The CSTO Parliamentary Assembly in Search of Normative Consensus

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Abstract
The article provides a detailed analysis of the final CSTO Parliamentary Assembly Activity Program—adopted on 8 December 2025 and focused on harmonizing CSTO members' 2026-2030 legislation—compared to its

initial March 2025 draft. The article examines the Program's structure and thematically analyzes the submitted model legislation. The member states have clearly different conceptual approaches to collective security, but share certain priorities, like informational-technological security, civil defense and emergency response, and certain more specific aspects of security.

Keywords: CSTO Parliamentary Assembly, model legislation, international security, international institutions, national interests.

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), founded on 15 May 1992, and an international organization since 14 May 2002, remains the only viable mechanism for ensuring collective security in the post-Soviet space.

On 16 November 2006, the Council of the Interparliamentary Assembly of CIS and CSTO States established the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly (CSTO Parliamentary Assembly, 2006). The CSTO PA focuses on interparliamentary cooperation to harmonize CSTO members' legislation and to address regional and international security issues. Formally, the CSTO PA exists within the framework of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly and has been governed for almost 20 years by the "Temporary Regulations on the CSTO PA" (CSTO Parliamentary Assembly, 2007). This creates a number of procedural and institutional difficulties (Khlopko, 2025) and reduces the status of the PA's decisions.

The CSTO PA's key area of activity is model legislation—the development and adoption of consensus strategies, concepts, laws, and recommendations covering a wide range of collective security issues. Despite the participating countries' diverging visions of the CSTO's strategic security priorities, model legislation plays a key role in harmonizing national legislation and establishing a unified regulatory framework for collective security (Pospelov, 2021).

The CSTO PA's lawmaking plans are drawn up for a five-year period and stated in the Program adopted at the end of the year

preceding the next five-year period. Under the 2021-2025 Program, 35 model laws were adopted, addressing a fairly wide range of collective security issues. The focus was on military security, counterterrorism, migration policy, harmonization of national criminal legislation, joint peacekeeping capabilities, and emergency prevention and response (Bondurovsky and Pospelov, 2024; Vykhodets and Tyumentsev, 2025).

In 2024-2025, the member states' experts worked out proposals for the CSTO PA Program for 2026-2030. Its draft was first presented on 27 March 2025 at a meeting of the Expert Advisory Board under the CSTO PA Council (CSTO Parliamentary Assembly, 2025a; CSTO Parliamentary Assembly, 2025b). The final Program for 2026-2030 was adopted by the PA in Moscow on 8 December 2025 (CSTO Parliamentary Assembly, 2025c).

This article analyzes model legislation initiatives included in the final version of the 2026-2030 Program, as compared with the initial draft proposals. This may illustrate the involved states' national and international security priorities, as well as the opaque process by which their differences are resolved (Zhdanova et al., 2022).

The analysis is based mainly on unpublished materials of the closed meetings of the CSTO PA Council's Expert Advisory Board (27 March and 6 October 2025) and on the final version of the CSTO PA Activity Program for 2026-2030.

