

## Some Aspects of the Impacts of the “Russian Factor” in the Post-Soviet Space

### I. Introduction

*“We, the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation (RSFSR), and Ukraine, as founding states of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, having signed the Union Agreement of 1922, hereinafter referred to as the High Contracting Parties, do state that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as a subject of international law and a geopolitical reality, hereby terminates its existence.”* The Preamble to the Agreement on the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States, signed on 8 December 1991 in Minsk, speaks in clear terms: three Slavic states, which considerably contributed to establishing the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, have broken **this Union** up seven decades later. The “nerushimyj Soyuz” disappeared from the East European space and three new entities emerged which have already been establishing and strengthening their statehood for thirteen years. These entities also have been looking for an optimal *modus vivendi* in their mutual relations. Both processes are more than complicated.

The establishing of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which was gradually joined by further nine post-Soviet countries,<sup>1</sup> was understood as a means of alleviating the effect of the fast break-up of the USSR.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays it is possible to say that the CIS did not fulfil this role and that despite a whole range of reviving attempts it did not become a meaningful integration entity bringing any greater advantages to its members.<sup>3</sup> Apparently one of the main reasons for this has to be sought in Russia’s inability, as a key regional player, to reduce some of its ambitions for the sake of the whole and to introduce a really attractive project of integration to potential partners.

The CIS can, as far as the territory is concerned, be divided into three sections: the first of which – **European** – consists of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, the second – **Transcaucasian** – of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and the third – **Central Asian** – of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. If we were looking for deeper (e.g. historically based uniting elements, which would actually clarify the integration within this whole group in a logical way and, above all, positively influence it) it would then be very difficult to find them. In fact the only building element of this integration is the current economic dependence of the individual countries on the former centre – the USSR, i.e., on Russia. Russia, the gravitational force which is also strengthened by the fact that it stands behind some of

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<sup>1</sup> Azerbaijan (24 September 1993), Georgia (3 July 1993) and Moldova (8 April 1994) were the latest to join the Commonwealth. All three joined the CIS under somewhat atypical circumstances. Azerbaijan did so only after the overthrow of the pro-Turkish oriented president Elchibey; this forced Georgia to deal with its problem with Abkhazian separatists supported by Moscow. Moldova had to take similar path due to Transdnistria.

<sup>2</sup> The note that the CIS was “the biggest fig leaf in the world,” behind which one was dividing Soviet heritage, is fairly fitting under the circumstances. *Globe, P., Forget the Soviet Union. In: Foreign Policy 86/1992, p. 56.*

<sup>33</sup> Possibly, the only such advantage is the relatively low price of the Russian oil and gas for some of the members of the CIS, particularly for Ukraine and Belarus, but this can be considered as an issue of Russian–Ukrainian or Russian–Belarusian relations rather than a preference implied from the membership of these countries in the Commonwealth.

the separatist groups threatening the integrity of, e.g., Georgia or Moldova. These countries cannot solve the problems with separatists without the involvement of Moscow.

From Moscow's point of view if we are looking for a space within the CIS that would nonetheless be more prone to integration, then, considering the above mentioned blocks, it would mainly be the European section. In these sections there are: tighter historical and cultural links, certain common economic interests, ethnic and psychological affinity of the population, and further, a (to some extent) still functioning interconnection of the surviving elite from the USSR era. Within the mentioned European space Moldova underwent not only different historical development. It has a population, seen from the ethnic point of view, closer to Romania than to Russia and lower integration potential. Moldova is also experiencing a somewhat different post-Soviet presence than its Slavic neighbours.

The greater interest of Russia in Belarus and the Ukraine is naturally given by the already mentioned historical closeness. However, the behaviour and the possibilities of the political elites also play an important role. While the countries outside of the European space of the CIS have often found their more or less natural allies outside of Russia the Belarusian and Ukrainian leaderships look back to Moscow with considerably more intensity. In the case of Belarus it is actually a virtue made of necessity since President Lukashenka, due to his authoritarian way of government and systematic violation of human rights, cannot really choose his foreign partners. The only countries, aside from Russia, with which the Lukashenka's regime keeps friendly relations are China and some Arabic countries. They are, however, too far away from Belarus. The Ukraine differs considerably in this aspect from Belarus. However it keeps the Eastward vector of its policy in case of collision in its relations with the West. This vector determines the mutual relations by a whole range of democratisation measures to which Kiev does not show much understanding. Moscow does not burden it with such problems. Incidentally, it is the same as in the case of Belarus.

## **II. The Development of Russian Understanding of the Relation to Post-Soviet Countries from Yeltsin to Putin**

To summarize briefly, the Soviet Union broke up as a result of long influence of historical and economic factors. These factors were accelerated by the attempted communist revenge on Moscow in August 1991, which, in a moment critical for the existence of the USSR, cut through political and economic interests of national elites. In most cases these interests were interpreting and at the same time skilfully exploiting the mood of the majority of the population in their respective federal republics. The speed with which the break-up of the USSR took place was principally influenced by the conditions under which the succession countries began building their regained statehood.

No matter how noble the words of the declaration announcing the creation of the "Commonwealth of Independent States" had been, with its promises of true cooperation among the individual states on principles of equality, mutual respect, sovereignty and prosperity- soon everything was different. The main agent, Russia, immersed itself in solving its own problems. In the sphere of domestic politics it was solving the question of transition into market economy, in the area of foreign politics it was the transformation of its

relations with the West where it did not have the appropriate capacity to build new relations with its renewed partners.

After the break-up of the USSR, Russia, under the leadership of Gaidar's government in 1992–1993, set out on the way of radical reforms meaning a sharp diversion from the surrounding countries. Gaidar's strict fiscal policy did not correspond with the inflation-supporting "socially oriented" attitude of the then Ukrainian, Belarusian and other governments. Therefore, the existence of the common currency (ruble, which the CIS countries inherited from the former Union) was a great burden for Moscow at the beginning of the 90's; because, it meant "importing" inflation from the former federal republics into Russia.<sup>4</sup> This was one of the reasons why during the first months of existence of the CIS Russia did not care much about becoming close with the former federal republics.

The economies of the succession countries were influenced by the break-up of the USSR, most noticeably those countries which were deeply integrated in the Soviet economy. Belarus delivered some 80-90% of its production into the intra-republic exchange of goods. It received 96% of all components of industrial production from the federal republics.<sup>5</sup> Ukraine was in a similar situation; its case further shows that it was necessary to face not only the break-up of the common market, but also the consequences of the often illogical division of labour among the republics when the Ukraine had negative balance with other Soviet republics in the foods industry and in the agricultural production.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the CIS failed in this for the new states key, and definitely the most difficult moment, and that CIS contributed only very little to overcoming the problems, inevitably had to be reflected in the further development of the CIS through the intensity of the integration process.<sup>7</sup> The declared intentions and diverse thoughts inducing analogies between the CIS and the European Union remained buried under a layer of chaos and struggle for survival which accompanied the first years of existence of the newly created countries.

## II.1. First Attempts to Regain the Lost Influence (1993–1995)

A more intensive movement in the area of Russian officials' considerations about the CIS appears in 1993, when in the concepts of the foreign policy (January) and the military policy (November), it is possible to perceive certain amount of dissatisfaction by Russia with the process of rapprochement with the West. This rapprochement was felt especially towards the USA, which was not running according to Moscow's expectations and which aspired to equal partnership that would again assure its freshly lost status of

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Gaidar, Y., *V dni poraženij i poběd*, Moscow 1996, pp. 48 – 53.

<sup>5</sup> Organized by Krojberg, S.; Grabovski, S., Unzer, J., *Vneshnaya politika Rossiji: ot Jelcina k Putinu*, Kiev 2002, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> *Narodne gospodarstvo URSS v 1990r.*, Kiev 1991, pp. 5, 16, 296.

<sup>7</sup> "In 1992–93 it was possible to do many things, but the chance was wasted. Russia was not interested in it [the creation of the common economic area] and other members of the CIS did not show sufficient effort to bring their economies closer to each other, to create unified economic infrastructure. The result was the reorientation of the economic relations, which pushed the former Soviet Republics, having obtained independence just recently, even further away from the idea to maintain common economic area." Primakov, Y., *Gody v bolshoj politike*, Moscow 1999, p. 385.

superpower. *“Simply said, neither objective nor subjective conditions existed for efficient global partnership in the years shortly following the break-up of the Soviet Union. The Western-oriented democrats simply wanted too much and offered too little. They craved for equal partnership with America – or rather for condominium – they wanted to have relatively free hand in the Commonwealth of Independent States and wished for the Central Europe to be no man’s land. However the ambiguity with which they related to the Soviet past, the lack of realism concerning the global power of Russia, the depth of the economic crisis and also the fact that they were not getting broad public support meant that they had not been able to fulfil their promise of stable and truly democratic Russia, which was included in the concept of equal partnership.”*<sup>8</sup> The possibility of equal partnership between Russia and the USA moved further away from Moscow when the liberal economist Y. Gaidar was replaced as Prime Minister in December 1992 by the somewhat more conservative Viktor Chernomyrdin who was a representative of the traditional Soviet “party–economic” elite.

Russia was searching for possibilities to strengthen its influence and quite logically it found this possibility in the space of the former Soviet Union.<sup>9</sup> The newly formulated policy did not only contain thoughts on mutually beneficial cooperation but it also clearly declared Russian interests within the territory that Moscow considered its sphere of influence. In those days - already since the turn of 1991/1992 - the term “Near Abroad,” (which quite clearly delimited the character of Russian interest in the post-Soviet states) was in circulation.<sup>10</sup> *<Near Abroad> became the motto supporting the policy which put the biggest stress on the necessity to reconstruct a certain viable structure in the geopolitical space previously ruled by the Soviet Union, while Moscow should have appeared in the leading and decisive post.”*<sup>11</sup>

In the ground principles of this conceived Russian policy, towards partners in the CIS, the tendency was incorporated to keep them within the sphere of Russian influence combining political, economic, yet also pressure means. Based on Yeltsin’s message to the State Duma the substance of the Russian policy in the “Near Abroad” in the middle of the 90’s was summarized by Yurij Afanasyev, the then chancellor of the Russian State Humanities University:

- Strong Russia is the most effective guarantor of stability on the whole territory of the former Soviet Union
- Russia should fulfil the role of peacemaker in the post-Soviet political space
- The key aspect of Russian foreign politics is strengthening the CIS
- The integration within the CIS should not damage Russia’s own economic interests

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<sup>8</sup> Brzezinski, Z., *Velká šachovnice. K čemu Ameriku zavazuje její globální převaha*, Prague 1999, pp. 109–110.

<sup>9</sup> *“The development of the Commonwealth of Independent States corresponds with the existential interests of the Russian Federation and the relations with the states of the CIS are a serious factor for incorporating Russia into world political and economic structures.” Ukaz prezidenta RF ot 14 sentyabrya 1995 goda N 940 „Ob utverzhdeniji Strategicheskogo kursa Rossijskoj Federacii s gosudarstvami-uchastnikami Sodruzhestva Nezavisimich Gosudarstv.“*

<sup>10</sup> *The Baltic States gradually disentangled from this group. The other post-Soviet states are still more or less regarded in this way today.*

<sup>11</sup> Brzezinski, Z., *ibid.*, p. 110.

