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Institutional basis of the Eurasian integration: case of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly (1992-2020)

The article examines the history of creation and main activities of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Interparliamentary Assembly – one of the institutions of the CIS. The authors consider the conceptual and regulatory basis of the Organization, as well as conduct a quantitative analysis of the legal acts adopted by the Assembly. The data obtained made it possible to identify four principal aspects of activity of the Organization, including the unification and harmonization of the legal basis of the CIS states; intensification of economic and trade cooperation; deepening of the political cooperation and interaction on ensuring regional and global security; and intensification of humanitarian and cultural cooperation between the states concerned. Finally, a conclusion is made about the role and significance of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly in the activation and intensification of political and economic integration in the Eurasian space.

Key words: Interparliamentary Assembly, Eurasian Economic Union, Commonwealth of Independent States, integration, international relations, foreign policy.

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Introduction

The process of interparliamentary interaction in the post-Soviet space is carried out by deputies of legislative bodies of the CIS countries in various forms and at various levels. In particular, it can be a question of episodic (non-permanent) interaction of deputies, which can be carried out both in an interpersonal format and

as part of official parliamentary delegations. However, a different format of cooperation - interaction on a permanent, institutional basis that allows building constructive relations within the framework of certain specialized bodies and organizations - seems to be more effective and promising. In the post-Soviet space between 1991 and 2020, there were 3 such institutions: the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Eurasian Economic Community (2006-2014, before the transformation of the EurAsEC into the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEC)).

The purpose of this article is to review the history and main directions of activity of one of the largest of the three above-mentioned structures - the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly. In addition, the authors intend to assess the degree of influence of this organization on the dynamics and intensity of the Eurasian integration process in political, socio-economic and cultural and humanitarian spheres.

Given the objective need to deepen and expand multilateral and multi-format integration in the post-Soviet space, the study of interparliamentary cooperation of the CIS states seems more than significant and relevant. From the point of view of the authors of this article, the effectiveness and dynamics of the Eurasian integration will largely depend not only on how intensive the interaction between the executive authorities of the CIS countries will be, but also on whether the legislative bodies of the respective states will be able to establish a constructive and fruitful dialogue between them.

History of creation and regulatory framework of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly

The Agreement on the Establishment of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member States[1] was signed in Alma-Ata on March 27, 1992, i.e. a little over 3 months after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (December 8, 1991). The signatories to this agreement were Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Two years later, on 18 March 1994, two other legal acts regulating the activity of the organization were adopted - the Regulations on the Permanent Commissions of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly[2] and the Regulations of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States[3].

In May 1995 the existing conceptual and legal basis for the activity of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly was supplemented by another document - the Convention on the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member States[4], the text of which clearly described the procedure of formation, financing and terms of reference of this organization. Among other significant normative legal acts regulating the activity of the Assembly one can also mention the Agreement between the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS member states and the Government of the Russian Federation on conditions of the Interparliamentary Assembly's stay on the territory of the Russian Federation[5]; the Regulation on the Youth Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS member states[6] and the Regulation on the

[1] Agreement on the Establishment of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member States. 27 march 1992 / https://iacis.ru/public/upload/files/1/346.pdf [Accessed 12.10.2020].
[2] Regulations on the Permanent Commissions of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. 18 march 1994 / https://iacis.ru/public/upload/files/1/348.pdf [Accessed: 12.10.2020]
[3] Regulations of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States. 18 march 1994. / https://iacis.ru/public/upload/files/1/347.pdf [Accessed: 12.10.2020]
[4] Конвенция о Межпарламентской Ассамблее государств-участников Содружества Независимых Государств. 26 мая 1995 г. / https://iacis.ru/public/upload/files/1/344.pdf [Accessed: 12.10.2020]
[5] Соглашение между Межпарламентской Ассамблеей государств-участников Содружества Независимых Государств и Правительством Российской Федерации об условиях пребывания Межпарламентской Ассамблеи на территории Российской Федерации. 28 августа 1997 г. / https://iacis.ru/public/upload/files/1/351.pdf [Accessed: 12.10.2020]
[6] Положение о Молодежной межпарламентской ассамблее государств-участников СНГ. 22 ноября 2012 г. / https://iacis.ru/public/upload/files/1/522.pdf [Accessed: 12.10.2020]

Secretariat of the Council of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS member states[7].

Currently, the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly includes the legislative assemblies of ten CIS countries and, as an observer, representatives of the National Assembly (Wolesi Jirga) of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are present.

Main activities of the Assembly

As of September 2020. Since its foundation in 1992, the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly has adopted more than 600 legislative acts, resolutions and other regulatory documents.

The authors of this article have attempted to quantitatively analyze a significant part of these legislative acts, which resulted in the identification of fundamental interests and key areas of the Assembly's activities. In particular, the most attention of the organization was focused on the following areas.