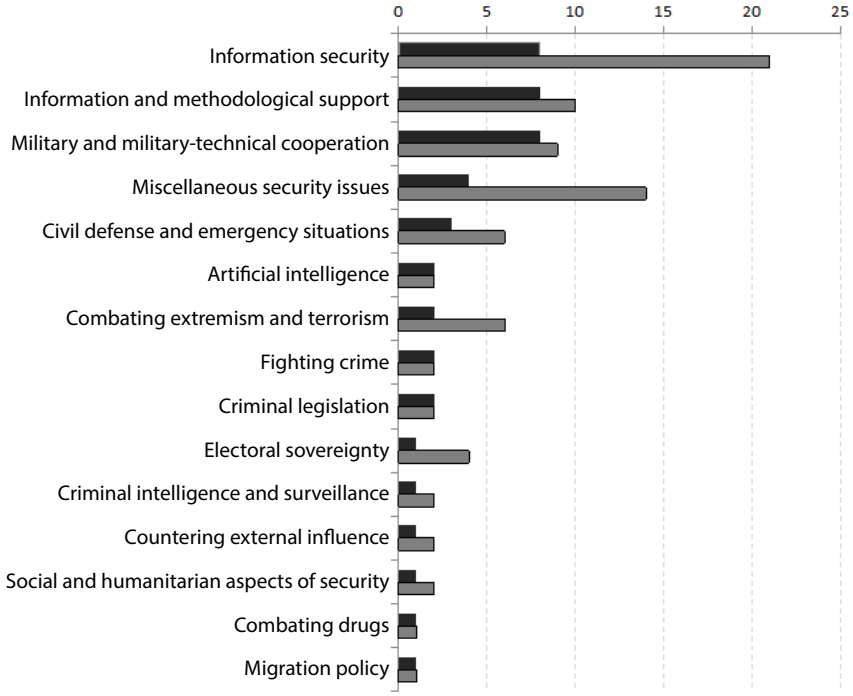
THE CSTO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY PROGRAM FOR 2026-2030: PRIORITIES

Although model legislation has no direct binding effect, it serves as a guideline for harmonizing national legislation according to common political and regulatory principles. In this sense, all member states, when adopting a model legislative act (MLA), assume certain obligations to implement its provisions at the national level.

The final *CSTO PA Program for Converging and Harmonizing the National Legislation of the CSTO States in 2026-2030* includes 45 MLAs, down from 93 in the March 2025 draft, which are thematically categorized in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1.

The topics of the MLAs included in the draft (gray) and final (black) versions of the 2026-2030 CSTO PA Program[1]



In the final Program, more than half (24 out of 45) initiatives fall into three categories: information security, information and methodological support, and military and military-technical cooperation. The draft's largest section was collective information security containing about a quarter of all information-related MLAs reflecting the conceptual expansion of international conflicts caused by the rapid development of information and communication technologies.

Global digitalization has added two new domains of international conflict to the four classical ones (land, sea, air, space): informational-technological and informational-psychological, as reflected in the

[1] Diagrams and tables compiled by the authors are based on the *CSTO PA Activity Programs for Harmonizing the National Legislation of the CSTO States for 2026-2030, 2021-2025, and 2016-2020* (Adopted by Resolutions of the CSTO PA #18-9 of 8 December 2025, #13-8 of 30 November 2025, and #8-16 of 26 November 2015, respectively).

draft Program. However, the final Program contains initiatives only related to the first domain (information-technological). These include the MLA "On Countering Cyberbullying," plus recommendations for personal data protection, cybersecurity incident-response, and a common approach to building national cybersecurity systems.

The informational-psychological security initiatives were excluded from the final Program. These contained:

- a proposal to develop a CSTO Information, Psychological, and Cognitive Security Concept;
- the model law "On Neutralizing the Influence of Destructive Ideologies on Young People";
- recommendations for:
  - combating the production and dissemination of deliberately false socially significant information, countering destructive information campaigns aimed at encouraging children and young people to commit illegal acts,
  - preserving and strengthening traditional spiritual and moral values and principles, cultural and historical memory.

The final 2026-2030 Program also excludes all of the draft's proposals pertaining to:

- education and training (e.g., "Recommendations for the Development and Implementation of Media Literacy Programs;" and "Recommendations for the Formation of Common Educational Standards in the Discipline of 'National Security'");
- anti-corruption measures (e.g., a draft "CSTO Anti-Corruption Strategy");
- peacekeeping (e.g., "Recommendations for the Training and Use of the National Peacekeeping Contingents Assigned to the CSTO Collective Peacekeeping Forces");
- intelligence activities (e.g., the MLA "On Intelligence Activities").

The section "Electoral Sovereignty" was also significantly reduced, despite the growing threats to electoral processes. Purposeful attempts to destructively influence them, manipulate public opinion during elections and referendums, and discredit government agencies and

politicians may undermine socio-political stability, lead to violent change of power, and challenge the constitutional foundations of a state. Hybrid wars and color revolutions beget electoral extremism: activities during election campaigns that encroach on the electoral rights of citizens, the constitutional order, and the security of the state (Borisov, 2024a).