- When defending legitimate state interests, Russia has the right, if necessary, to act resolutely and firmly
- Russia is obliged to protect the interests of Russians living in the “Near Abroad.” If their rights are infringed, it is not only an internal matter of the country where they live but it is also a matter concerning the Russian state.<sup>12</sup>

Russia told itself,<sup>13</sup> as well as the rest of the world, that it had its sphere of interests with the vital interests lying close behind its borders. In this message, Moscow announced what it wanted and repeated its intentions in the presidential decree: *The Strategic Course of Russia with States– Members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (14 September 1995)*. While the aims are formulated quite clearly, the methods on how to reach them are described rather vaguely. The problematic nature of Russian attempts to reunite the post-Soviet space was embedded-- in this phase in the fact that Moscow had little to offer. Its power was supported by the internal problems in other countries to which it itself (in some cases) contributed considerably. Russia simply wanted to control, but it offered very little in exchange for this control: “Moscow is interested in exercising military, political and economic control over the former Soviet republics, yet it is not interested in taking the responsibility for securing conditions comparable to those in Russia for the Uzbeks, for comparable child mortality rate in Azerbaijan and for appropriate living standards in Tajikistan.”<sup>14</sup>

## II.2. The CIS as a Springboard into Higher Levels of Global Politics (1996–2000)

With Y. Primakov entering the Ministry of foreign affairs the view of the CIS did not change very much. Following the example of Chancellor A. Goncharov, who led the Russian foreign policy after the lost Crimean War, Primakov refused Russian resignation to the role of an international player and saw a chance for comeback into international politics. Russia was attempting this comeback also on the Balkans, particularly in the CIS, to strengthen Russia’s influence on this territory. The CIS was assigned an important place in Primakov’s attempt to exercise multipolar politics. There, the power of the single real pole (i.e., of the USA) should have been balanced by the sum of the powers of smaller poles with whom Russia, as one of them, would closely cooperate.

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<sup>12</sup> Afanasyev, Y., *A New Russian Imperialism, Perspective, Volume IV, No 3 (February-March 1994)*.

<sup>13</sup> *This moment should not be underestimated. Yeltsin along with Kozyrev wanted to show the Communists and the hawks, who were constantly criticizing the sale of the Russian interests to the West, that this was not the case, and that Russia kept its influence, and it was able to pursue it forcefully. In fact, the renewal of the interest in the “Near Abroad” has very strong reasons in the state of Russian internal politics of that period. For further details see Foye, S., *Russia and the „Near Abroad“, In: Post Soviet Prospects, Vol. III. 12/1995.**

<sup>14</sup> Afanasyev, Y., *ibid.*

Primakov understood the considerable differences in the integration of ambitions single members of the CIS very well and was therefore a supporter of the idea of “multi-speed integration.”<sup>15</sup> That is how the commonwealth of four, (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia) or rather the Union of Russia and Belarus, came into existence. These sub-regional groups within the CIS were rather the evidence that the Russian intention to reintegrate the post-Soviet space was not progressing as Russia would wish: a display of an onward progressing integration of the intended space. Especially, the non-European members of the CIS were looking for their own way to find more natural centres of influence which manifested themselves, for example, when all five Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan entered the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

Primakov understood very well that if Russia should fulfil its integration ambitions, it must above all follow the road of economic integration. It could be a contribution to everyone, and keeping the economic strength of Russia in mind, it could also be a less irritating means of advancing the Russian dominance within the given area. *“The present times are much different from Goncharenko’s days: The empire does not exist nor does the Soviet Union. The current reality is such that there is nobody to doubt the sovereignty of the former Soviet republics nor should they. On the other hand, the politics leading to the rapprochement of the states which emerged on the territory of the former Soviet Union is not by far of second-rate importance. Therefore the questions of economic integration and of creating a common economic area come out and become one of the key tasks of the present-day Russian foreign politics.”*<sup>16</sup>

Considering the real possibilities of Russia undergoing political and economic crisis culminating in default in August 1998, it was practically impossible for Russian foreign policy to carry out Primakov’s intentions<sup>17</sup>. Russia meant even further contribution to its partners as a source of energies for prices that were much cheaper than the prices on the international market, or, Russia at least did not rush their payments.<sup>18</sup> The integration mainly meant founding different (and from the beginning) destined for failure

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<sup>15</sup> *The multi-speed integration is characterized more very eloquently in the presidential decree no. 940: “The multi-speed model of integration proposed by Russia is not obligatory. Nevertheless, the approach of our partners towards this model will be a critical factor determining the level of economic, political and military support from Russia.”*

<sup>16</sup> *Primakov, Y., Rossija v mirovoj politike (K 200-letiju A.M. Gorchakova). Speech from 28 April 1998.*

<sup>17</sup> *The internal political friction in Russia was reflected on the CIS also by naming the then grey Eminence of the Russian politics – Boris Berezovsky – the chairman of the CIS Council. Berezovsky somewhat intensified the activities of the Executive Council of this Commonwealth, however he tried to use them to gain advantage in his own business activities as well as for the sake of the power of the people around Yeltsin known as the “Family”.*

<sup>18</sup> *At this point, let us briefly mention the issue of supplying energy, particularly oil and gas for better prices. These supplies were and are actually a mixed blessing. They do not force these countries to develop more progressive and energy-saving technologies, which leads to their lagging behind the most developed countries of the world. At the same time they do not look intensively enough for ways how to diversify the energy resources. Hence, they are kept in the field of economic and implicitly also of political influence of Russia. Moscow thus gained a very effective possibility to influence these countries (this is valid for Belarus and Ukraine in particular). The evidence that this is not just a hypothetical*

control substructures and ineffectual meetings of the presidents of the CIS. For Russia, the multi-speed integration further got an unexpected tinge of creating structures which were emerging without Russian participation. Apparently the most ambitious project in this sense became GUAM (group consisting of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) based in 1997 which was in 1999 expanded by Uzbekistan (GUUAM).

Besides this unintended consequence, the multi-speed integration today brings yet another problem. The countries which should be attracted by the created gravitation centre – in this case the Common Economic Area, the establishment of which is pursued by Russia together with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine – are embittered, feeling rather left out on the edge of the events. This has manifested itself at the CIS summit in Astana (15 September 2004) where the meeting of the members of the Common economic area was the main event and the CIS summit just formed a sort of formal framework.<sup>19</sup>

Primakov had set the parameters of the policy towards CIS, however they were not much applied. In Yeltsin's understanding of politics within the CIS the political aspects always won over the economic ones. Yeltsin's was unwilling to follow his aims with real vigour. His lack of the usual effort to come to an agreement is obviously based on certain psychological moments when the Russian president, by a whole range of undertaken attempts to revive the new form of the USSR, was trying to rid himself of the brand of the breaker of the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup>

### II.3. Liberal Empire (2001–2004)

Putin's understanding of politics related to the CIS lacks the primarily demonstrated political aspect. Although, the conception of the foreign policy sounds like it would rather support the contrary, the cooperation in the political sphere is underlined herein. Concrete actions of Putin's administration clearly show that the time of Yeltsin's patriarchal approach, accompanied by personal connections to most of the renewed leaders of the succession countries, is over. Further, the stage of pragmatic calculations where 1 + 1 very often equals 2 and where even strong words are not missing has come.<sup>21</sup> In the new Russian policy towards the CIS the stress is put on the economic relations that will keep the Commonwealth lead by Russia together more effectively than any well-meant and well-written political declaration. After the Russian state-owned enterprise RAO UESR has taken over the Georgian energy sector, an account hitting off the new course

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*possibility became clear in the beginning of 2004 when Russia stopped supplying gas to Belarus with the aim to reach its economic goals narrowly connected to the political issues.*

<sup>19</sup> Kravchenko, V., *A vy hot v Astane sadites...*, *Zerkalo nedeli*, 19. September 2004. [www.zerkalo-nedeli.com](http://www.zerkalo-nedeli.com)

<sup>20</sup> "I am persuaded that nobody would dare to bluntly tell the president himself that they are against the Union. [Union of Russia and Belarus]. May be, the <Belovezh complex> manifested itself in Yeltsin's behaviour, when ill-conceived decisions were accepted in an hour... Primakov, Y., *Gody v bolshoj politike*, p. 388.

<sup>21</sup> Let us remind, as an example, of Putin's words, which he said after finishing negotiations with A. Lukashenka in 2002, when discussing the integration of Belarus and Russia it is necessary "to keep the flies and cutlets separate." This was not really a form of a courtesy towards the Belarusian leader, which he did not forget either.

appeared in one political commentary: *“A characteristic change which might become common. Instead of memories past, which are a cordial matter, we will see calculated steps directed towards gaining markets. Russian companies bring the countries of the CIS together on wholly new basis. Just this week RAO UESR has acquired key Georgian energetic objects from the Americans.”*<sup>22</sup>

Economic integration should be the main means of establishing the Russian influence in the “Near Abroad.”<sup>23</sup> As it is possible to tell from Putin’s speech to Russian diplomats, the Russian president is satisfied with the chosen method: *“in the recent years it was possible to develop policy towards the real interests of the country and of its people here [in the CIS].”*<sup>24</sup> Although, he does not outwardly endorse the policy and he thinks over different means and possibilities aloud: *“we still insufficiently use those possibilities of influence which we have. For example credits of trust established in history, friendships and close bonds connecting the peoples of our countries.”*<sup>25</sup>

If the president still has certain inhibitions to talk about the economic means when establishing the Russian influence at the Russian borders, then all the fundamentals are thought out and presented by Anatoly Chubais. He has fully introduced his thoughts in the concept called *Missiya Rossiji v XXI. veke.*<sup>26</sup> Obviously motivated by Dostoevski’s political reflections, in the expansion of Russia he sees a possibility to: *“help our nation to forever overcome the intellectual crisis and to genuinely unite and mobilise it.”*<sup>27</sup> Behind further ideological ballast, which can be attributed to the turbulent pre-election atmosphere and effort to grip the Kremlin strategists, it is possible to find even a quite concrete explanation why it is necessary to be utmost active in the “Near Abroad”. Russia, according to Chubais, is “not only a leader, but it can and must by all means increase, strengthen and consolidate its leading positions in this part of the planet for the next 50 years.”<sup>28</sup> Building a liberal empire has to become the historical mission of Russia, an empire which will be a

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<sup>22</sup> TV RTR, *Vesti*, 7. September 2003.

