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CSTO summit: security threats and divergent approaches

On December 26, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) held a summit meeting of Head of States in St. Petersburg (Russian Federation) to discuss their cooperation within the organization and their approach on global and regional threats namely fighting terrorism and extremism as well as drug and weapons trafficking.

In addition to this security meeting, a summit of the Eurasian Economic Union - the Russia-led economic bloc - was held the same day, mainly because the membership of the two organizations overlap. Russian geopolitical strategy aims to create and lead an economic and security bloc in the post soviet space, which currently includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

The term of CSTO secretary-general Nikolay Bordyuzha expired the 31 December 2016. He highlights the existence of three categories of regional security threats to face, and Central Asian republics reveal different approaches to handle them. The return of Central Asian foreign fighters trained in Syria to their homelands and the Afghanistan's instability represent dangerous and destabilizing threats for Central Asian CSTO members as well as for the whole regional security system.

However, the reiterated refusal of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to join CSTO (both sharing borders with Afghanistan) clearly complicates the possibility to organize a regional response to this threat. Furthermore, also traditional problems like drug and weapons trafficking can not be solved due to the lack of regional cooperation.

A growing divergence about security issues is undermining the cohesiveness of this regional security organization. The NATO-CSTO confrontation and the lack of cooperation in the fight against terrorism are the third category of security threats underlined by Bordyuzha, but CSTO members did not completely agree with the Russian orientation aimed to contain NATO.

As a matter of fact, the preservation of good relations with NATO could allow Central Asian CSTO members to benefit of military cooperation with the Atlantic Alliance, strengthening their military capacity to fight against existing security threats as well as to lessen Russian traditional influence in the post soviet security field. One of the main dilemma to solve is about the successor of Bordyuzha. Russia promised to Armenia - maybe the most loyal ally of Russia in the region – the place of CSTO secretary general but other members disagree with this choice, given the geopolitical and economic weakness of the South Caucasian state.

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