Russia proposed four initiatives regarding CSTO members' electoral sovereignty, including the model law "On Ensuring and Protecting Electoral Sovereignty" (Borisov, 2024b). However, the final document combines all of them into a compromise MLA, which amends the previously approved "Recommendations for Improving Legislation on the Protection of Electoral Processes and Sovereignty in the CSTO Member States." Specifically, the MLA would amend the section on countering destructive informational influence on internal affairs and electoral sovereignty.

Compared to informational-psychological security and electoral sovereignty, information and methodological support and military security apparently enjoy greater agreement within the CSTO PA, and thus entered the final Program with few alterations.

Regarding information and methodological support, the CSTO PA plans to adopt, by 2030, several glossaries in various areas of national and international security, as well as recommendations for improving the information, analytical, and methodological support for strategic planning; for improving the organizational, legal, and methodological foundations of the CSTO's information and analytical activities; etc.

Regarding military and military-technical cooperation, the CSTO PA will focus on the use of reconnaissance equipment, unmanned aerial vehicles, and electronic warfare systems by military contingents of one CSTO member on the territory of another; on the international air transport of military and other personnel; and on mine action.

A number of proposals on the joint development and use of AI for security deserve special attention. AI has a growing influence on national and international security, primarily in the information sphere (Bazarkina and Pashentsev, 2020; Pashentsev, 2023). Its rapid

development poses completely new risks. UN experts note that its widespread use would remove humans from decision-making. "While humans make assumptions (e.g., of best- or worst-case scenarios), AI introduces a degree of inflexibility that may prove to be impractical or, at worst, catastrophic in conflict" (Puscas, 2023b, p. 46).

The need for cooperation on AI to ensure collective security began to feature prominently on the CSTO PA's agenda after its Council's 3 June 2024 meeting in Almaty, which adopted the "Statement on the Development of Artificial Intelligence Technologies" (CSTO, 2024). To date, all CSTO member states have formulated and adopted norms reflecting their strategic vision for security in AI technology development. Some countries (Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan) have approved national AI strategies; Kyrgyzstan is in the final stage of this process; and Armenia and Belarus have included AI in broader national legislation on digital transformation and innovative development.

To date, only one AI-related MLA has been adopted: "Recommendations for the CSTO Member States on Developing General Principles for the Development of National Legislation on Creating Artificial Intelligence and Robotics to Ensure National Security." The critical importance of AI for national security should prompt greater lawmaking activity by the CSTO PA in that area.

On Russian-Belarusian initiative, the 2026-2030 Program includes proposals for drafting a "Concept for the Development and Application of AI Security Technologies" and "Recommendations for the Development of Common Approaches to the Creation, Implementation, Maintenance, and Continuous Improvement of AI Management Systems in Computer Security."

The section on harmonizing CSTO members' legislation on miscellaneous security issues, only one-third of which entered the final Program, includes draft MLAs pertaining to biological and financial security and military-economic cooperation, and also suggests developing a model CSTO Weapons Code.

Analysis of which sections (other than 'miscellaneous security') contain the most MLAs, compared to previous Programs, reveals high continuity of priorities.

Table 1.

Most common subject of MLAs, by Five-Year Program

2016-2020	2021-2025	2026-2030
Information security (8 MLAs)	Information security (8)	Information security (8)
Information and methodological support (4)	Information and methodological support (5)	Information and methodological support (8)
Military and military-technical cooperation (4)	Military and military-technical cooperation (4)	Military and military-technical cooperation (8)
Social and humanitarian aspects of security (4)	Combating terrorism (3)	Civil defense and emergency response (3)
Fighting terrorism (3)	Migration policy (2)	AI (2)

Information security, information and methodological support, and military and military-technical cooperation are the top three topics in each program, remaining the key areas of CSTO cooperation.