<sup>23</sup> *“It is necessary to support the integration processes under way in the interregional formations by all means. This is particularly the case in structures such as JevrAzES and the already mentioned Common Economic Area.”* Vystuplenije Prezidenta Rossiji Vladimira Vladimiroviche Putina na plenarnom zasedaniji soveshchaniya poslov i postojannyh predstavitelej Rossiji. Moscow, MZV, 12. July 2004. JevrAzES (Jevroazijskoje ekonomicheskoe soobshchestvo – Eurasian Economic Community) was established in October 2000 (Astana). The founding members are Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. In practical terms, it is a change of the Customs Union into an international economic organization, the aim of which is to create a common customs–economic and customs area.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Chubais, A., *Missiya Rossiji v XXI veke*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 1.X. 2003.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

part of the “circle of great democracies of the Northern hemisphere of 21st century – USA, united Europe, Japan and the future Russian liberal empire.”<sup>29</sup>

In Chubais’ document, which has caused a turbulent discussion in Russia, we can read many strong words. It would be possible to put it side by side with other reflections about the Russian idea, which have been the past time of Russian intellectual elites for a very long time already. In this case, however, it is necessary to become more attentive. Chubais is not just a fanciful dreamer, he is a pragmatically thinking businessman and a politician, one of the most talented Russia has to offer. Nowadays there are already concrete actions looming behind his reflections. That about which he is theorising in his paper is already being carried out under his leadership on a smaller scale by the state-owned enterprise RAO UESR.<sup>30</sup> This enterprise has on the territory of the CIS created power-producing network comparable to the framework of the USSR. RAO UESR under Chubais’ leadership uses the energy problems in the neighbouring countries. It not only exports electrical power there, but even attempts to take over the power-producing facilities. It is therefore necessary to take Chubais’ words from an interview for the TV RTR very seriously: “*We have aggressive plans which touch most of the CIS countries.*”<sup>31</sup> These words are underlined by the logotype of the company he manages, where the background clearly shows the map of the Soviet Union.

Not only Chubais’ RAO UESR has aggressive plans. Using softer rhetoric most of the representatives of the present-day Russia talk about recovering Russian influence in the “Near Abroad.” Chubais only shows how it could be achieved on the practical level. If it is going to be possible to build the liberal empire, it is of course a major question, because the conditions have considerably changed. The post-Soviet space, in which Russia is moving, has several quite new characteristics which do not really create the favourable conditions necessary to build a new empire- even if it were a liberal one.

### **III. Factor Against Factor. What Supports and What Eliminates the Russian Influence on the Territory of the CIS**

A known Russian historian Alexei Miller claims that the Russians have, with a certain delay, “*understood that happiness does not come from territory. Annexation of this or that extra territory to*

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Rossijskoe akcionernoje obshchestvo „Jedinaya energeticheskaya sistema.“*

<sup>31</sup> *TV RTR, Vesti, 7. September 2003. The possibility to use the RAO UESR in purely political context was more than clearly indicated by the Vice-President of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry B. Pastukhov (former deputy to the Russian foreign minister) during his visit in Transdnistria where he announced the intention to persuade the RAO UESR to buy a Transdnistrian power station. The logic of such step is more than obvious. [www.politcom.ru/2004/zloba4703.php](http://www.politcom.ru/2004/zloba4703.php) If the “minister of foreign affairs” of the so called Transdnistrian Republic A. Lickaj departs from the diplomatic formulas without greater problems and says: “As a country we have guarantees from Russia and these guarantees should have a military element” (Maksymiuk, J. *Analysis: Transdnister Wants Talks On „Federal system“ With Moldova*, [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org), 17. September then Pastukhov bets on seemingly more neutral methods although the core idea is the same, i.e., to keep Russian influence in Moldova.*

*Muscovite empire, Russian empire or Soviet Union did not make the life better in many cases.*"<sup>32</sup> This opinion without doubt sounds good. However, it is rather proverbial wishful thinking. Imperial thinking did not disappear from the intellectual equipment of the Russian elites, nor did it disappear from the subconsciousness of the Russian society which is best proved by a new wave of nationalism sweeping across Russia during Putin's government. If the situation were different, Russia would only hardly engage so much in Adzharia, Abkhazia, Southern Osetia or Transdnistria (that is, if we are talking about the places of past, present or future conflicts), or in Belarus or Ukraine (in cases when we mean places where Russia influences the heading of the local regimes).

It is obvious that state aspiring to the status of regional- if not to world power will attempt to establish its influence in the neighbouring countries. The thing is what methods are being used and what are the final aims being pursued. Let us try to answer the questions of what exactly are the strategic aims of Russia in the mentioned space. Can it really come to restoration of Russian hegemony there? What forms could this process take?

### **III.1 The Independence of the CIS Countries is an Indisputable and Long-term Phenomenon.**

Still several years after the new independent states emerged from the ruins of the USSR, discussions of how long some of them were going to manage to keep their independence, and under what condition they would in one way or another re-join Russia, were not scarce. Especially in Russia the return of Belarus, at least of a part of Moldova and Georgia were counted with as a quite sure thing. Variations of what a new union with Ukraine, which naturally has and still is in the centre of Russian interest, could look like were considered. Not only Russia was interested in the variants of mutual closer interconnection, especially among the reform forces coming up against the opposition of the renewed nomenklatura in the new states. This opposition looked up to Russia as to an appealing example because Moscow, despite the colossal problems, first realized quite decisive reform steps towards market economy and democracy. A certain paradox then was that the camp supporting closer ties with Russia had, in this period, been formed both by the pro-reform oriented politicians together with the old cadres who had been unable to reconcile with the break-up of the USSR. The situation, however, began changing in the second half of the 90's:

- a) **The Russian example ceased being attractive.** The "late Yeltsin period" Russia offered very few things worthy of following. The model of the created oligarchic capitalism repelled rather than attracted. A similar situation was on the Russian internal political scene where wages and pensions were not paid and a lot of damage was caused by the protracted war in Chechnya. Public opinion in the "Near Abroad" began slowly averting from Russia also because of the Russian activities aimed against Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova.
- b) **The process of forming political nations was nearing its end or had even ended in the new states.** The nations were characterised by their own social and economic specificities. They had their own system of values, their own ideology and more or less shaped elites. It is possible to

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<sup>32</sup> Miller, A., *My nikogda ne budem sverchderzhavoj*. [www.polit.ru/publicism/world/2004/06/15/georgia.html](http://www.polit.ru/publicism/world/2004/06/15/georgia.html)

observe fulfilling the idea of J. Pilsudski during this period of time saying that: “*it is not the nation who creates the state but it is often the state which creates the nation.*” This is true especially in the case of Belarus or Kazakhstan, where only the emergence of independent states accelerated also the forming of the nation.

The degree of forming political nations in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine is clearly characterised by the public opinion poll (May 2004) carried out by the Russian research institute VCIOM. This poll asked the respondents the following question: “If you could choose, which country would you like to live in?” 51% of Russians, 32% of Ukrainians and 28% of Belarusians answered: “In my own.” Nineteen percent of Russians and Ukrainians and 15% of Belarusians would like to live in the restored USSR. New union of the mentioned republics would be welcomed by 23% Ukrainian respondents, 17% Belarusian and 9% Russian respondents. Twenty eight percent of Belarusians, 15% Ukrainians and 11% Russians would then like to live in the united Europe.<sup>33</sup>

**C) The citizens of the post-Soviet states got used to independence during the period of almost fifteen years**, contrary to some politicians to whom their own political ambitions are more important than the interests of their own nation. Let us remember the steps undertaken by the Ukrainian president L. Kuchma in summer 2004. There are different currencies, the proportion of Russian language in the domestic culture grows less, the ties with Russia are getting weaker, even the interpretations of the history lived through together begin to differ. The border is no longer seen as something artificial but as a simple fact dividing two countries, two nations.<sup>34</sup>

Understandably, this process still has not been fully completed yet. Especially in the behaviour of the elites it can be observed that there are moments when they act on a subconscious reflex: “What would Moscow say about it?” This is obvious especially in Belarus and Ukraine. The episode of the hunger strike of several Belarusian parliamentarians, who sent an open letter to president Putin in which they call for his intervention to improve the morals of president Lukashenka, is very graphic. The interviews of Ukrainian politicians, both governmental and the opposition, given to Russian media where the key part is taken by the description of their relationship to Russia, are also typical. It is obvious that some Belarusian and Ukrainian politicians still have not quite believed in the independence of their countries. Somewhere in their sub-consciousness there is a thought that if Moscow wanted to it could take away their, not that long ago gained, independence. These doubts are then accompanied by the fear of the consequences given by historical experience-- how cruelly was the opposition against Moscow punished.

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<sup>33</sup> Radio station Svaboda, 24. May 2004. [www.svaboda.org/news/articles/2004/05/20040524122308.asp](http://www.svaboda.org/news/articles/2004/05/20040524122308.asp)

<sup>34</sup> In this context the reflections on a single East Slavic nation, i.e., Russian nation, artificially divided into Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian nations, now even separated by unnatural borders, sound somewhat comic. Nikiforov, A., *Odna naciya-raznyje kultury? Russkij zhurnal*, 7. July 2004. [www.russ.ru/culture/20040707\\_nikifor-pr.html](http://www.russ.ru/culture/20040707_nikifor-pr.html)

On the other hand, however, the leading politicians of the respective countries are also guarantors of its independence, because they would not want to end as district clerks on the periphery of the re-established empire. This is very well visible in the cooling down of the President Lukashenka integration enthusiasm after President Putin introduced him to his idea of Belarusian-Russian integration. This would basically mean incorporation of Belarus into Russia and would not leave much space for Lukashenka himself.

### **III.2 The Borders Between the Former Soviet Republics are Untouchable**

The fast break-up of the USSR left neither time nor space to attempt solving the controversial questions related to the borders of the new countries. The Article 5 of the Agreement on the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States says the following about this topic: *“The High Contracting Parties shall recognize and respect the territorial integrity of one another and the inviolability of existing borders under the framework of the Commonwealth.”* The borders of the Soviet republics were confirmed including all their problems which were caused by quite a wanton delimitation of the borders in the Soviet era. This also was the source of many heavy conflicts for disputable territories in the first half of the 90’s when Russia was almost always involved. Russia was usually involved on the side of the country questioning the integrity of the other state. Russia itself, or rather some political powers, then questioned the Ukrainian borders- mainly their control over Crimea.<sup>35</sup>

During 1993–94 the majority of the territorial conflicts went from “hot” into “cold” phase and the solution of the conflict situation was conserved. The borders remained in the original form, although the integrity of the aggrieved countries was doubted by the newly emerged phenomenon of “states” not recognised by anybody else, e.g. Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia, Southern Osetia or the Transdniestrian Republic. Not recognising these bodies is quite a convincing proof that the threat of “balkanisation” in the CIS territory is not on the table. Although Russia used and uses particular separatist groups to exert pressure on the central governments of the given countries it nonetheless keeps certain limits that would not, and probably will not, revert to such a radical steps; for example, to acknowledge one of the separatist territories as a sovereign state, which would have to necessarily happen with Russian military assistance<sup>36</sup>. Even though such step could appear attractive, and some Muscovite hawks would even like it, Moscow is reasonable enough to know what consequences it would have to face: *“Russian military annexation of a territory inhabited by ethnic minorities with separatist dispositions would change that which remains of the other republics into an enemy <sanitary cordon>. This would lead to outside intervention supporting the*

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<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., statement of the mayor of Moscow J. Luzhkhov from 17 January 1997. *That Sevastopol belongs to Russia, this in connection to Luzhkhov’s “raids” of Sevastopol provoked tensions in Russian–Ukrainian relations. Already on 23 October 1996 the Russian State Duma also poured more oil into the fire by passing a resolution stating that Sevastopol “was, is and will be the main base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.”* de Weydenthal, J., *Russia/Ukraine: Talks On Black Sea Fleet Deadlocked Again*, [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org), 13. November 1996.

