

CIS states form economic union

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, JUNE 1. Russia and four other former Soviet states have set up a new economic alliance tipped to eventually supersede the loose Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan formally inaugurated the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) at a two-day summit of the CIS in Minsk, capital of Belarus, on Thursday. The union, initially endorsed last October, became operational with the election of Kazakhstan's President, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev, as Chairman of the Interstate Council of the EEC on a one-year rotating basis. Mr. Nazarbayev has pushed the idea of a Eurasian union since 1994, but it was not until Mr. Vladimir Putin replaced Mr. Boris Yeltsin as Russia's President last year that the plan took off. Along with the Interstate Council, represented by the heads of state and Prime Ministers of the member-states, the EEC will also have an Integration Committee and an Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. Analysts said the new grouping may become a nucleus for an alternative to the 12-member CIS, which has failed to evolve into something bigger than a diverse mechanism for the former Soviet republics.

In contrast to the CIS, the EEC is a rigidly structured body whose decisions are binding on member-states. Although Russia has a decisive say in the new organisation, with four votes, as against two for Kazakhstan and Belarus each and one for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, decisions must be supported by at least



The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin (second from right), with his counterparts from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze (left), Mr. Geldar Aliyev (third from left), and Mr. Mr. Robert Kocharian (right), at the CIS summit in Minsk, Belarus, on Thursday. — AFP

three countries to become effective. According to Mr. Nazarbayev, trade among the EEC members jumped 36 per cent last year and is set to further grow in the current year.

When the EEC comes into its own, it is likely to be joined by Armenia, a Russia-led six-nation collective security pact, and Moldova, which is rapidly drifting towards Russia in the wake of a Communist victory in parliamentary

and presidential elections earlier this year.

The CIS is currently split into two rival organisations — the pro-Russia EEC and the pro-West GUUAM, which unites Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova. However, GUUAM, set up two years ago, is still unworkable and is already losing its anti-Russian bias as Moscow's influence in the former Soviet Union is on the rise.

CIS SUMMIT / MOVE TO COUNTER ISLAMIC MILITANT GROUPS

Joint forces approved for Central Asia

By Vladimir Radyukhin

MOSCOW, MAY 25. Russia and three other former Soviet republics today approved the creation of a joint rapid-reaction force to fight the growing threat of Islamic militant groups in Central Asia.

The decision was taken at a summit of member-states of the Collective Security Treaty in Yerevan, capital of Armenia, on Friday. As envisioned, the rapid-reaction force will comprise a battalion from each of the four participants Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan — amounting to a total of about 1,700 men. The battalions would be deployed in their respective states, except the Russian force which will be formed on the basis of its 201st division stationed in Tajikistan, but will all be subordinate to a joint headquarters based

in Kyrgyzia. All paperwork must be completed by August 1, clearing the way for the establishment of the rapid-reaction force before the end of the year, the RIA Novosti news agency reported from Yerevan.

The other two members of the Collective Security Treaty — Belarus and Armenia — will later also form regional joint forces with Russia along what was described as strategic directions — the East European one and the Trans-Caucasian one.

The decision to build regional security setups is a major victory for Moscow in its efforts to revive the Collective Security Treaty, which nearly fell apart in 1999, when Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia refused to extend their membership in the pact.

To encourage further defence

integration of collective security member-states, Russia has announced that it will sell them arms at cut-rate prices — the same as are effective for the Russian army.

The collective security summit has also approved a statement on combating terrorism in Central Asia.

“We will continue to jointly rebuff attempts to disrupt peace and tranquility in Central Asia, the statement said. ...We reiterate the readiness of our countries for close cooperation with the international community in defusing the hotbed of tension in Afghanistan and facilitating political settlement of the Afghan conflict under U.N. auspices. We call on all states to implement the 1333 Security Council resolution of December 19, 2000.”

THE HINDU

26 MAY 2001

Moldova moots union with Russia, Belarus

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, APRIL 16. Moldova's new Communist President, Mr. Vladimir Voronin, confirmed reports that his country was mooting joining the Russia-Belarus union.

Mr. Voronin told reporters after talks with the Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, in the Kremlin on Monday that question of accession was on the agenda. We must weigh the option carefully and we want to know whether Russia and Belarus would like us to join their union, the Moldovan leader said. However, he said the issue was not being discussed during his current visit to Moscow.

