

**COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES
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Fifteenth Anniversary of the Commonwealth of Independent States

In 2006 the Commonwealth of Independent States is celebrating its 15-year anniversary.

Signed in December 1991, the Agreement on the Creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the related Protocol and the Alma-Ata Declaration set forth the fundamental principles of relations among the new independent states and created a platform for establishing cooperation in new conditions.

One of the prerequisites to the CIS viability is that it rests on the primordial concepts of sovereign equality of all its members. The legal framework and the mechanism for organizing international and intergovernmental ties created in the Commonwealth take account of the fact that the preparedness to go ahead with integration varies from state to state and enable each of the participating states to take part in the integration processes to the extent and in the areas that meet their interests.

Different as the current approaches to the Commonwealth may be, all of the member states are committed to the primary goal – that of developing constructive, mutually beneficial business relations on a wide range of integration cooperation. The session of the Council of the Heads of State held in Kazan on August 26, 2005 convincingly proved the appropriateness of this conclusion. The priority areas of interaction within the CIS clearly confirmed at the top level include: **further economic integration, reinforced stability and security, and broader humanitarian cooperation.**

The main outcome of the **joint economic activities** pursued in the 15 years of the Commonwealth of Independent States is that the Commonwealth countries are leaving the phase of economic stability to enter the period of dynamic economic growth. The volume of trade in 2005 amounted to USD 392.6 billion, which was 2.7 times higher than in 2000. Relying on the available resource potential as a basis, the Commonwealth states have been able to secure higher macroeconomic indices in the recent years. In particular, across the Commonwealth the GDP was, on average, 39% higher than in 2000. According to forecasts by the United Nations Organization, the World Bank and CIS Statistical Committee, the tendency toward economic growth in all CIS participating states will be sustained in 2006: on average, the GDP is expected to grow by 6% across the CIS.

Program documents have become a regular feature of the work performed within the CIS framework. The Plan for Implementing Top Measures aimed at

developing and enhancing the efficient cooperation of the CIS member states in the economic sphere from 2003 through 2010 was approved in 2003, which provided the Commonwealth with a mid-term strategy of economic development.

As a whole, the results yielded by the CIS in the past period convincingly prove that the Commonwealth has become a reality that serves the purposes of developing mutually beneficial partnership among all participating states.

Apart from the issues of economic integration, **building up joint effort to reinforce stability and security** is of paramount importance within the Commonwealth. The framework for addressing these issues is typically based on long-term intergovernmental programs that give consistency and purposefulness to the cooperation effort undertaken in this sphere.

Some of the documents adopted in the past two years include: The Program of Joint Measures for Combating Crime from 2005 through 2007; the Concept of Military Cooperation of the CIS Participating States up to 2010; the Program of Cooperation of the CIS Participating States in Combating Illegal Trafficking in Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors from 2005 through 2007 etc.

The adopted documents are implemented using the existing system of CIS organs on the cooperation in the sphere of prevention of crime, terrorism and extremism, illegal trafficking in narcotic substances, illegal migration and trade in human beings.

The investigative and prevention measures jointly undertaken by the relevant authorities in the past two years have helped to solve 46.3 thousand crimes, apprehend 18.6 thousand people on wanted lists, break up 102 organized criminal associations and groups, seize 12 thousand firearms and 15.7 tons of narcotic substances.

Trade in human beings, especially women and children, pose a serious threat to the CIS participating states. Hundreds of thousands of people afflicted by human trafficking annually cross international borders all over the world. This sphere is where organized criminal activity generates some of the highest revenues.

On November 25, 2005 the heads of government of the CIS participating states signed the Agreement on the Cooperation of the Commonwealth Participating States in Combating Trade in Human Beings, Organs and Tissues. This document contains important provisions concerning the development of a harmonized strategy and adoption of comprehensive joint measures of a legal, socio-economic and other nature needed to combat trade in human beings, eradicate the causes and conditions conducive to the emergence thereof, as well as protect human trafficking victims and provide for their rehabilitation, joint efforts of all governmental authorities, public

and other organizations and citizens to counteract human trafficking in the most efficient manner possible.

Illegal trafficking in narcotic substances persists as one of the most critical international issues. Drug abuse and, above all, consumption of their high-concentration drugs contribute to the epidemic of HIV and other dangerous infections.

Serious potential for collectively counteracting the drug industry is laid in the Program of Cooperation of the CIS Participating States in Combating Illegal Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors from 2005 through 2007.

Humanitarian cooperation plays an important part in the multi-sided partnership of the Commonwealth countries. New opportunities enabling the CIS participating states to cooperate on humanitarian issues opened up in 2005. In this respect the Declaration on Humanitarian Cooperation signed at an informal summit of the Commonwealth presidents on May 8, 2005 and the related Agreement on the Humanitarian Cooperation of the Participating States of the Commonwealth of Independent States later adopted by the Council of Heads of State in Kazan on August 26, 2005 were events of symbolic and milestone significance.

Within a short time the Council of the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth agreed on and adopted the Treaty on the Creation of the Intergovernmental Fund of Humanitarian Cooperation and endorsed its Charter on May 25, 2006. This created both a comprehensive basis for multi-sided cooperation within the CIS and paved the way for the implementation of the creative initiatives of the citizens living in these countries; it also laid the legal foundation for developing contacts in all spheres of humanitarian cooperation.

The Council for Cultural Cooperation of the CIS Participating States contributes to the formation of cultural environment of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The implementation of the Program of Main Events in the Cooperation of the CIS Participating States in the field of culture until 2005 was made possible due to its direct involvement. The proposals put forward by the CIS countries and organs provided the basis for the Main Events of Cooperation in the field of culture until 2010 which were approved by the Council of Heads of Government on May 25, 2006.

As part of humanitarian cooperation, contacts in the sphere of sport and physical culture have been developing actively. It would suffice to say that in the recent years six International Sport Games attended by the CIS participating states have been conducted.

The work done to shape the educational environment of the Commonwealth continues to gain momentum. The Program of Cooperation of the CIS Participating States in the field of education for the years 2006 - 2010 has been prepared for consideration by the supreme organs of the Commonwealth. It will address issues affecting the interests of many people living in the CIS participating states. In particular, this includes statutory and legal documents and programs providing for the exchange of students, teachers, academics; recognition of higher professional training diplomas, academic degrees and ranks; development and implementation of new informational technologies, distant learning methods in educational activities.

In recent years the Commonwealth has been actively involved with a new area of focus – **monitoring the preparation and conduct of presidential and parliamentary elections, as well as referenda in the CIS participating states.**

Since 2001 CIS observation missions have monitored elections and referenda in ten Commonwealth countries.

An analysis of the observation experience reveals two aspects of no small importance. First, the activity of the CIS Observers' Mission is a universally recognized fact of international life, both CIS participating states and international organizations reckon with the conclusions it makes. Second, during the monitoring of preparation and conduct of elections the Commonwealth observers have established practical and constructive ties with international organizations, first of all, with observers' missions representing the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human rights, OSCE, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

It is obvious that in many aspects of its multidimensional activity the Commonwealth has undoubtedly been a success. At the same time, globalization processes and the dynamics of the contemporary trends in the world call for new approaches and new forms of integration interaction. To this end on November 28, 2006 in the city of Minsk the Council of the Heads of State of the Commonwealth passed fundamental resolutions on the reformation of the CIS organs, based on the recommendations by the High Level Group for Enhanced Efficiency of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The resolutions adopted view reformation as a consistent process of attaining constructive agreements and compromises capable of giving the Commonwealth a new fillip.