<sup>36</sup> *Moscow very clearly demonstrated this type of pressure politics in Abkhazia where the local situation forced Georgian President Shevardnadze to join the CIS and some time later to sign the friendship treaty with Russia. The agreement to further keep three Russian bases on the Georgian Territory was a part of the forced concessions.*

*resistance against the Russian domination, to confrontation with the West and the Islamic world, to spreading of violence, isolation of Russia and possibly even to its disintegration.”*<sup>37</sup>

Russia is really trying to avoid direct forms of interference, even though it is often stepping on thin ice. If, in the second half of the 90's, Sevastopol was the favourite destination of trips of the Mayor of Moscow in the first years of the 21st century it is Abkhazia. If there were strong words uttered against Ukraine, now their target is Georgia or Moldova. This became the polygon for testing another variation of how to strengthen the Russian influence in the “Near Abroad” and that is by de facto legalizing the pro-Moscow oriented separatists. It is hardly possible to call the Russian plan to settle the Transdnestrian conflict any different- it was introduced by Putin's close assistant Dmitri Kozak as the *Memorandum on the Basic Principles for the State Structure of the United State* (15 November 2003).<sup>38</sup>

Jane's Intelligence Digest called this Russian proposal of “solving” the Transdnestrian conflict: “*Putin's Moldova Plot,*”<sup>39</sup> It is impossible not to agree with this description. Moscow tried to get around other parties participating in solving the conflict (i.e., OSCE and Ukraine) and behind their backs prepared a document which completely legalises the Transdnestrian separatists. It wanted to create a subject of a federation from the territory the separatists control subject to having factual independence within the framework of a very weak central state. The real intention is covered only sloppily: Gagauzia becomes the third federal subject. Russian gains the status of the official language and a further language can be introduced. It is possible to find more such trickery in Kozak's proposal; however, it is always possible to easily find hints of the real intentions which are “made relative” by equal rights for the other two subjects. Who will get the real profit from, e.g., collecting the local taxes or the gains from the local privatisation (art. 8.b.), or from establishing foreign representations (art. 3.12) is more than obvious.

Russia using the statement of their Foreign Minister I. Ivanov at the 11th Meeting of the OSCE put up an act of the misunderstood benefactor: “*At the request of the leadership of Moldova and Transdnestria, Russia has recently undertaken additional efforts to assist in the settlement of another long-standing conflict – the Transdnestrian conflict. Obviously, these efforts of ours did not go against, but were in line with, those efforts undertaken during the last few years – I stress years – in a pentagonal format involving representatives of the OSCE, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Transdnestria.*”<sup>40</sup> Russia has, nonetheless understood that the plan failed.

By such and similar initiatives or different steps, Moscow just keeps worsening its position within the CIS. Let's look at GUUAM, where there are three countries that face Moscow-supported separatists among the members of this organisation. Georgian president Saakashvili clearly indicates that solving the problems

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<sup>37</sup> Arbatov, G., *Bezopasnost: rossijskij vybor, Moscow 1999. Chapter Dilemy Rossiji v SNG.*

[www.arbatov.ru/mono3.shtml#31](http://www.arbatov.ru/mono3.shtml#31)

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.interlic.md/interviu.php?group=1069054130&lang=rus>

<sup>39</sup> *Putin's Moldova Plot. Jane's Intelligence Digest, 9. January 2004.*

<sup>40</sup> *Vystuplenije Ministra innostrannykh del Rossiji I.S. Ivanova na 11-om zasedaniji SMIC OBSE, Maastricht 1. January 2003. www.mid.ru*

threatening the integrity of the country is his priority. Azerbaijani president Alijev does not lag behind him. Also, Moldovan president Voronin became active in the issue of solving the problems with the separatists. At present, this element has not surfaced yet; however, in the future GUUAM could become the group uniting countries which found themselves under the pressure from Moscow. Moscow's pressure inducing their closer cooperation (and vice versa the deflection from the CIS) would strongly threaten this organisation. This would understandably mean also threatening the Russian ambitions which could threaten the CIS. Finally, the Russian ambitions would be strongly afflicted especially if another member of GUUAM, the Ukraine, would support the above-mentioned politicians. This cannot be under any circumstances elided if V. Yushchenko is elected.

### **III.3 Different Socio-economic Models Exist in the CIS Countries**

Notwithstanding the closely tied economies of the former Soviet republics, set by their co-existence in a single economic space lasting several centuries, (if we do not consider only the Soviet but also the Tsarist period) the economies of the individual countries begin to differ substantially. Although there are a whole range of problems faced by these countries there is a common denominator- the dynamics of the socio-economic processes has different character. The countries of the so-called Slavic triangle and Kazakhstan stand out from amidst the CIS member states.

The situation is more than critical in the remaining countries. The volume of industrial production in Azerbaijan is 36.8%, in Georgia 21.8%, in Moldova 49.1% of 1990's level. The average income at the end of 2003 in Tajikistan was nine times lower than in Russia or in Kazakhstan, in Armenia almost three times and in Moldova twice. Even in the cases of Russia or Kazakhstan it is not possible to talk about extremely high income since it is approximately USD 200 per month.<sup>41</sup> More than one third of the working population in Moldova looks for employment abroad. According to the "Human Development Index" published by the UN, the parameters of the basic socio-economic indicators of the Central Asian and Transcaucasian states dropped to the level of the developing countries of the Near East (not of the Arab oil kingdoms, however) and Latin America.<sup>42</sup> Yet not even the Slavic European states form a homogenous unit. Among them there are considerable differences. For a long time to come, Russia will remain a country in the economy of which the sector of natural resources shall play a key role, a role much more important than would befit a country with such possibilities and ambitions. The Russian prosperity stands and falls with the prices of oil and gas on the international market. This is proved by the development of Russia in the past ten years when the drop of the price of oil on the international market to the level of USD 12–13 for barrel was one of the important causes of a deep financial and economic crisis. On the contrary, the fast increase of the price of oil in 2000–04 is the main source for the so-called Putin's stability. Not even the events surrounding the oil giant Yukos did the

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<sup>41</sup> *Interfax*, 19. March 2004.

<sup>42</sup> *Human Development Report 2004* <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/>

amount of extracted oil decrease which during the first half of 2004 grew by 10.3% in comparison to the same period of the previous year.<sup>43</sup>

Basically, an extensive way of developing the economy when its growth is decided by the prices of the raw materials and the achieved level of their extraction, is reflected also in the economic indices of the country. Russia has stopped being the unreachable example of the best developing (in the first half of the 90's of the least declining) economy for the remaining members of the CIS. It loses the leading position in a range of economic indices. It is clear that at present these are naturally just trends and relative indices, because the absolute numbers are incomparable. In any event, the Russian domination is weakening.

**44**

**Some Economic Indices of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine – 1995–2004/V.**

	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004 (VI.)
<b>Gross Domestic Product</b>						
<b>Belarus</b>	89.6	105.8	104.7	105.0	106.8	110.3
<b>Russia</b>	95.9	110.0	105.1	104.7	107.3	107.9
<b>Ukraine</b>	87.8	105.9	109.2	104.8	108.5	112.7
<b>Industrial Production</b>						
<b>Belarus</b>	88.0	108.0	106.0	104.0	107.0	114.4
<b>Russia</b>	97.0	112.0	105.0	104.0	107.0	107.4
<b>Ukraine</b>	88.0	112.0	114.0	107.0	116.0	115.9
<b>Agricultural Production</b>						
<b>Belarus</b>	95.0	109.0	102.0	100.7	107.0	104.3 <sup>45</sup>
<b>Russia</b>	92.0	108.0	108.0	102.0	102.0	98.6
<b>Ukraine</b>	96.0	110.0	110.0	101.0	90.0	95.3
<b>Capital Investments</b>						
<b>Belarus</b>	69.0	102.0	97.0	106.0	118.0	122.0
<b>Russia</b>	90.0	117.0	110.0	103.0	112.5	112.6
<b>Ukraine</b>	72.0	114.0	121.0	109.0	133.0	152.0
<b>Industrial Price Index</b>						
<b>Belarus</b>	561.0	286.0	172.0	140.0	138.0	126.9
<b>Russia</b>	275.0	132.0	111.0	117.0	113.0	120.9
<b>Ukraine</b>	270.0	121.0	109.0	103.0	108.0	117.3
<b>Consumer Price Index</b>						
<b>Belarus</b>	809.0	269.0	161.0	143.0	128.0	120.8
<b>Russia</b>	231.0	120.0	119.0	115.0	112.0	110.4

<sup>43</sup> *Promyshlenost vyshla na planovyje pokazateli.* [www.polit.ru/publicism/economy/2004/07/20/sovetolog.html](http://www.polit.ru/publicism/economy/2004/07/20/sovetolog.html)

<sup>44</sup> *Stated in relation to the results achieved in the previous year.*

<sup>45</sup> *The data concerning agricultural production of all three states are only available for the period from January to March.*

<b>Ukraine</b>	270.0	121.0	109.0	103.0	108.0	117.3
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Source: Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS<sup>46</sup>

<b>GDP in 2003 in Chosen CIS Countries in Millions of USD</b>				
<b>State</b>	<b>Belarus</b>	<b>Kazakhstan</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>Ukraine</b>
<b>GPD/Rank in the World</b>	<b>17 493/76</b>	<b>29 749/60</b>	<b>443 491/16</b>	<b>49 537/55</b>

Source: The World Bank<sup>47</sup>

Concerning the data shown, it is necessary to add that in the case of Belarus and The Ukraine the supplies of cheaper Russian energy and raw materials hold a considerable share in their economic growth. Furthermore, the earnings from the transit of Russian oil and gas through their territory also flow into the economies of Belarus and The Ukraine. It is still possible to claim that the engines of Belarusian and Ukrainian economy work owing to the Russian energy supplies. Both countries realise this dependence and work on diversifying their resources. This, however, is not a problem that can be solved in a short span of time. One of few further chances which arose for Ukraine, the oil pipeline Odessa–Brody, was destroyed by the agreement on reverse usage. This is significant because it was turned into pipeline from Brody to Odessa. In Belarus after the “gas war,” president Lukashenka instructed the government to look for possibilities to strengthen the energy security of the country. However, Belarus has neither the resources to build new pipelines nor to purchase gas and oil at international prices. Minsk itself admits that it can provide maximum 25% of the country’s energy requirements from sources other than Russian.

