbekistan ceased again its CSTO membership. This decision could be explained by the dissatisfaction of Tashkent with the increased Russian control over the CSTO members through changes to the CSTO Charter that allowed intervention in internal crisis in the member states on the one hand, and the wish for more room for cooperation with Western countries on the other hand (McLean, 2015).⁴⁸ Allison (2004b) argues that the main attraction for the CSTO members could be the Russia’s offer to sell them weapons at domestic prices. Nevertheless, if this would be the only benefit of being into the CSTO, then this fact does not explain why Uzbekistan joined the CSTO in 2006 and withdraw from it in 2012.

Russia’s influence on the other CSTO members is the source of trade-off between security and autonomy, as already delineated in general terms by Snyder (1984). This trade-off theory, however, focuses on whether a country joins an alliance or not, by balancing security benefits of being hedged from external threats against autonomy costs. However, the trade-off should include

security benefits of being hedged from internal threats, along the lines of David (1991).

The withdrawals from the CSTO highlight that the membership in the organization implies not only benefits, but also costs, which could change during the participation in an alliance. Hence, some CSTO members have preferred to withdraw from the organization in certain periods. Russian dominance in the organization is likely to create costs for the other CSTO members, which do not want too much interference into their domestic affairs that may derive from the CSTO structures. Aris (2014) has also en passant mentioned that the CSTO members (except Russia) seek legitimacy from the CSTO membership as well as from other associated benefits. At the same time, they see Russia as a threat and fear that a more active cooperation in this organization could yield a loss of sovereignty.

Benefits and costs of being part of an alliance change over time as highlighted by Morrow (1991). The CSTO membership dynamics shows that the minor members of the organization are heterogeneous in their perception of costs and benefits. Some of them may be less reluctant with respect to others in accepting a rise in influence from the dominant member in exchange of more support (i.e., trading-off sovereignty for security against domestic upheavals).

Azerbaijan and Georgia, given their withdrawal without reversing the decision, are probably the most unwilling countries to accept more influence from Russia. Uzbekistan, which changed its position four times (it joined and withdrew twice) showed that it is on the edge. A sufficient rise in Russia’s influence or a sufficient decrease of regime stability moved Uzbekistan on a different pattern. Finally, the leaders of the current CSTO members could either be more prone to accept a high level of Russia’s influence or perceive their regimes as less stable. Nevertheless, the fact that, to date, five countries (besides Russia) have never left the CSTO does not automatically mean that for all of them benefits of being into the CSTO are greater than costs. One has to consider additionally that Russia is able to exercise leverage on its neighbours.

4.3 Costs of being into the CSTO

The CSTO membership dynamics shows that there are also costs that could exceed benefits. Azerbaijan’s exit from the CSTO was a manifestation against the Russian stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010). Georgia opted out because of the growing dispar-

⁴⁷ See also Barnett and Levy (1991).

⁴⁸ See, for example, Marek Matusiak, Uzbekistan Withdraws from the CSTO Once Again. The Centre for Eastern Studies, 11 July 2012. <http://goo.gl/d8beYc> (last access on 6 May 2016).

ities with Russia on the status of the break-away republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as Russia's attempts to interfere with Georgian domestic affairs (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010). Moreover, since its independence, Georgia has taken a course on integration with the West, and has never hidden its aspirations to join NATO. Uzbekistan withdrew because its president Islam Karimov was dissatisfied with Tajikistan's management of the conflict situation, as well as with Russia's support of the Tajikistan regime; another reason was Russia's inability to provide security guarantees to Uzbekistan (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010). Summing up, the three countries withdrew because of the dissatisfaction with Russian dominance in the CSTO (Hoffmann, 2014).

Russia is evidently the dominant member of the CSTO, given its sheer size and military power in the region (e.g., Sakwa, 2010, Norberg, 2013). As Norberg and Westerlund (2014, p. 5) highlight, "[t]he CSTO's military capabilities are essentially Russia's", thus making the other CSTO members highly dependent of Moscow in questions of national security. In fact, the CSTO Secretariat is located in Moscow, and its Secretary General is a Russian general who had served as a KGB counterintelligence officer. It is acknowledged that Russia would like to preserve its influence over post-Soviet countries, though they have shown, in different ways, their unwillingness to accept it. For example, Belarus has shown its reluctance to establish the CORF, by boycotting a CSTO summit in 2009 (the year of Belarusian chairmanship in the CSTO), and by delaying signing the CORF agreement (Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira, 2014). Even after a delayed signature of the agreement, Belarusian president Lukashenko declared that the deployment of Belarusian peacekeepers in a CORF mission would require a separate decision of the president (Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira, 2014). This shows the lack of a common vision of the CSTO members on questions of collective security.

Russia would also like to mark its (military) presence in the post-Soviet region and to dominate post-Soviet regional organizations (e.g., Norberg, 2013). It is also evident that Russia seeks to avoid that post-Soviet countries join NATO (e.g., Sakwa, 2010), and would like them into the CSTO. For example, Ukraine was invited several times to join the CSTO.⁴⁹ As Aris (2014, p. 564) highlights, Russia

"has sought to conceal bilateral military arrangements and agreements under the CSTO umbrella in order to wrap them in an air of multilateral legitimacy".

For example, there are CSTO military bases in Armenia and Tajikistan (Norberg, 2013), which are, however, stipulated in bilateral agreements between Russia and the target countries (Aris, 2014). The Russian airbase in Kant (Kyrgyzstan) has been expanded, by justifying it as an organic component of the collective security under the CSTO umbrella (Socor, 2006). Russian troops abroad present a dual edged sword for host countries (e.g., Gibler and Sewell, 2006). On the one hand, they provide sources of income in the area and guarantee security for the host countries.