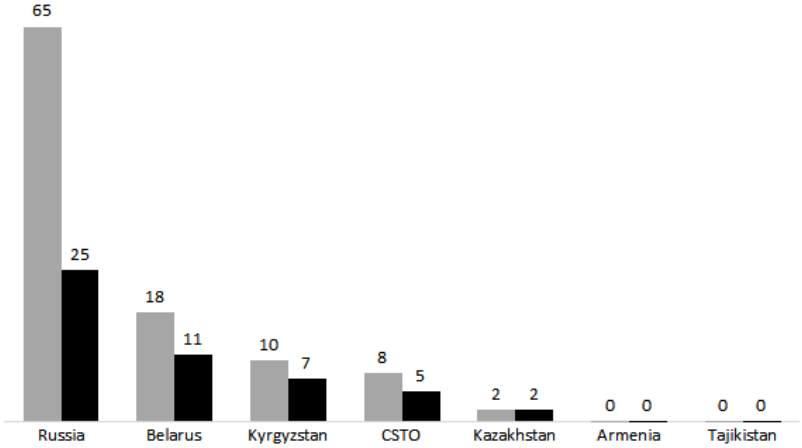
INITIATIVES: DIVERSITY AND CONSENSUS

Russia submitted the largest number of initiatives included in the final 2026-2030 Program—more than half of the total—followed by Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, CSTO structural bodies, and Kazakhstan. Armenia, which suspended its membership in the CSTO in 2023, did not submit any initiatives. Although some Tajik researchers recognize the CSTO's significant role in ensuring security in Central Asia amid modern challenges and threats (Rakhimov et al., 2025), Tajikistan made no legislative proposals for the 2026-2030 Program.

Pursuant to the "Regulation on the Drafting and Adoption of Model Legislative Acts, Recommendations, and Other Legal Acts of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly," legislative initiatives may be submitted by national parliaments, CSTO PA delegations, and CSTO statutory and structural bodies. However, in reality, a wide range of academic, research, and expert organizations have traditionally been involved in this process. They make proposals, work on the wording, provide argumentation, and often emerge as the final authors of the concepts and texts of enacted MLAs.

Fig. 2.

Countries' initiatives included in the draft (gray) and final (black) versions of the 2026-2030 CSTO PA Program[2]



The following Russian organizations are tasked with developing the MLAs proposed in the 2026-2030 Program:

Table 2.

Russian organizations tasked with developing the MLAs of the 2026-2030 CSTO PA Activity Program[3]

Potential developer	Number of MLAs
Kutafin Moscow State Law University	6
St. Petersburg State University	4
Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration	4
Center for Security Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences	4
Plekhanov Russian University of Economics	2
All-Russian Research Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs	2
Federal Financial Monitoring Service (RosFinMonitoring)	2
University of the Prosecutor's Office	2
Russian Public Institute of Electoral Law	1
St. Petersburg State Fire Service University	1
Institute for Security and Sustainable Development	1
Russian Anti-Plague Research Institute "Microbe"	1
Rosgvardiya	1
MGIMO	1
CIS Security Issues Research Institute	1

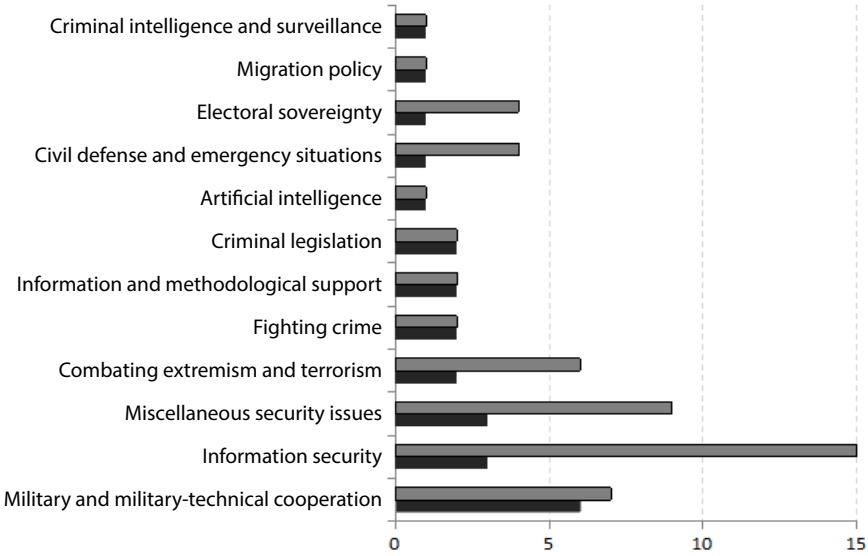
[2] In this and subsequent analyses, initiatives may have more than one author.