Three different models of economy are being gradually shaped in Belarus, Russia and The Ukraine. In Belarus we encounter something, that could be compared to the situation in the USSR in the 1920’s with a certain amount of exaggeration which could be, with a certain amount of exaggeration, compared to the situation in the USSR in the 1920s. Then, during the New Economic Policy (NEP), the bridge from which the economy was controlled was held by the state, and beneath it state supervised small and medium sized private businesses were allowed. Despite that, the private sector offers jobs to approximately 40% of Belarusians.<sup>48</sup>

This system is highly bureaucratic and politicized. For example, a change of ownership relations is considered only a minor issue when the ownership and shareholders’ rights are violated in a striking

<sup>46</sup> [www.cisstat.com/eng.htm](http://www.cisstat.com/eng.htm)

<sup>47</sup> [www.worldbank.org/data/databytopic/GDP.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/data/databytopic/GDP.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> IMF Country Report No. 04/139, May 2004, Republic Belarus: Selected Issues, p. 4. It is necessary to use this information carefully because, as the IMF report states, even the companies in mixed ownership, are counted as private companies in official Belarusian statistics.

manner.<sup>49</sup> The Belarusian form of NEP allows Lukashenka to keep a major part of Belarusian industry operating. This helps Lukashenka to keep the order in the country. Compared to neighbouring states Belarus has practically no unemployment; although, it is kept by means well known from the end of the Communist era in the Central Europe.<sup>50</sup>

The Ukrainian model is closer to the situation in Russia of the Yeltsin's period. An oligarchic type of capitalism is created here which differs from its Russian model in two basic aspects. Primarily, We will not find any industrial sector in Ukrainian economy that would have the same dominating status as the fuel-energy complex in Russia where the Russian Oligarchs concentrate their interest. Secondly, the Ukrainian oligarchy does not stand on the clan nor on the sector base but it originates in regional clans (e.g., the Doneck clan currently holds the power and through the Prime Minister and presidential candidate V. Yanukovich. This clan struggles for further expansion of its power to Dnepropetrovsk's clan. Influential businessman and the son-in-law of the current president Kuchma, V. Pinchuk, belongs to this clan... etc.).

In Russia, with the coming of V. Putin to power, the oligarchic capitalism gradually changes under the pressure of the central power into state capitalism. In state capitalism large corporations owned by loyal oligarchs become part of a regulated state system, which is controlled by the representatives of the politically strongest. In this case the strongest are of the Petrograd clan, completed by the representatives of power elements, mainly of special services. Putin's form of capitalism is neither Lukashenka's command economy nor Kuchma's system based on building political and economic balance among the regional elites; it is something in between. Real cooperation is not simple among so many different economic systems and different styles of political rule in the individual states.

#### **III.4 Economic Relations Among the CIS States Gain Different Character**

Countries such as Armenia, Georgia or Moldova are changed into an object of Russian economic expansion through catastrophic economic situation, little appeal to the western investors, ongoing Russian domination of the foreign trade, long-term economic and cultural relations. Armenia is an example of Russian influence based on the economic domination which, in this case, is wed with the security needs of the country and with the historic influences. It does not possess almost any of its own energy sources. Further, as a result of the struggle with Azerbaijan for Nagorno Karabakh and traditionally tense relations with another neighbour, Turkey, it has only a small chance of influx of greater volumes of non-Russian foreign investments. Under this situation Yerevan has handed the shares of Armenian enterprises worth 93.76 million USD over to Moscow in

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<sup>49</sup> Cf., e.g., the reprivatisation of the Svetlogorsk plant producing cellulose and cardboard. Here, Lukashenka touched the property of Russian owners hidden in three off-shore companies who were controlling the minority share. Chodasevič, A., *Alexandr Lukashenka: „Otkazhutsja platit-akciji zabrat“*, *Nezavisimaja Gazeta*, 10. August 2004.

<sup>50</sup> The IMF Country Report, p. 4, gives the unemployment rate of 2,9% for 2002. Also here, it is necessary to be careful, the unemployment in Belarus is no doubt lower than in the transitive economies, nonetheless, except the artificial employment, the institute of forced holidays cuts the real number of unemployed also down.

2003.<sup>51</sup> Armenia thereby repaid the loan to Russia. It is not particularly difficult to see that using this attempts to assure its own security because the presence of Russian capital in the country strengthens its positions in the conflict with Azerbaijan. Armenia has thereby bound itself even more tightly to a country that, according to the opinion of its leadership, is not only an important economic partner, but also a guarantor of its safety.<sup>52</sup>

Nonetheless, a great interest of Moscow is also being arisen by the "Near Abroad," whose economic situation is not so critical, and does not merely promise Russia the expansion of its geopolitical influence, but also large gains. This is mainly the case of Ukraine, Belarus and some Central Asian states, in particular Kazakhstan. Azerbaijan is therefore a specific case because of its nagging competition with Russia in the area of the Caspian Sea. Russian interests do not collide only with oil extraction in this area but also with the attempts of Baku to build transportation routes outside of the Russian territory. This dormant conflict is also transferred into political issues. The Azerbaijani president, I. Aliyev, visited Moscow shortly after his election. However, the issues of oil and Nagorno Karabakh do not allow the relations to achieve a state of mutual trust and cooperation. This is also confirmed by the results of the public opinion poll asking the Azerbaijanis about their feelings towards Russia. *"Considerable cause of distrust towards Russia lies in its role in the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh. Many people in Azerbaijan think that Armenia and the Armenian separatists could not have occupied 20% of our country's territory without the secret and covert support of Russian soldiers. This opinion is not, with respect to the recent developments in our region, anything surprising. Russia is attempting to re-establish its former influence in our country."*<sup>53</sup>

It is possible to find the most elements from the Chubais' concept of a "liberal empire" in the Russian behaviour in economic relations between CIS countries. This concept, which in the relations to the former Soviet republics basees Russian domination on the economic domination that has its origin in the former USSR. This type of dealing with the "Near Abroad" ensues mainly from the knowledge of energy dependence on Russia and has almost forced the last remnants of political paternalism (of the Yeltsin style) out of the Russian politics.

However, the economic factors are not as strong, as the ideologists of "liberal imperialism" would like. Mainly, the gradual diversification of the economic relations occurs especially where exports and trading with countries outside the CIS prevails.

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<sup>51</sup> *Armenia to pay Russian debt in Armenian companies' shares, 14. May 2003, [www.pravda.ru](http://www.pravda.ru) The portfolio of the companies' shares handed over, is more than interesting. It is probably not very surprising that the geothermal power station in Razdan also belongs among such companies, the acquisition of the shares of the research institutes (Automated Control Systems Scientific Research Institute and Scientific Industrial Enterprise of Material Science) is, no doubt, more interesting.*

<sup>52</sup> *Armenia's Foreign Relations In 2003, A Summary January 14, 2004. [www.armeniaforeignministry.com/pr-04/pr-04/040114vo-summary.html](http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/pr-04/pr-04/040114vo-summary.html)*

<sup>53</sup> *Faradov, T., Vneshnaya politika i obshchestvennoje mnenije (Po materialam sociologicheskogo issledovaniya v Azerbajdzhane), Diplomatiya alyami, 6/2004. [www.mfagov.az/diploamtiya\\_alemi/diplomatiyaalemi6.zip](http://www.mfagov.az/diploamtiya_alemi/diplomatiyaalemi6.zip) According to the survey commented in the study, 12.8% of Azerbaijanis trusts and 30.3% does not trust Russia.*

<b>Exports from the Selected CIS Countries into the CIS and Outside the Commonwealth in 1995–2003 (%)</b>									
		<b>1995</b>			<b>2002</b>			<b>2003<sup>54</sup></b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>CIS</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>CIS</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>CIS</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	100	45	55	100	11	89	100	13	87
<b>Armenia</b>	100	63	37	100	19	81	100	18	82
<b>Belarus</b>	100	63	37	100	55	45	100	55	45
<b>Georgia</b>	100	62	38	100	49	51	100	49	51
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	100	55	45	100	23	77	100	23	77
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	100	66	34	100	35	65	100	34	66
<b>Moldova</b>	100	63	37	100	54	46	100	54	46
<b>Russia</b>	100	19	81	100	15	85	100	15	85
<b>Tajikistan</b>	100	34	66	100	26	74	100	18	82

**Source: Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS**

The provided information shows that the CIS member states keep finding a market for their goods outside of CIS borders. The information also shows that Russia is not a partner for them in this regard. They would be able to assure the placement of their products on the market, mainly due to the fact that they own the majority that “Near Abroad” produces- goods that are available on the Russian market. There existed quite a developed division of labour among the Soviet republics in the USSR; yet, the Russian Socialist Federation had an absolute majority of the all-union manufacturers duplicated on its territory. The information given below shows the imports of the CIS countries, portraying a different picture and confirming the ongoing

<sup>54</sup> The data is for January and November. The countries not included in this table did not provide full information.

and considerable dependence of other members of the CIS on Russia as an exporter of all types of raw materials.

<b>Imports from the Selected CIS Countries into the CIS and Outside the Commonwealth in 1995–2003 (%)</b>									
		<b>1995</b>		<b>2002</b>			<b>2003<sup>55</sup></b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>CIS</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>CIS</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>CIS</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	100	34	66	100	39	61	100	33	67
<b>Armenia</b>	100	50	50	100	31	69	100	25	75
<b>Belarus</b>	100	66	34	100	69	31	100	70	30
<b>Georgia</b>	100	40	60	100	39	61	100	34	66
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	100	70	30	100	46	54	100	47	53
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	100	68	32	100	55	45	100	57	43
<b>Moldova</b>	100	68	32	100	39	61	100	43	57
<b>Russia</b>	100	29	71	100	22	78	100	23	77
<b>Tajikistan</b>	100	59	41	100	76	24	100	69	31

*Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS<sup>56</sup>*

In some cases (yet there have to be favourable conditions for it) the national elites are able to face even increased Russian pressure, as was the case in the “gas war” between Belarus and Russia at the beginning of 2004. In this case, despite the increased interest of Russia in key Belarusian enterprises, (especially in the company Beltransgaz controlling the transit of Russian gas through the Belarusian territory)

<sup>55</sup> *The data is for January and November. The countries not included in this table did not provide full information.*

<sup>56</sup> [www.cisstat.com/eng.htm](http://www.cisstat.com/eng.htm)

the enterprises remained in the ownership of the Belarusian state. Here, however, the struggle is not over because Russia (assuming that it will not miss anything in Belarus) concentrates its focus more on Ukraine before the presidential elections.

