



## The CSTO Factor in Armenian-Russian Relations

**OE Watch Commentary:** When Armenian authorities arrested former president Robert Kocharian and Colonel-General Yuri Khachaturov in July and charged them “overthrowing the constitutional order of Armenia” (in connection with the March 2008 protest against election results that turned violent), it sparked a harsh reaction in Russia due to Kocharian’s relationship with President Vladimir Putin and the fact that General Khachaturov is the Secretary General of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). As the accompanying excerpted articles from Armenian and Azerbaijani sources report, the arrests have had an impact on Armenian-Russian relations and sparked discussions in Azerbaijan over the possibility of the country becoming an observer, or even member, of the CSTO.

The article from *Inews.az*, a pro-government news website in Azerbaijan, discusses the possibility of Azerbaijan joining the CSTO and notes how Ali Guseynli, the head of the “legal and state construction committee” of Azerbaijan’s Parliament, talked about it “in an interview with local media.” Guseynli’s statement

started the discussions that took place in Azerbaijani media and caused a reaction in Armenia. The article also includes an interview with a political analyst, who mentions how Azerbaijan was “already in the CSTO, and seeing that it indulges Armenian aggression, we left its ranks.” The Azerbaijani government does have good bilateral relations with CSTO members (outside of Armenia), so it is possible that it would have some support in obtaining observer status; however, it ultimately left the organization because of the situation with Armenia over Nagorny Karabakh, which has yet to be resolved.

The article from *News.am*, an Armenian news website, notes Pashinyan’s reaction to discussions of Azerbaijan’s potential participation with the CSTO. It demonstrates that the Armenian government is taking the discussions somewhat seriously and how it intends to reject Azerbaijan’s participation in the organization, if it comes to that. Lastly, the article from the Russian-language version of *Lragir*, an independent news website, discusses the recent visit of Nikol Pashinyan, the Armenian Prime Minister, to Moscow and how Russian officials are concerned with “former President Kocharian and other high-ranking (Armenian) officials being held to account.” While the concern for Kocharian is important to note, the arrest of General Khachaturov has an impact on the CSTO, an organization the Russian government considers important for regional security and to maintain partnerships with member states. Russian government officials and media in Russia consider the arrests a shift in Armenian policy away from Russia and toward the West and while General Khachaturov has been released on bail, the CSTO’s leadership remains up in the air. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Flag of Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).

Source: By UnknownUnknown author ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:CSTO\\_Flag.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:CSTO_Flag.png)) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_the\\_Collective\\_Security\\_Treaty\\_Organization.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_Collective_Security_Treaty_Organization.png).

**Source:** S. Agayeva. “Мы и ОДКБ: О том, почему тема возможного вступления в организацию вызвала шквал обсуждений (The CSTO and Us: Why the topic of membership in the organization caused a storm of discussion),” *Inews.az*, 28 August 2018. <http://www.1news.az/news/politolog-o-polemike-razvernuvsheysya-v-obschestve-vokrug-voprosa-o-vstuplenii-azerbaydzhana-v-odkb>

*There has been a recent, heated discussion in Azerbaijan of the possible entry of the country into the CSTO. Ali Guseynli, the chairman of the legal and state construction committee of Milli Mejlis (parliament) of Azerbaijan, expressed his opinion of the expediency of Azerbaijan’s possible entry into the Collective Security Treaty Organization in an interview with local media...*

*In continuation of the theme, Inews.az decided to turn to political analyst Tofik Abbasov and learn his reaction to this controversy in society...*

*(Abbasov): ...With regard to our possible contact with the CSTO, or adopting observer status in it, I note that the organization is now undergoing a reorganization and new legal requirements are being made for observer status...I am not saying “Yes, I am for the CSTO,” I am saying that it is possible (to join). On the other side, I am certain that where our enemies are present, especially our sworn enemy – Armenia, we must be present, at least in the status of observer...I want to remind you that, having joined a collective organization and facing some unexpected situations, Azerbaijan can leave it at any time. We were already in the CSTO, and seeing that it indulges Armenian aggression, we left its ranks...*

(continued)



## Continued: The CSTO Factor in Armenian-Russian Relations

*“The possibility of Azerbaijan getting observer status in the CSTO and new prospects for military-technical cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan are not coming out of the blue. Azerbaijan is clearly waiting for a reversal of the political situation in the region.”*

**Source:** “Пашинян: Без согласия Армении Азербайджан не может стать наблюдателем в ЕАЭС и ОДКБ (Pashinyan: Without the consent of Armenia, Azerbaijan cannot become an observer in the EAEU or the CSTO),” *News.am*, 10 September 2018. <https://news.am/rus/news/470194.html>

*It is likely understood by everyone that without the agreement of Armenia, these kinds of decisions cannot be made. This was stated by Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, in an interview with the newspaper Kommersant, answering a question about the position of Armenia if Azerbaijan becomes an observer country in the Eurasian Economic Union and in the CSTO...*

**Source:** Sarkisyan, Manvel. “Новая фаза в армяно-российских отношениях и Азербайджан (A new phase in Armenian-Russian relations and Azerbaijan),” *Lragir*, 8 September 2018. <https://www.lragir.am/ru/2018/09/08/133271/>

*On the eve of the visit to Moscow by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, passion burned in both Russia and in Armenia...The blunt statements of officials and political scientists over Moscow's concerns of the internal policies of the new Armenian government and about the expectations of the leadership of Russia even became humorous.*

*The concerns of Russian officials are about the involvement of former President Kocharian and other high-ranking (Armenian) officials being held to account...Moscow does not have any mechanism for influencing Armenian policy – this mechanism was eliminated along with the vassal power of Serge Sargsyan...Pashinyan's visit has one unique aspect – it takes place after the meeting between the presidents of Russia and Azerbaijan...A lot is expected in Azerbaijan of the Pashinyan-Putin meeting. The possibility of Azerbaijan getting observer status in the CSTO and new prospects for military-technical cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan are not coming out of the blue. Azerbaijan is clearly waiting for a reversal of the political situation in the region...*

*...there were hopes in Azerbaijan the “velvet revolution” in Armenia would stimulate Russia's aggressiveness towards the new authorities. For some reason there was a naïve idea to provide Russia with services for “punishing” Armenia...*

## Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity

By Matthew Stein

Since Central Asian states gained independence in 1991, new regional military and security alliances have been created (some of which are Russian-led), new military partnerships with non-NATO countries have been established, a number of joint military exercises have been conducted, over a dozen high-profile incidents of violence and civil unrest have taken place, and military installations have been used by foreign militaries. While this activity gained attention, it has not been collectively compiled. A compilation of this activity can serve as a guide for current and future military and security involvement in Central Asia.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/194880>