[3] An MLA may have more than one developer.

The topics of Russian initiatives are presented in Fig. 3.

Fig. 3.

Topics of Russia's initiatives included in the draft (gray) and final (black) Programs



Russia's top priority is information security: about a quarter of all Russian initiatives addressed it. These covered informational-technical issues (personal data protection, biometric identification, information protection and cybersecurity, etc.), as well as informational-psychological security (countering the production and dissemination of deliberately false socially significant information, destructive information campaigns, historical education, preservation of collective historical memory, strengthening traditional spiritual and cultural values, etc.).

However, as noted above, the final Program included no informational-psychological security initiatives, which made a significant number of Russian MLA proposals in the draft. Russian initiatives on 'electoral sovereignty' were also almost entirely cut out, while initiatives on 'combating extremism and terrorism,' and on 'miscellaneous security issues,' were significantly reduced. Russian initiatives on 'military and military-technical cooperation' were thus the most successful.

Belarus submitted 11 initiatives for 2026-2030, about a quarter of the total. The Belarusian organizations empowered to develop MLAs are listed in Table 3.

Table 3.

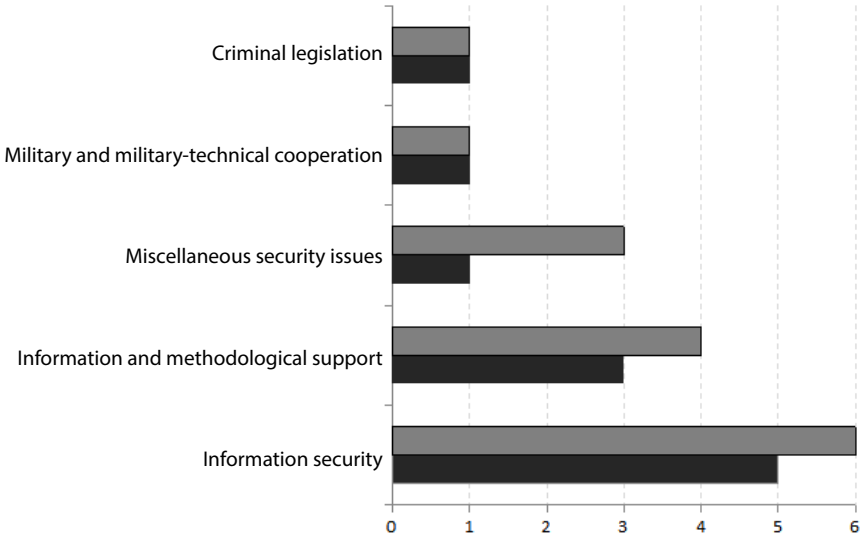
Belarusian organizations tasked with developing the MLAs of the 2026-2030 CSTO PA Activity Program

Potential developer	Number of MLAs
Institute of the Border Guard Service of the Republic of Belarus	2
Scientific Research Institute of Technical Information Protection	3
Operational and Analytical Center under the President of the Republic of Belarus	3
Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno	2
Belarusian State University	1
Research Institute of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus	2

The topics of Belarusian initiatives are presented in Fig. 4.

Fig. 4.

Topics of Belarus's initiatives included in the draft (gray) and final (black) Programs.