The first and main direction of the Assembly's activity is harmonization and rapprochement of the national legislation of the CIS member states, aimed at forming a common legal space within the Commonwealth. The main tool for achieving this goal is the adoption of recommendations and the so-called "model" (ie, employees as a model) legislative acts. Of the 600 regulatory documents mentioned above, at least 400 (more than 65%) were related to such "model" legislative acts.

Harmonization of the national legislation of the CIS countries can be considered as one of the most important and integral prerequisites for the development and deepening of the Eurasian integration. Moreover, the formation of a common legal space is a necessary and inevitable step towards the intensification of international cooperation between member states not only of the CIS, but also of other integration associations in the post-Soviet space - in particular, the EAEC and CSTO.

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[7] Положение о Секретариате Совета Межпарламентской Ассамблеи государств-участников Содружества Независимых Государств. 27 ноября 2014 г. / https://iacis.ru/public/upload/files/1/349.pdf [Accessed: 12.10.2020]

The second key area of activity of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly can be called expansion of economic cooperation among the CIS member-states. According to the authors' estimates, over the period 1992-2020, more than half (50%, more than 300 documents) of the legislative acts adopted by the Assembly were devoted to the economic aspect in one way or another. The most popular subjects of these acts, as well as relevant recommendations, were energy cooperation; measures to create a single market and eliminate customs barriers and duties (primarily, this applies to the EAEC countries); promotion of business activity and investments within the CIS; increasing mutual trade turnover, as well as developing a set of measures to strengthen the financial and banking systems of the CIS member states.

The next, third, aspect of the Assembly's activity is the political direction. In particular, it is about observing the course of parliamentary and presidential elections in the post-Soviet space, assessing the degree of their transparency and democracy, as well as activation of international political cooperation. It also includes legislative support for peacekeeping operations in the post-Soviet space, cooperation in regional security, the fight against international terrorism and the development of a joint, consolidated position of the CIS countries with respect to certain topical political issues and problems on the international agenda. According to the authors' assessment, the political aspect of the activities of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly can be attributed to about 40-45% of the total number of model bills (≈ 260-270 documents and recommendations) adopted by the organization.

The fourth most important direction of the Assembly is the activation of cultural and humanitarian cooperation and dialogue between the CIS countries. This aspect is devoted to about 100-130 documents adopted by the organization, ≈ 15-25% of the total number of model bills. This category includes such areas as cooperation in science and technology (including support for advanced, innovative technologies), the organization of various joint cultural events (art exhibitions, music and film festivals, theater seasons, etc.), the holding of cross years of culture

in the post-Soviet space (for example, 2020 was the cross year of Kirgizia in Russia and Russia in Kirgizia), support for the Russian language as the dominant mode of communication in the Commonwealth of Independent States. From the point of view of the authors of this article, intensification of cultural and humanitarian dialogue between CIS member states is, along with the political and socioeconomic aspect of interaction, one of the key prerequisites for further deepening of Eurasian integration.

Along with the four above-mentioned priorities of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (harmonization of legislation; trade and economic cooperation; political dialogue; cultural and humanitarian cooperation), the organization actively focuses its attention on the intensification of other, narrower areas of cooperation. In particular, about 50 model bills and recommendations (about 8-10% of the total number) were devoted to such topics as activation of youth cooperation in the post-Soviet space (including within the Assembly itself), protection of political and socio-economic human rights, cooperation with other international organizations (in particular, with the OSCE, Council of Europe, CSTO, etc.), study of the history of parliamentarianism, etc. Thus, the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly actually deals with the whole range of political, economic, cultural and humanitarian issues of importance for Russia and other CIS countries.

Conclusion

Summing up the topic under consideration, it seems appropriate to emphasize once again a number of the most significant points.

First, the history of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly begins a few months after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the Commonwealth. Over the next 28 years, the organization has developed an extensive legal and conceptual framework that allows the Assembly to act efficiently and effectively, complementing the ramified structure of other CIS bodies and institutions.

Secondly, the main form of the Assembly's activity is preparation of recommendations and so-called "model" bills. In the period 1992-2020, more than 600 such documents were prepared.

Thirdly, the quantitative analysis of the abovementioned legislative acts allowed to highlight four main directions of the Assembly's activity: harmonization and unification of national legislations of the CIS member states (more than 400 documents); trade-economic and energy aspect of cooperation (more than 300 model acts); political interaction and cooperation in the sphere of regional security provision (about 270 documents); and finally, cultural and humanitarian cooperation (100-130 documents). With the exception of these four areas, there are a number of other, less significant aspects of the organization's activities.

Fourth, despite the often recommendatory nature of the documents adopted by the Assembly, it is necessary to note the indisputable importance of the organization's activity for further deepening and intensification of the Eurasian integration process. In particular, from the point of view of the authors, the second, trade and economic area of the Assembly's activity is especially significant, allowing to contribute to strengthening the economic basis of both the CIS and the Eurasian Economic Union.

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