On the other hand, Russian control of local troops can be a real threat for host countries' sovereignty. This is especially relevant after the recent Ukraine crisis and Russia's involvement in the conflict. Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira (2016) argues that after the Russian annexation of Crimea, the members of the EEU (in her analysis Belarus and Kazakhstan) slowed down their pro-Eurasianist integration rhetoric, threatened by Russia's behavior. On some occasions, leaders of these two countries have also declared to be ready to leave the EEU (Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira, 2016). Thus, since recently we can observe another shift in the perception of threat. In addition to pro-democracy movements, the CSTO members now could fear one of its members. Such a fear has some real grounds: a CSTO intervention can be authorized by a majority vote (Aris, 2014). A warning signal for the CSTO members could be that some of the Russian CORF troops have been deployed either in Crimea or for exercises near Ukraine (Norberg and Westerlund, 2014). Through the CSTO, Russia has the opportunity to control military establishments of the member states because of the joint staff and command structure (Frost, 2009). Russia's dominant position in the organization allows Moscow to enforce collective decisions in favour of Russia. For example, a preliminary agreement of December 2011 states that the CSTO members cannot allow the deployment of foreign military bases on their territory without the consent of the other members. This fact gives Russia a formal veto right over such decisions (Cooley, 2012), and limits foreign policy options of the member states.

⁴⁹ See the Russian government-owned newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta. Bordyuzha: CSTO Does Not

Consider NATO as an Enemy. 26 December 2014. <http://goo.gl/wTTtMa> (last access on 6 May 2016), author's own translation from Russian.

Due to numerous linkages (e.g., cultural, economic) and interdependencies (often asymmetric in favour of Russia) among post-Soviet states, Russia has a wide array of tools for influencing these countries. Russia has demonstrated its ability to interfere with domestic affairs of the post-Soviet states on numerous occasions. For example, it has influenced the electoral outcomes in target countries and helped incumbent regimes to win elections (Tolstrup, 2015a). This could also work in a reverse way. Russia could also use its capacities to make incumbent regimes loose elections by, for example, disseminating critical reports (Szostek, 2015). It is a well-known fact that Russian TV channels are very popular in the post-Soviet countries (Tolstrup, 2009, Szostek, 2015), thus representing a “soft power” tool in Russian hands to influence the populations of the target states.

Some scholars have suggested that Russia could use CSTO as an additional tool to influence the post-Soviet states (e.g., Cameron and Orenstein, 2012, Aris, 2014). Aris (2014, p. 564) highlights that the relational dynamic between Russia and the other CSTO members is a two-way process, namely

“the other members seek to extract concessions from Moscow and to avoid excessive imposition of Russian influence.”

CSTO integration is likely to be connected with material benefits from Russia, such as preferential loans and subsidies (e.g., Cooley, 2012, Aris, 2014). Nevertheless, since Russia’s economy is getting weaker, integration will of its allies could diminish.

5 Conclusion

The CSTO, unlike many international organizations, is characterized by an unusual membership dynamics. Some of its members withdrew and never rejoined it. Yet, one of them withdrew and rejoined twice. Motivated by this peculiarity, I have investigated what were the benefits for which countries joined the CSTO, as well as the costs causing their withdrawal. I have provided an assessment of the CSTO’s potential role in stabilizing its autocratic members against the risk of regime change. The CSTO has proved to be one of the most viable organizations in the post-Soviet space. Indeed, the CSTO membership offers some tangible benefits, such as discounted Russian weapons and reliance on its military support in case of crisis. The latter benefit is hypothetical thought, given the non-intervention of the CSTO during the crisis in Kyrgyzstan. What could be even more important for autocrats

is the rhetorical legitimation of their rule at the international level, something Ambrosio (2008) has highlighted for the SCO. This rhetorical support is omnipresent in the CSTO discourse that, especially after color revolutions, discredits Western democracy promotion and pro-democracy movements. Although I do not quantitatively assess the impact of the CSTO’s instruments on the regime stability, the rejoining of Uzbekistan in the CSTO after the Andijan crisis suggests that the organization plays an effective role in stabilizing its members.

The CSTO members do not only enjoy benefits. The CSTO membership dynamics shows that there are also costs that could exceed benefits. Withdrawal of some CSTO members (caused by the increased Russian dominance in the organization) demonstrates this point. The example of the Uzbekistan membership dynamics well represents the two sides of the coin. Besides the goals declared in the CSTO Charter, the organization is also likely to be Russia’s Trojan horse to enter into internal (military) affairs of the other CSTO members. The litmus test for the CSTO is ahead, for what regards its role as collective security organization and possible stabilizer of the regimes in case of potential crises. For example, some of the post-Soviet autocrats are getting older, therefore the question of succession, which might result in chaos and violence, becomes inevitable.

A critical issue shaping today’s Western foreign policy is international sanctions against Russia, which are likely to continue in the near future. From the paper’s analysis, Russia is the pivotal actor of the CSTO, both for what concerns benefits and costs for its minor members. If sanctions will continue in the long run and have a further impact on Russia’s economic performance, then this may have repercussions on the CSTO members. For instance, Russia could find itself in a situation to cut benefits associated with the CSTO membership, rising the likelihood that a minor member could decide to leave the organization. Alternatively, being constrained to decrease the benefits, Moscow could also reduce its influence on minor members to guarantee their remaining in the CSTO.

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