The reality further shows that even successfully concluded economic manoeuvres still do not necessarily have to mean pushing through the Russian political influence. Even taking over of a considerable part of the Georgian energy network by Russian RAO UESR does not mean that Russia has politically established itself in this country. Further, the relations with the new Georgian leadership can neither be described as harmonious nor as having been influenced by the given economic situation. It will be interesting to observe how a similar situation in Ukraine is going to develop in the case of victory of the opposition candidate V. Yushchenko in the presidential election. According to some information, Russian corporations own 90% of the market with fuels there.<sup>57</sup>

Debts Ukraine had in Russia for the unpaid gas,<sup>58</sup> were used by Moscow as a means of political pressure on Kiev. Even power cuts and a certain form of pressure can be also seen in the once topical considerations of leading new pipelines transporting the Russian gas and oil outside of the Ukrainian territory. President L. Kuchma is leading The Ukraine to closer integration with Russia. At the end of his last term in the office is described in his book – *Ukrajina-ne Rossija*. This is one of the cases when Russia radically exploited Ukrainian dependence on the Russian gas and torpedoed the Ukrainian government's attempt to reduce the tension in supplying the country with the necessary energy. *"Ukrainian government passed an act On prices of the liquefied gas for the population on 22 May 1999, which set the price of a 50-litre cylinder at 10 grivna. This precaution did not have commercial character, rather on contrary, but it was necessary to somehow support the people... When the cost price of a cylinder is 3–4 times higher than its market price, the realisation of such program is difficult. The national joint stock company Neftegaz of Ukraine is in red numbers and then the Russian suppliers grasp the opportunity and steeply (by 50%) increase the price of liquefied gas delivered to Ukraine. We do understand that on the market nobody forgives anybody anything, but sometimes one gets sad because of it."*<sup>59</sup>

The dependence of some of the CIS member states on the delivery of the Russian energies can also get lower because the European market is slowly being infiltrated by the oil and gas from other regions, mainly from the Central Asia and Caspian Sea. Projects of pipelines avoiding the Russian territory (e.g. the oil pipeline Baku–Ceyhan) are emerging and are realized which impairs the Russian energy domination in the CIS space. The experts from the Russian information and analytic portal [www.polit.ru](http://www.polit.ru) arrived at the conclusion that the policy of *"the big pipe does not have the desired effect for the present-day Russia anymore. Pushing the regimes when necessary by the use of pipelines and oil supplies was effective only*

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<sup>57</sup> Radziwinowicz, W., *Kuczma ustępuje Moskwie*, *Gazeta wyborcza*, 4.VIII. 2004.

<sup>58</sup> According to the Ukrainian government decree No. 1002 from 6 August 2004, the debt of 1.25 billion USD for the Russian gas supplied in the years 1997–2000 will be paid by the transit fees which Russia should pay to Ukraine in 2005–09. Until now these fees have been paid in the form of gas supplies (app. 30 billion m<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>59</sup> Kuchma, L., *Ukrajina-ne Rossija*, Moskva 2003, pp. 180-181.

*under the conditions of clear economic domination bound with existing political domination. Currently using any economic means without political goals in the CIS cannot lead to anything.*"<sup>60</sup> This fact naturally poses the question of how Russia will react in the future. Will it chose a strategy from the arsenal of economic means or will it rather attempt an extra-economic solution? For example, will the situation in Nagorno Karabakh worsen again?

President Putin is obviously aware of the possibility of losing positions in the CIS. That is why he puts so much stress in establishing the common economic area potentially including four states. He wants to sacrifice 800 million USD to this project in 2005; for example the Russian loss caused by the new system of collecting the VAT (at the place of destination) in the countries preparing the creation of the Common economic area.<sup>61</sup> This price is seemingly high, however Russia, which earns huge sums from expensive oil, can afford the cost. Besides, the common economic area with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine will richly compensate for these losses. Close before the Astana summit Ukraine held itself back from the CEA, yet president Kuchma looking for support of his political plans in Moscow changed his mind. The question is whether Ukraine will sign the agreement. The signing of this agreement is planned for 2005 if V. Yushchenko wins the presidential election. This is also a reason why Russia supports Kuchma's candidate V. Yanukovich.

If the CEA is really going to be established then the largest international economic organisation since the times of the COMECON will appear in the post-Soviet space. Russia as the strongest economy will profit considerably from this organisation; whether it is going to be the same in case of other members is not as certain. The CEA would apparently conserve the Russian economic domination in the given space for a long time. The further question is whether the creation of the CEA would really lead to reaching one of the intended goals; specifically, increasing the competitiveness of the participating countries on the international markets since the leading role of Russia in the CEA somewhat contradicts the set goal. After all Russia is a country with economy oriented towards extraction and export of raw materials and is on a comparatively low level (with the exception of some sectors, e.g., aviation and astronautics) of technological development.

If it really wanted to change the current status quo, it would have to "initiate a complex program of structural reconstruction of the post-Soviet economy on the basis of carefully chosen priorities and extensive application of modern technologies."<sup>62</sup> In theory everything is more or less clear, yet the reality is somewhat different. The new Russian elites do not have objections to the current situation and for the time being it is difficult to perceive any more significant signals that Russia would be preparing real structural modernisation of the economy. If the modernisation is not carried out, then the orientation of the Russian partners in the CIS

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<sup>60</sup> Cypin, A., *Odessa–Brody. Krutoj marshrut. Polit.ru* 29 July 2004.

[www.polit.ru/publicism/economy/2004/07/29/odessa.html](http://www.polit.ru/publicism/economy/2004/07/29/odessa.html)

<sup>61</sup> *Otveti na voprosy zhurnalistov na press konferenciji po itogam vstrech glav gosudarstv-uchastnikov Soglashenija o formirovaniju Jedinного ekonomicheskogo prostranstva, Astana 15. September 2004.* [www.president.kremlin.ru](http://www.president.kremlin.ru) Dubnov, A., *Astanskije ekspromty, Vremja novostej*, 16. September 2004. [www.vremya.ru/print/107591.html](http://www.vremya.ru/print/107591.html)

<sup>62</sup> Grinberg, R., *Rezultaty ekonomicheskich reform v postsocialisticheskich stranach. Problemy teoriji i praktiki upravlenija*, 3/2003. [www.ptpu.ru/issues/3\\_03/1\\_3\\_03.htm](http://www.ptpu.ru/issues/3_03/1_3_03.htm)

to Russia can mean confirmation of their second- third tier role in the world economy in the long run, and only a small chance of full scale European integration.

How the matters will develop further will in a great extent depend also on the developed democracies. The EU attitude is not much encouraging even for the greater part of the post-Soviet countries: *“EU has the following policy: <Please, do not try to join now>. EU will pay for that. By offering real stimuli – such as the possible membership – the block will lose very little and gain a lot when Ukraine and Belarus would resemble more Poland than Russia. Western neighbours of the lost territories, Poland and Lithuania, are now in the EU and changing the attitude of the EU should be their priority.”*<sup>63</sup>

### **III.5 Strengthening the Western Presence as an Active Geopolitical Player in the Post-Soviet Space**

Foreign political priorities of the USA as well as of the European Union lie mostly behind the borders of the post-Soviet space, yet it does not mean that the West will give up the control of what is happening there, or that it will not be active there. An important role here is played by the interest in assuring the stability of the whole region which presumes elimination of destabilising factors. The current situation in the Euro-Asian space can be changed but not completely altered against the will of the Western countries led by the USA.

The western influence differs considerably in each CIS country. The interest is shown in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine which show themselves in a whole range of undertaken steps of political, economic and of military nature. Armenia and Belarus on the other hand stand outside the concentrated western focus. As if the close ties to Russia and its unavoidable influence on Minsk and Yerevan predetermined the disqualification of these countries' efforts, although only weakly shown, form partnership with the western democracies.

However, none of the CIS countries is an object of trade-offs among superpowers. Each of them has the possibility to choose their future headings and the means to achieve these headings. Even here the historical, geopolitical and economic factors as well as close-knit group interests inevitably bear their influence.

After all the heading of the Ukrainian foreign politics will be considerably influenced by the result of the October presidential elections. In case of victory of the opposition candidate V. Yushchenko we can assume that the long period of the tedious balancing of this country between the West and Moscow will end. Kiev is trying to develop both the western and eastern vector of its politics; however, it is not done very skilfully. It basically runs from one negotiation table to another and it often presents positions are more than merely contradictory. During last months before the election the scales inclined towards Moscow where L. Kuchma is looking for support of his post-presidential plans and is willing to pay quite a high price by giving up national interests.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Trouble in the Borderlands, The Wall Street Journal, July 30, 2004.*

<sup>64</sup> *For more details see, e.g., Radziwinowicz, W., Kuczma ...*

Using Kuchma's efforts to push through his successor by any means, it is possible to graphically document the principles of Russian and Western attitude towards the CIS countries. In the case of The Ukraine, the West is trying to assure democratic election: a fair election process, and, if these rules are kept, to accept any winner. Moscow on contrary banks on the result and is more or less indifferent to the methods used to achieve it. It has, after all, shown the same attitude also towards the referendum declared by the Belarusian president Lukashenka on 7 September 2004. This referendum, contradictory to the present-day constitution, should allow him to run for the office for the third time, which de facto also means securing the third mandate. Contrary to the West, Moscow did not have any objections to calling the referendum, since according to the opinion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation: "*The basic law of Belarus allows changing the individual parts of the constitution by the means of referendum, under which falls also the part that defines the possible length of the presidential mandate.*"<sup>65</sup> The following part of the MoF RF reaction speaking about the necessity of transparent referendum can only be described as a hypocritical rhetoric exercise.

Carrying out the referendum and the very probable third election of Lukashenka for the president in 2006 will submerge Belarus into an even deeper international isolation which is currently interrupted by fairly active business relations with the European countries. Having practically no political contacts with the West limited Lukashenka's space for manoeuvring and increased his dependence on Russia. Lukashenka is one of the few partners who does not have any greater problems with Lukashenka's regime, that is if we do not include the unwillingness of the Belarusian president to sell key Belarusian enterprises to Russian companies. On the outside Lukashenka has one strong ally who is and will be strictly following their own aims for which it will use Lukashenka's international isolation among other things.

This pressure from Moscow leads and will lead even further to friction in the mutual relations. This is the same as at the beginning of 2004 when Russia stopped the natural gas feed to Belarus in reply to Belarusian president's unwillingness to sell the key petrochemical company Beltransgaz below its market price. Lukashenka did not feel all the possible consequences of this step was caused by international circumstances because stopping the feed to Belarus meant also stopping the deliveries for the western customers. This did not allow pushing the Belarusian president against the wall completely because there already were voices heard doubting Russia as a reliable supplier in the West. As we can see, it is not always only the western political interests that limit the Russian steps in the post-Soviet territory.

The position of the Belarusian president has, after deterioration of relations with Moscow, become even more complicated. He can be almost without exaggeration described as a "lonely soldier in the field."<sup>66</sup> Lukashenka, who doubtlessly feels his isolation reacts by rattling the weapons. The large military exercise "The Shield of the Country – 2004" which is going to take place in Belarus at the beginning of October (as a matter of fact only couple of days before the mentioned referendum) can be considered an example.