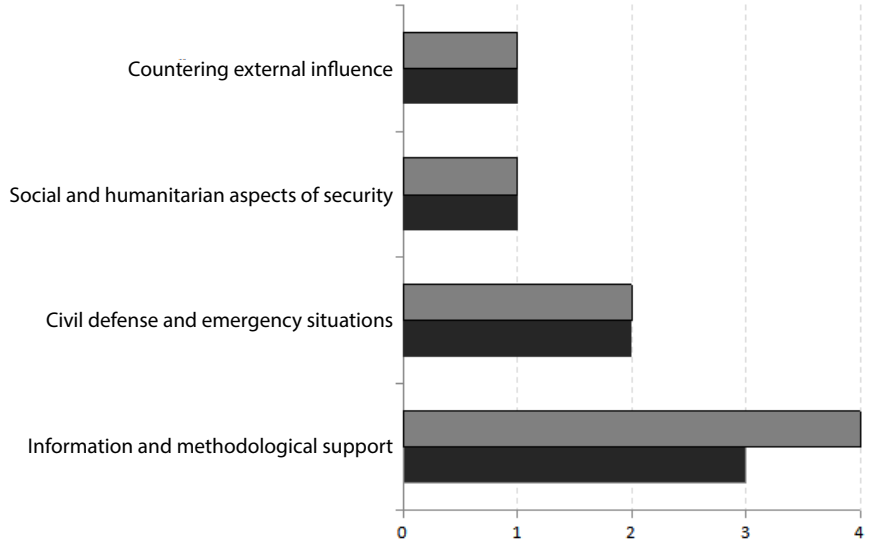
The adopted 2026-2030 Program almost fully reflects Belarus's priorities. Like Russia, Belarus gave the highest priority to information security. However, it focused mainly on technical aspects of the

issue, with only one (rejected) initiative pertaining to informational-psychological security.

Another Belarusian priority, which survived almost intact into the final 2026-2030 Program, concerns 'supporting information.' Belarus proposed unifying various terms and concepts; and improving organizational, legal, and methodological principles of information and analytical activities.

Kyrgyzstan also submitted 11 initiatives to the draft Program, seven of which were included in the final document. Their potential developers are the Kyrgyz State Technical University and the Osh State University, each of which contributed one MLA. The Kyrgyz National University and the Yeltsin Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University were responsible for drafting two and three MLAs, respectively. The topics of Kyrgyzstan's initiatives are presented in Fig. 5.

Fig. 5.
Topics of Kyrgyzstan's initiatives included in the draft (gray) and final (black) Programs



Regarding information and methodological support, Kyrgyzstan seeks to unify security-related concepts and terms, and to catalogue the challenges, threats, and risks in the CSTO space.

Regarding civil defense and emergency situations, Kyrgyzstan's proposals include joint emergency situations forecasting; prevention

of and response to natural and man-made transborder emergencies; and devising common principles for providing emergency humanitarian aid.

Regarding social and humanitarian security, Kyrgyzstan proposed "Recommendations for Developing Common Principles of the CSTO Member States on Provision, Receipt, Storage, and Distribution of Humanitarian Aid in Areas of Military Conflict, and for Conducting Special Military and Counter-Terrorism Operations."

Kyrgyzstan's only informational-psychological security initiative called for neutralizing the influence of destructive ideologies on young people. However, during preliminary discussions, this initiative was declined, and replaced with "Amendments to the Previously Adopted Recommendations for Harmonizing Legislation of the CSTO Member States to Ensure Internal Stability and Counter Technologies of External Destructive Influence…" which we have placed in the section on countering external influence.

Finally, ***Kazakhstan*** submitted only two initiatives: 1) countering drug trafficking; and 2) countering Internet fraud. The Management Academy of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Internal Affairs is listed as a potential developer of both initiatives, which were included in the final document unaltered.

ANALYSIS

The initial draft 2026-2030 Program underwent significant changes and was basically halved during discussion and approval in 2025. This did not come as a surprise, since some member states, primarily Kazakhstan, had clearly stated their critical position even during the initial discussion. Kazakhstan made the largest number of critical comments on the draft, and suggested changing or dropping (as was in fact done) 42 of the 93 proposed MLAs.

Most criticized were proposals on informational-psychological security (all of which Kazakhstan suggested discarding), media literacy, and countering external influence.

