

GUUAM: view from Ukraine

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A clear achievement of the GUUAM summit in Yalta, Ukraine, on June 6-7, 2001 was the fact that the summit took place at all after being postponed three times.

The meeting of presidents of the GUUAM states was initially expected to take place in Kyiv in early March. Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Anatoly Zlenko, describing cooperation within the framework of GUUAM as one of the government's foreign policy priorities, announced that the summit "will enter history as the summit of birth of a new organization" (Ukraina Moloda, 25 March 2001 p.). However, the date of the summit was quietly moved to indefinite future. In early February 2001 it was announced that President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma and his Azerbaijani counterpart Geidar Aliyev had agreed to postpone the GUUAM summit without specifying any particular date, so that the summit could take place with all of the heads of member states able to attend. The official reason for postponing the summit was defined as "tense schedule of the President of Azerbaijan". Simultaneously the request for postponing the summit was made by the Moldovan leadership, as Moldova was preparing for the parliamentary election, scheduled for February 25, and the subsequent election of the president by the parliament.

However, some other reasons for postponing the summit were informally discussed. "As many Russian observers noted, the true reason of postponing the forum is the growing instability in Ukraine," according to the Moldova.azi agency (February 15, 2001). Among other things, the political crisis in Ukraine, caused by the "tape scandal" and the disappearance of journalist Georgy Gongadze, contributed to certain warming of the Ukrainian-Russian relations. Meanwhile, Russia has never treated the idea of GUUAM favorably. Former Foreign Minister of Ukraine Borys Tarasiuk once argued: "Russia clearly dislikes GUUAM, and [I] may suppose that the decision to postpone the summit was a result of pressure." "I know facts when Moscow exerted pressure on certain participants of GUUAM that resulted in cancellation of their scheduled meetings within GUUAM... If we continue every time to rear after every call from Moscow, nothing will come out of GUUAM [idea]" (Ukraina Moloda, February 21, 2001).

Noteworthy, GUUAM is probably the only international associations on the CIS territory in which the Russian Federation is not involved. The initiative was launched on October 10, 1997 in Strasbourg during the Council of Europe summit. Then four countries - Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan - announced the establishment of a consultative body, GUAM. The group of the four states formed during the debates over the Flank Limitation Treaty at the Permanent Council of the OSCE. The declaration, issued by the four heads of states at the Strasbourg summit, referred to readiness for practical cooperation, common positions on a number of international issues. Some time later, on April 24, 1999, the GUAM initiative was joined by Uzbekistan, transforming it into GUUAM.

The next major stem in the history of GUUAM was the UN Millennium Summit in New York. The heads of states of GUUAM met during the summit in New York on September 6, 2000 to discuss multilateral cooperation within the entity, identify obstacles to cooperation and agree on key efforts aimed at overcoming them. The meeting resulted in a significant step towards institutionalization of GUUAM: the Memorandum, stipulating the shared position of the participating states on the need for more active multi-level cooperation within the forum, the constant dialogue at the top level, interaction in the fields of conflict prevention and crisis management, and cooperation in development of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transportation corridor. Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma argued that the New York meeting of GUUAM heads of states had demonstrated a change in their attitude to the organization: "Today we have reached understanding of the fact that we need to act within an organization". The opinion was shared by President of Azerbaijan Geidar Aliyev, who announced that the meeting had laid the foundation for a new stage in activities of GUUAM. "The implementation of the TRACEKA project and the building of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transportation corridor will be the key task for GUUAM", (DINAU, September 7, 2000), President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze said. His Ukrainian counterpart also viewed further prospects for GUUAM as provisions for free

movement of goods, capitals and people: "the future is possible only on the condition of existence of a free trade zone between the countries," Leonid Kuchma said (DINAU, September 7, 2000),