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<sup>65</sup> *Otvět oficialnogo predstavitelja MID Rossiji A.V. 2004, [www.in.mid.ru](http://www.in.mid.ru)*

<sup>66</sup> *Sudlianková, N., Sám voják v poli. Alexandr Lukašenka hodlá zůstat prezidentem, Týden, 20. September 2004, p.54*

According to Russian military specialists, for the Belarusian leader this is a way of showing NATO and the West: “that Belarus will not become another Iraq.”<sup>67</sup>

Belarusian–Russian “gas war” was for Moscow, as far as the situation in the CIS is concerned, only an episode. Far more important processes, seen from the point of its interests, are taking place in Georgia and The Ukraine. Here the main rivalry between Russia and the West happens after Russia has more or less reconciled with the American military presence in the Central Asia. Although it does not, of course, mean that Russia will not try changing this situation. The words of president Putin which were said at the meeting with the Russian diplomats can likely be interpreted in this sense: *“It is necessary to give the relations with the CIS countries a maximally attractive character, both for us as well as for them. I am certain the hard work on this direction will assure competitiveness of our foreign politics as a whole. It is not necessary to submerge in sentences that no other state but Russia has a right to claim leadership within the CIS space. If we have admitted certain aspects, it is necessary to work with them and base the process of building our foreign politics on them.”*<sup>68</sup>

The pro-western orientation of the new Georgian leadership is more than obvious. There also is no doubt that the Georgian president Saakashvili means his plan to strengthen the territorial integrity of the country completely seriously. This creates strong friction areas in the Georgia–Russian relations which Saakashvili is attempting to soften by building maximally close relations with Washington and by internalisation of the issues with Russia. Russia, in this case, proceeds in a usual manner, i.e., by supporting the separatists in Abkhazia and Southern Osetia, which again only confirms how little it can offer its partners in the CIS and how little innovated and original Putin’s foreign politics are in this situation.

Moscow could face similar problems in Ukraine if pro-western oriented V. Yushchenko wins the election. Despite the fact that under no circumstances will Moscow burn the bridges to the East; Moscow does not leave anything to chance and unambiguously supports Kuchma’s candidate Yanukovich. Russian media often behave hysterically and describe the future of Ukraine–Russia relations in case of Yushchenko’s victory in the darkest colours possible. Also Russian elites understand the Ukrainian elections as the final battle for Ukraine: *“In the current situation of the Russian elites the Ukrainian election will, for them, become the main foreign policy priority, the decisive battle for preserving the perspective of pulling Ukraine inside the so called liberal (well, perhaps not that much liberal) empire. In other words, the Ukrainian election is being treated as a battle between the USA and Russia for the influence in the post-Soviet space.”*<sup>69</sup> In the case of The Ukraine, the Russian politics gets into a somewhat paradoxical situation: what is it actually going against? Is it against the Ukrainian intention to integrate with the West more deeply, actually against something it itself is diligently trying to achieve, or at least it declares this aspiration?

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<sup>67</sup> Jelenskij, O., “Belorusskij vystup” mozolit glaza NATO, *Nezavisimoje vojennoje obozrenije*, 17. September 2004

<sup>68</sup> Vystuplenije Prezidenta Rossiji Vladimira Vladimiroviche Putina na plenarnom zasedaniji soveshchaniya poslov i postoyannykh predstavitelej Rossiji. Moscow, MZV, 12. July 2004.

<sup>69</sup> Piontkovskij, A., *Vybory v Ukraine: Rossijskij faktor*. [www.zerkalo-nedeli.com/ie/show/510/47681](http://www.zerkalo-nedeli.com/ie/show/510/47681)

Belarus still remains somewhat aside, sometimes considered Russia's periphery because of which it is not worth annoying Moscow. The situation there, seen from the point of view of integration with the West, does not currently look best. It need not be a permanent state. The change of political situation in the country is in this case naturally "conditio sine qua non." If they are met, Belarus has the chance to enrich the heading of its foreign politics. A good base for such a change is created by the existing economic ties to the West, mainly to the European Union. The mutual trade keeps slowly yet steady growing<sup>70</sup> and the geographic location of Belarus as an important transit space creates interesting possibilities for the future. These factors could lead to the creation of another spot on the map of the CIS where there is latent geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the West under way.

For now, the positions of Moscow are stronger and more favourable. Aside from various frictions in the relations Lukashenka–Putin, Lukashenka prefers relations with Russia. He knows the West only badly and simply does not like it in accordance with his characteristics of a typical Soviet man. The Moscow's positions are supported also by the fact that Lukashenka does not intend giving up the rule in 2006 and will, as the president, continue further. If any unforeseen things do not happen, it would lead to his involuntary retirement. The state the Belarusian opposition is in naturally helps him, when it is hardly possible to find a personality who would be able to become really earnest opponent to Lukashenka. Lastly, there are also economic factors at work. Even despite the growing economic relations with the EU and other countries, Russia still is a key Belarusian partner. We should neither forget that Russian oil, or rather the products made of it, are important export article for Belarus.

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<sup>70</sup> According to the Belarusian sources, the Belarusian trade with the EU countries was 2.7 times higher in 2003 compared to 1995. *Dinamika osnovnykh pokazatelej vneshnej trgovli Respubliki Belarus za 1995-2003gg.* In: *Ekonomicheskoe razvitije Respubliki Belarus v 2003g.* Goskomitet RB po statistike, Minsk, 2004. The EU statistics are not so optimistic, nonetheless, they also register gradual increase with occasional drops. According to Eurostat, the bilateral trade between the EU and Belarus was 1,447,258 Euro (in thousands) in 1995 while in 2002 it was 2,350,137 Euro.

<b>Belarus, Imports, Production and Exports of Energies</b>						
	<b>Commodity</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
<b>Imports</b>	Natural Gas (mill. m <sup>3</sup> )	16 565	17 115	17 266	17 578	18 113
	Crude Oil (thousands of tons)	9 900	12 010	11 913	14 024	14 885
	Gasoline (thousands of tons)	55	38	9	12	65
	Diesel (thousands of tons)	90	236	63	75	248
	Heavy Fuel Oils (thousands of tons)	354	440	108	232	717
<b>Production</b>	Natural Gas (mill. m <sup>3</sup> )	256	257	255	246	254
	Crude Oil (thousands of tons)	1 840	1 851	1 852	1846	1 820
	Gasoline (thousands of tons)	1 685	1 964	1 824	1 756	1 895
	Diesel (thousands of tons)	3 398	3 847	3 880	4 606	4 912
	Heavy Fuel Oils (thousands of tons)	4 305	4 627	4 408	5 099	4 790
<b>Exports</b>	Natural Gas (mill. m <sup>3</sup> )	–	–	–	–	–
	Crude Oil (thousands of tons)	350	351	401	601	801
	Gasoline (thousands of tons)	629	1 026	910	938	1 035
	Diesel (thousands of tons)	1 761	2 339	2 298	3 270	3 493
	Heavy Fuel Oils (thousands of tons)	2 006	3 076	2 621	3 694	4 063

*Source: IMF Country Report No. 04/140<sup>71</sup>*

The competition between Russia and the West in the post-Soviet space has basically two main features which were very well described (although only on the case of Ukraine) by Russian political scientist A. Piontkovskij<sup>72</sup>: The West offers strategic horizon, a vision of success, while Russia is trying to appeal on the momentary economic interests, mainly on the need of cheaper raw materials. This attitude was confirmed by the already mentioned change of the VAT collection in the Common Economic Area. The possibility to lighten the stretched state budgets should be an important means of attracting further states.

The West works in the countries of the CIS with a much more open visor while Russia prefers backroom negotiations and pressure. These methods can admittedly be partially successful, but in the long run they work against the Russian interests instead. Along its borders emerges a belt of countries which feel aggrieved by the Russian methods and even the formerly friendly-disposed local elites become opponents of closer integration with Russia. This has very characteristically manifested itself in the case of Moldova, namely in the radical change of President V. Voronin's attitude to Russia. President Voronin even refused to

<sup>71</sup> *IMF Country Report No. 04/140, May 2004, Republic of Belarus: Statistical Appendix, p. 12.*

<sup>72</sup> *Piontkovskij, A., Ibid.*

participate at the presidential summit of the CIS countries in Astana. Behind his words about limited effectiveness of the CIS one can mainly feel the deep dissatisfaction with the development in Transdniestria.

If Russia wants to successfully establish its influence on the CIS territory, it will have to focus on the policy of good and mutually equal neighbour relations and forget the omnipresent ambition to rule. This however is not going to be easy as proved by the unceasing smaller or larger provocations against the countries suffering the attacks on their integrity.<sup>73</sup>

### III.6 The Geopolitical Status of Russia Has Stabilized

Currently hardly anyone could seriously consider the possibility of Russia regaining the status of a superpower in the near future. While for a whole decade the Russian politicians and political scientists fervently discussed whether the imperial grandeur of their country would be re-established, history has solved this question all by itself. The current Russian Federation is a large multinational post-imperialistic state with authoritative political system which however allows many democratic features. Russia is following the way of building market economy, so that during Putin's rule there were even more actively gains the form of state capitalism. The key sector of this is still the extraction and transportation of energy raw materials. According to the American political scientist of Russian origin Nikolai Zlobin, who knows Vladimir Putin personally, Putin's vision of the Russian future lies in the "*development based on liberal economy and political system which is based more on the specific Russian characteristics and values than on western traditions and customs.*"<sup>74</sup>

Russia is facing a whole range of unsolved problems, mainly in the security area and in the sphere of social policy. The tragic events in Beslan of September 2004 showed again how instable the situation in some parts of Russia can be (mainly in the Caucasus region) and how lacking and ineffective Moscow's attempts are to normalize this situation -especially as far as the protracted war in Chechnya is concerned.

Admittedly Russia can aspire to the status of large regional power in the geopolitical context, but nothing else. The recent political-economic development shows that the future Russian limits lie somewhere here for many years to come. After all, the imperial expansion of Russia or USSR in history always took place in periods when the enemies of Moscow were either defeated or considerably weakened (Sweden after the Northern war, Polish-Lithuanian aggregate and the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 18th century, Poland and Rumania in 1939-40, Germany after 1945, etc.) A destabilized zone had always appeared among them which became the target of the Russian expansion.

The cause of this ongoing expansion (which lasted from the second half of the 15th to the 20th century) lies in the historical peculiarity of the Russian state and of the mentality of its ruling elite: "As soon as

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<sup>73</sup> In September 2004, during the period when the situation in Georgian Abkhazia was very tense, the railway connection between the Abkhazian capital Sukhumi and Moscow was renewed, in the same month a group of representatives of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, led by the Vice-President of the Chamber B. Pastukhov, came to Transdniestria to negotiate "breaking through the economic blockade" established by Moldova.