In a joint communique issued after their meeting, the two Presidents confined themselves to expressing readiness to cooperate in the framework of the CIS (the Commonwealth of Independent States) in efficient use of the available potential for deepening bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation.

Russia is the first country Mr. Voronin is visiting after his election as President on April 4 in the wake of the Communist sweeping victory in parliamentary elections last month. Moldova's Communists had made accession to the Russia-Belarus union one of their main election campaign promises. Russia and Belarus have agreed to move towards a union state and plan to introduce a common currency by 2005.

THE HINDU

167 APR 2001

77 APR 2001

Putin visits Ukraine to support Kuchma

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, FEB. 11. The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, arrived in Ukraine on Sunday, with a risky mission to prop up the embattled Ukrainian President, Mr. Leonid Kuchma.

Mr. Putin's visit comes at a time when Mr. Kuchma faces growing pressure to step down over his alleged involvement in the murder of an Opposition journalist. The scandal flared up last year when Opposition leaders made public tape recordings which appeared to prove that Mr. Kuchma had ordered the killing of Heorhiy Gongadze, editor of an online newspaper critical of the Government. The journalist was abducted and killed last year.

The tapes were made by a former presidential bodyguard who had bugged Mr. Kuchma's office. The Ukrainian President has admitted that it is his voice on the tape, but claims that it has been edited to change what he said.

Opposition parties, from Communists to right-wing nationalists, have supported the demand for Mr. Kuchma's resignation and are planning to launch impeachment proceedings in Parliament. Mr. Kuchma's opponents have set up a tent camp in front of his of-

fice in Kiev and have been holding mass protest rallies. In a major concession to the Opposition, Mr. Kuchma has sacked the chief of the State Security Service, former Soviet KGB.

Analysts in Russia and Ukraine are convinced the scandal has been masterminded by U.S. secret services in order to bring down Mr. Kuchma and replace him with the pro-American Prime Minister, Mr. Victor Yushchenko.

What America fears most is a strong European Council which has built relations of friendship and partnership with the former Soviet republics, writes Mr. Vladimir Malinkovich, a political scientist in Kiev. To prevent this, the U.S. would go to great lengths, such as provoking a conflict in Ukraine.

Seen against this background, Mr. Putin's visit to Ukraine is a clear demonstration of political support for Mr. Kuchma. Moscow is also keen to take advantage of Mr. Kuchma's problems to bring Ukraine closer to Russia.

The political crisis in Ukraine makes its President an ideal partner for talks with Russia, a Moscow daily said last week.

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12 FEB 2001

Russia, Ukraine move closer

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, FEB. 13. The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, has squeezed maximum advantage from the political crisis in Ukraine, persuading the embattled Ukrainian President, Mr. Leonid Kuchma, to rebuild close economic ties between the two biggest Slavic states of the former Soviet Union.

Meeting in Ukraine's industrial centre of Dnepropetrovsk on February 11-12, the two Presidents signed 16 accords on cooperation in energy, space and other spheres.

Mr. Putin was the first foreign leader to visit Ukraine after a major political scandal erupted there last November over alleged involvement of Mr. Kuchma in the kill-

ing of an opposition journalist. The visit and the accords signed were a clear demonstration of Moscow's political support for Mr. Kuchma in his battle for survival against a mounting campaign for his resignation waged by a united opposition with Western inspiration and support.

The leaders agreed to re-link the two countries' electricity grids, which would significantly cut Ukraine's energy costs and open the way for Russian electricity exports to Europe.

Other agreements provide for coordination of industrial policies for joint construction of peaceful-uses missiles at Ukraine's Yushmash, the world's biggest missile plant, and for joint manufacture of civilian aircraft.

The two sides also agreed to facilitate the buying by Russian companies of shares of Ukrainian factories.

Russian majors have recently snapped up Ukraine's aluminium plants and oil refineries and would also like to buy up the international gas pipeline that transports Russian gas to Europe across Ukrainian territory.

After years of trying to cultivate ties with the West, Mr. Kuchma has recently shifted his policies toward Russia. In a recent interview, Mr. Putin said improved relations with Ukraine were Russia's most important foreign policy gain last year. This week's meeting was the eighth between the two leaders since Mr. Putin came to power a year ago.

THE HINDU