The motivations for the establishment of GUUAM were both economic and geopolitical. The inability to solve economic and political tasks in accordance with the national interests within the CIS, traditionally and prominently dominated by the Russian Federation, was one of the key factors that caused the emergence of GUUAM. Other relevant components of the process included efforts of the participating states to reduce the influence of the "big brother" Russia on their domestic processes. As the CIS was transforming into a dysfunctional "political club", the new entity, GUUAM, could be seen as a joint search for new forms of inter-regional cooperation and equal partnership in political and economic areas. The motivations, multiplied by the need for cooperation in the field of development of transportation routes and transportation of the Caspian oil to Europe were the key reasons for establishing GUUAM. However, so far the declared intentions have not gone beyond the declarations - primarily due to political and economic instability in the GUUAM participating states, as well as due to some "pragmatic" influences from the outside and the lack of clear positions of the GUUAM states themselves as far as the future of the organization is concerned.

The dynamics of trade between Ukraine and other GUUAM states in 1998-1999 left much to be desired, but substantial improvements occurred in 2000. Compared to 1999, Ukraine's trade with the GUUAM states increased by almost 1.7 times (or by US\$ 261.4 million) to reach US\$ 636.2 million.

Meanwhile, yet another geopolitical structure exists in the disoriented and disintegrating CIS: the Eurasian Economic Commonwealth (EEC), institutionalized at the recent May CIS summit in Minsk. The declaration, approved by member states of the EEC stressed that the EEC is the successor of the Customs Union of the CIS. The customs union of Russia, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan was established in 1995 with Russia as its unofficial leader. The organization may be seen as Russia's response to the current complicated processes in the CIS. The organization's trade ideology is the abolition of all barriers in trade between the member states, and the introduction of a single tariff and customs regime. While the Customs Union failed to live up to those ideas, it was transformed into the EEC in 2000. In the context of development of inter-regional relations in the CIS, it is worth considering a statement made by Russian President Vladimir Putin at the recent CIS summit: Russia is not inclined to view the emergence of "various regional groupings" as a problem. According to Putin, "the Eurasian Economic Commonwealth, institutionalized in Minsk, and the GUUAM group do not weaken, but only compliment the CIS" (ITAR-TASS, June 1, 2001). However, given the process in the post-Soviet space, one may see that the CIS is gradually deteriorating into a kind of supplement to international "groupings" - and the recent summit of GUUAM has only added to this opinion.

The view on GUUAM from Washington D.C. is rather vague. Cooperation between the United States and member states of GUUAM has great prospects, as U.S. Undersecretary of State Richard Armitage put it (Interfax-Ukraina, June 6, 2001), and those states, working together, can make others take them into account, he added. Meanwhile, the diplomatic message was clear: Richard Armitage emphasized that GUUAM was not an anti-Russian block.

Hence, the participating countries' domestic problems and external pressures made the very act of calling the Yalta summit look like a challenge. More doubts about its chances rose after Moldovan communists had won the parliamentary election in that country. Moldova's new president, member of the Communist party Vladimir Voronin, stressed that his government's foreign policy priorities would be development of relations with the strategic partner to the east, i.e., the Russian Federation, as well as with Moldova's neighbors, Ukraine and Romania. Commenting on his vision of GUUAM, asked if he saw an alternative to that organization in the Union of Russia and Belarus and if he thought Moldova could leave GUUAM, Voronin replied: "If the point is just to draw a oil pipeline, is there any sense to arrange GUUAM? If there is something more prominent behind it and it goes beyond Russia's interests and may, therefore, pressure us as its very serious partner counting on serious relations with it - then it is worth thinking about, and thinking very seriously" (Den, April 10, 2001). While no unequivocal answer to the above questions has been given, in May 2001 Voronin was quoted as saying: "Everything is vague with GUUAM; the commonwealth of five states has emerged of shaky foundations, on very unclear political grounds. Yet, he added that "if that organization really seeks the goals of free trade, reduction of customs barriers, then Moldova, no doubt, should develop relations in that field, as well as with the countries of the other five, the EEC..." (Moldova.azi, May 25, 2001). Shortly before the summit Mr. Voronin made a number of "interesting" proposals. Speaking on the Moldovan national