[www.politcom.ru/2004/zloba4703.php](http://www.politcom.ru/2004/zloba4703.php)

<sup>74</sup> Zlobin, N., *Putin feels quite well in political loneliness*, *Izvestija*, 10. September 2004

*Moscow subdued an area, it immediately became part of the <patrimony> of the ruling dynasty and all the successive monarchs considered it holy property entrusted to their hands which they can never give up. This stubbornness with which the Russian governments, no matter which ideology they followed, clung to every square centimetre of soil ... comes from the patrimonial mentality. It is a territorial expression of the same principle, due to which the Russian rulers refused to give their subjects even the smallest particle of the right to political power.”<sup>75</sup>*

The current situation in the post-Soviet space is different from any situation that existed in this region at any given time in history. The West, wielding much greater power than Russia, is not interested in the change of situation in the region, and will, therefore, oppose all Russian attempts of military–political expansion. This attitude of the West is not set by some kind of phobia of Russia. The attitude is merely set by simple historical rules according to which the spheres of influence of collapsed empires are quickly divided by the new geopolitical players.

### **III.7 Russia Does Not Have an Attractive “Imperial Idea”**

Any real empire has to be built on some leading idea, mission or function. Current Russia does not have anything like this in its arsenal. We do not see any generously projected feasible projects that would manage to attract the CIS countries into the Russian gravitation sphere. The determination to somehow (or probably anyhow would be a more proper word) take control of the space of the former Soviet Union with the absence of an attractive idea is obvious in all the offered know-how that keeps appearing in the internal Russian discussions of the historical role of the present-day Russia.

G. Pavlovskij, still an acknowledged glossator in Russia, has attempted to come to terms with this problem in a way typical for him. His article “*Rossia yeshcho ishchet svoyu rol v mire*” (“Russia Is Still Looking for its Role in the World”)<sup>76</sup> is a sort of amalgam of quite reasonable, nonetheless banal statements of the type: “*There is no way how to exclude Russia from the East European space. Block or differently combined ousting will quickly and inevitably lead to re-establishing the military–political front,*” of statements lacking more profound arguments (“*No one apart from Russia offers stability in the post-Soviet region*”) and of loud shouts that “*America does not represent the torch of freedom in the European East, but hotbed of oligarchy and pro-western fractions of bureaucracy.*”<sup>77</sup> Besides presenting different levels of bombast, Pavlovskij does not bring any new view of the subject. Further, in the end he more or less contradicts himself, when he somehow forgets the right of Moscow to dominate the region, which he himself stresses. Further, he states that the “pluralism in the European East ... is the result of the influence of Russia, Europe, the USA and of the domestic elites.”

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<sup>75</sup> Pipes, R., *Rusko za starého režimu*, Prague, 2004, pp. 104–105.

<sup>76</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. 31. May 2004.

<sup>77</sup> *For the sake of fun, let us try to change the US by Russia and pro-Western by pro-Moscow in Pavlovski's argument. This step allows us to relatively quickly open the possibility to describe the nature of the Russian politics in some of the CIS countries.*

The chairperson of the Committee for Foreign Affairs of State Duma of Russian Federation – K. Kosachev attempted to formulate the “democratic” doctrine of the Russian domination in the CIS. He arrived at the conclusion that “Russia has to become an exporter of democracy” in the post-Soviet region. The question if Russia really has anything that can be exported has to emerge. In comparison to Central Asian regimes most likely: yes. However, already in comparison with Ukraine, there is not much that can be exported. Kosachev himself seems to realize such deficit, when he notes a “most negative tendency” in thinking of the Russian neighbours “either Russia or democracy.”<sup>78</sup>

It is obvious that the question of Russia regaining the lost positions within the CIS is not on the schedule. If anyone still considers it, it is not about realistically assessing Russian possibilities, but merely it is a relapse of nostalgic emotions and ignoring reality. This reality lies in the fact that we witness the closing of a colossal historical circle which Russia began to circumscribe five hundred years ago. Here, at the dawn of the greatness of the Muscovite principality, the idea and program “Moscow – the Third Rome,” emerged. This scheme has with time changed beyond recognition; nevertheless, it became the meaning of life for the old Muscovite Rus’, the Russian Romanov empire as well as of the Soviet Union. The fall of the last mentioned one and the ensuing crisis of the 90’s qualitatively differs from nuisances and crises that Russia underwent (e.g. in 1605–1613, 1905–1907 or 1917–1921). Due to these crises the geopolitical status of Russia changed when the empire changed into a post-imperial state.

Longer continuation of this fact is given by the changes of the whole global system that took place in the world. The process of globalisation entered a phase when the role and potential of individual countries, even of the strongest ones, lessens, and vice versa. The role of civilisations, multinational corporations and global “network” structures grows. There is no place for ideocratic continental empires; Russia, for many centuries was in such a world. Its role in the future will in depend on how it is going to be able to come to terms with security questions: if it is going to be able to submerge into the wave of new technological changes, to build a system of mutually favourable political, economic and cultural connection with close and more distant neighbours.

Under such conditions the geopolitical hierarchy does not disappear, it becomes more complicated, multiple tiered and ambiguous. Should Russia have a chance to succeed, then it must use different, much more flexible methods. *“The logic of the 90s, i.e., the logic of supporting <inadequate sovereignties> and <grey zones>, grows old immediately and destines those who would insist on continuing keeping it for failure.”*<sup>79</sup> The imperial logic grows old at the same pace.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

1. Russia remains the key player on the territory of the former Soviet Union (with the exception of the three Baltic states). The leading position of Russia is given by the historical development in this area, by the economic dependency of the majority of the post-Soviet states on Russia (which these states inherited from

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<sup>78</sup> Kosachev, K., *Rossija dolna stat eksportorom demokratii*. *Izvestiya*, 25. June 2004.

<sup>79</sup> *Posrednik iz proshlogo*. [www.gazeta.ru](http://www.gazeta.ru), 10. July 2004. (Editorial)

the Soviet period), by cultural relations and by ethnic proximity of the Russians and of some nations of the former Soviet Republics (particularly of Ukrainians and Belarusians). Nearly from the beginning of the CIS existence Russia has been trying to strengthen its influence in the post-Soviet countries with the aim to at least partially restore its power status, which was lost after 1991.

2. To reach this aim Russia uses various methods including political and economic pressure on its neighbours. The integration effort of Moscow within the CIS framework could be potentially evaluated more positively if there did not exist several factors, which require considering Russian behaviour towards the “Near Abroad” and to some extent as continuation of the Russian imperial expansion. Among these factors belong:

a) Factual questioning the state sovereignty of some of the CIS states in the regions in which these countries have to face problems such as separatism and criminality; the support of separatist movements and illegal regimes in Abkhazia, South Osetia, Transdniestria by Moscow, etc. (all this is in sharp conflict with the efforts of Russia itself to fight separatism on its own territory, in Chechnya);

b) the use of economic, primarily of energy dependence of majority of the CIS states on Russia as the way to establish pro-Russian oriented regimes in these countries without taking eventual corruption and unscrupulousness of these regimes into account (according to the known principle “*although he is a villain, yet he is our villain*”);

c) the absence of a really attractive ideology or a concept that would offer the CIS countries the possibility of an equal and for all sides beneficial cooperation; from this perspective the present-day Russia still follows the path of the tsarist Russia or of the Soviet Union that managed to subdue new territories but they were unable to attract favour of the inhabitants of these territories,<sup>80</sup> to persuade them about the advantage of the Russian protectorate. Hence, Russia could and still can without doubt conquer a territory, but not colonize it in the positive meaning of the word. Many proofs of this statement can be found in the history of the tsarist Russia as well as in the history of the Soviet Union.

3. Russia and the West try to influence the course of events in the post-Soviet region at the same time; however, their approach is substantially different. While the West stresses *values* and pursues various democratising measures in the countries of the CIS, including Russia itself, it insists on the human rights protection, organization of free elections, etc., Russia relies on the *short-term interests* of these countries’ elites, ruling groups and clans. Moscow should finally stop thinking in the East–West categories and should stop to put its neighbours into the position where they have to face this choice. “*Russia and the West. Only*

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<sup>80</sup> *If we realize the differences among several types of leading positions of one of the subjects within whichever group (this difference is expressed in English by words “leadership” and “domination”), it is apparent that Russia has always preferred rougher and more ruthless, albeit “more certain” domination, and not niftier and strategically more effective “leadership.” This, however, is a problem of nearly all imperial states. It is typical that in the US there is a heated discussion under way whether it is better for America to dominate the whole world and forcefully push its own interests or to be an example for other countries, i.e., to lead them (to dominate or to lead). In Russia, unfortunately, there is no similar discussion about its role in the CIS.*

*this formula of the relations oriented towards our neighbours will allow strengthening the economic and cultural position of Russia in the post-Soviet area and will preserve, which is the most important, sympathies it has in these countries. If Russia wants to reach it, it is necessary to stop the talk about <domination> and not to force former <neighbours from the communal flat> into <friendship>. Then, they might possibly remain our friends.”<sup>81</sup>*

4. The differences between Russia and the West and from the strategic perspective generally not very positive influence of Moscow on its “Near Abroad” are given particularly by the indecision of Russia itself in the question of its own historical perspective. Russian elites still have not decided whether their country should be part of Western (Euro-American) civilization taking its most important principles and values (it is understandable that Russian social and cultural specificity would be preserved in the process) or if it has to continue the attempts to create its own civilization centre. In the past, Russia neither succeeded with the latter under the Tsars nor under the Bolsheviks. Today’s weakened and easily harmed Russia has even lower chances to reach this aim than its predecessors.

5. The future of the CIS states will to a certain extent depend on the decision of Russia about its own faith. This dependency, however, is not absolute. Practically in all post-Soviet countries it is possible to observe gradual political (and even less economic) move towards independence. The efforts to gain independence of the domestic and foreign politics should continue in these and in other CIS states. These efforts would have noticeable support in the West. The diversification of the economic relations, democratization of the internal situation and parallel development of the Western and Eastern vectors of the foreign policy of the CIS states is probably the only way in which these states can preserve real sovereignty. It is, further, the only possibility of how to participate in the great project of the all-European integration in the future. Russia could, of course, participate in this project as a big post-imperial democracy with huge potential and not as an aggrieved, suspicious and vicious offspring of the empire formed by Nicholai I and Stalin.

6. Democratic Russia could together with the democratic neighbours, the CIS states, change this area, (incidentally for the first time in its history) into a belt of stability and prosperity. As is known, democracies do not wage wars against each other. This state seems to be unreachable under the current conditions, but if this path were taken after all, it would be great news not only to the CIS, but also to the whole world. At the moment, closer to the truth are those, as, e.g., the Ukrainian politician V. Yushchenko who in the CIS see a “*spectrum of wild capitalism, Soviet authoritarianism where even a bit of medieval feudalism is not missing.*”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Piontkovskij, A. *Vybory v Ukrajině...*

<sup>82</sup> Yushchenko, V., *Plotting Europe’s Eastern Border. International Herald Tribune, 10. September 2004.*