Kazakhstan's critical position at the CSTO PA appears to be a continuation of its post-independence multi-vector foreign policy

(Ivanov and Petrenko, 2025). Its political elites evidently believe that deep engagement with the normative-ideological spheres of regional integration organizations may restrict its ability to cooperate with other international actors.

Leaving aside Armenia and Tajikistan (which did not make any proposals), the adopted Program reflects the priorities of all CSTO member states except Russia. Not only were most of Russia's proposals excluded from the final document, but those exclusions contained all of Russia's initiatives pertaining to the crucial sphere of informational-psychological security, which was prioritized in Russia's 2023 Foreign Policy Concept and which forms a major part of Russia's foreign policy goal of upholding traditional spiritual and moral values, promoting normality, and countering the distortion of history.

The exclusion of Russia's initiatives, which were meant to significantly expand the conceptual boundaries of collective security, exposes substantial disagreement on this matter, especially with Kazakhstan. The Kazakhstani insistence, on reducing security to traditional military issues, has already fallen significantly behind modern challenges and threats.

A vivid example is Russia's initiative concerning media literacy programs.

Throughout the CSTO PA's history, questions of education and training have not been adequately addressed in model legislation, even though many of today's national and collective security challenges cannot be effectively solved without proper education programs. Amid ongoing global digitalization, media and information technologies are increasingly often used to exert destructive influence on the populations, mutating values and sentiment and inciting socio-political destabilization. According to the latest data, active Internet users make up about 85% of the CSTO's population, and active users of (mostly foreign) social networks exceed 65% of the population (Datareportal, 2025). Furthermore, modern recommendation algorithms and generative AI have significant potential to manipulate public opinion (Goldstein, 2021) and threaten new forms of digital colonialism in countries that lack such technologies (Sytnik, 2025).

Given the huge volume of information and the speed of its creation, distribution, and consumption, special measures by law enforcement are no longer sufficient. Systemic efforts are needed to develop the public's ability to critically analyze information.

Yet some CSTO member states are implementing Western-funded media literacy programs, like "Texherdim" in Kyrgyzstan, operating since 2023 and funded by the EU (and USAID, until it was dismantled) (Institut Media Polisi, 2023). In Tajikistan, media literacy programs are implemented under the MediaCAMP Project, which is promoted by Internews, a U.S.-linked NGO funded for many years by USAID (Gaisina, 2021). Such external influence contradicts CSTO states' national interests and collective security objectives.

Development of unified approaches to media literacy programs thus appears highly relevant. To this end, Russia proposed working out "Recommendations for the Legal Regulation of the Development and Implementation of Media Literacy Programs" in 2026-2030. Unfortunately, it was rejected by Kazakhstan as allegedly unrelated to collective security.

The exclusion of whole sets of modern challenges and threats from the CSTO's political agenda undoubtedly limits the latter's effectiveness and status (at least in the view of Russia until 2030).

* * *

The above analysis of the final CSTO PA Activity Program for 2026-2030 and its comparison with the draft permit several general conclusions:

1. The CSTO's members have differing interests in the PA. Russia, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan consider it critical for pursuing their foreign policy objectives and promoting their vision of regional and international security. Tajikistan is a passive participant, Kazakhstan is in active opposition, and Armenia has de facto suspended its work in the CSTO PA.

2. Cooperation in the CSTO PA is being tested by centrifugal forces generated by sanctions, by members' orientation towards different external centers of economic and technological power (the U.S. and

China), and by differences in civilizational identity and development priorities.

3. The CSTO's members have clearly different conceptual approaches to collective security. While Russia and Belarus consistently advocate for expanding the CSTO's conception of security to include the spiritual, moral, informational, psychological, and cognitive spheres, and seek to engage civil society on these issues, other states, primarily Kazakhstan, tend to narrow the concept of security to the traditional spheres of the military and law enforcement.

4. Informational-technical security, civil defense and emergencies, and miscellaneous security issues are the CSTO PA's common priorities until 2030.

5. In order to strengthen cooperation within the CSTO, its agenda must be expanded, and conceptual disagreements over collective security must be overcome.

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