TV, he announced that his country was prepared to join the Eurasian Economic Union. However, he stressed that much depended on the position of Ukraine, for Moldova does not border on the states that are members of the EEC. "At the Minsk summit I almost convinced President Leonid Kuchma to join the Eurasian Union. This issue will also be discussed at the forthcoming summit of GUUAM states to be held in Yalta on June 6-7" (Vysokyi Zamok, June 6, 2001), Voronin announced. Earlier on, before the Minsk summit, he suggested that Russia should be invited as an observer to the GUUAM summit in order to avoid political speculations. Hence, the involvement of Moldova could contribute to serious revision of activities and uncertain prospects of GUUAM.

While the outcomes of the summit remain to be seen, its main result was the adoption of GUUAM Charter, signed by presidents of all of the participating states.

Specifically, the Charter announced that the goal of cooperation within GUUAM was strengthening of social and economic ties, development and effective usage, in the interest of the GUUAM member states, of the transportation and communication "highway" and relevant infrastructure located on the member states' territories; strengthening of regional security in all spheres, development of relations in the fields of science, culture, humanities; cooperation within international and intergovernmental institutions; fighting international terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking. According to the Charter, cooperation within GUUAM will be based on generally recognized norms and principles of international law, respect for sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and non-interference with member states' home affairs. The Charter also announced that GUUAM was open for new participants who are willing to join and are fully committed to goals and principles of GUUAM as specified in its basic documents, including the Charter.

The GUUAM Charter will regulate activities of the organization's bodies. According to the Charter, GUUAM's supreme body is the annual summit, and its executive body is the bi-annual assembly of Foreign Ministers of the member states. The organization's working body will be the Committee of National Coordinators, appointed by foreign ministers. GUUAM will be chaired by each of the member states in the alphabetical order for one year.

Almost a year ago Azerbaijani information agency Bilik Dunyasy quoted the statement of President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov at his meeting with President of Azerbaijan Geidar Aliyev: "Will GUUAM be institutionalized as some intergovernmental structure or will it exist just on the word of honor?" (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, June 16, 2000). Reportedly, the President of Uzbekistan was dissatisfied with the fact that in GUUAM "everything is built on some of the members of the organization showing initiative and all others getting together based on it. But there is not anything like a secretariat or a permanent executive committee, as it is the case in all international structures." Only a year after GUUAM came closer to the expected status.

Hence, the Charter, signed at the Yalta summit, "transforms GUUAM into an international organization," as Leonid Kuchma put it. However, the Yalta summit failed to sign the free trade zone agreement for GUUAM, as Ukraine had proposed. President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov explained his reluctance to sign the document by arguing that the document was not ready yet and had to be agreed on with the World Trade Organization. "The document needs to be agreed at the level of experts and those who deal with exports," Karimov was quoted as saying (Ukrainski Novyny, June 7, 2001). The failure to sign the agreement may be viewed as a step back, made simultaneously with the progress in institutionalizing the entity. While, according to Karimov, members of the new organization may pursue the introduction of the free trade area through the mechanisms of the CIS, practice of recent years has shown that Russia's position makes chances for that slim.

The Charter, being the beginning of formalization of relations within GUUAM, is a positive step towards development of inter-regional cooperation. However, it is still unclear how (and whether at all) members of GUUAM will be able to implement one of the key ideas of that international structure - the construction of the Europe-Asia transportation corridors and the restoration of the "Silk Road". The future of GUUAM and prospects for new countries that may be willing to join the organization will depend entirely on its success in meeting the declared objectives. However, it is unlikely that the initiative will be able to succeed without support on the part of the EU and other major international players. While it is still unclear how the establishment of a free trade zone between the GUUAM states would have affected prospects for building a free trade area between Ukraine and the EU in the future,

a clear message is that the G7 states will have to outline their state priorities and follow the declared principles consistently.