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The OSCE Centre in Astana at Ten: Activities and New Directions

Introduction

On 1 January 2010 Kazakhstan will become the first country of the former Soviet Union to hold the OSCE Chairmanship. Uniquely, it will also be the first country to hold the Chairmanship while remaining host to an OSCE field mission: the OSCE Centre in Astana. With Kazakhstan already a member of the rotating Chairmanship Troika, Central Asia is becoming a region of renewed focus.

In March 2009, the Centre and the Kazakhstani Ministry of Foreign Affairs celebrated the tenth anniversary of the OSCE's presence in Kazakhstan and the entry of Kazakhstan into the OSCE Troika. This occasion provided a significant opportunity to recognize and evaluate the wide range of activities carried out by the Centre over the past decade and to highlight its contributions in light of the upcoming Kazakhstani Chairmanship and the prospect of even greater OSCE involvement in Central Asia after 2010. Indeed, the OSCE Centre in Astana today finds itself on the verge of several important turning points that affect not just its own work, but that of the OSCE as a whole.

An anniversary is an occasion not only to reflect upon the past but also to anticipate future directions and orientations. Despite the excitement surrounding the Centre's ten-year anniversary and the upcoming Kazakhstani Chairmanship, one has to bear in mind that, in many respects, the work of the OSCE is long-term. After 2009 and 2010, life for all of us will go on. Kazakhstan's transition from the Soviet system – and mindset – to a modern, democratic, developed society since independence less than 20 years ago will require not just a span of months or years of continuing efforts, but perhaps even generations.

In this endeavour, the Centre and the OSCE as a whole provide active and positive support to the host country, leveraging the Organization's expertise and the tools it has available. For me, as a career diplomat with considerable experience in East-West relations,¹ this is both a challenging and a

Note: The views contained in this contribution are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the OSCE.

1 Including several assignments at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs East European desk, diplomatic posts in New Delhi, Belgrade, Rabat, Moscow, and Saint Petersburg, as well as serving as the Director for OSCE and Council of Europe Affairs and Special Counsellor to the Director General of France Coopération Internationale for the promotion of expertise in governance, human rights, anti-corruption activities, and institutional capacity building.

fascinating endeavour, particularly in view of 2010 Kazakhstani Chairmanship. At its core, I view the mission of the OSCE in Kazakhstan to strive to meet the needs and requests of the country – its official bodies as well as the civil society – to encourage positive trends, and to provide international expertise and best practices, rather than excessively impose, pressure, or criticize. It is with this philosophy in mind that I have sought to shape the activities and areas of engagement of the OSCE Centre in Astana.

Background and Centre Mandate

In January 1999, based on OSCE Permanent Council Decision No. 243 of July 1998, the OSCE Centre in Almaty opened its doors. In March 2003, a small liaison office was set up in Astana, Kazakhstan's new capital since 1998. In June 2007, in light of the increase of activities in Astana and the heightened need to develop closer contacts with central authorities, the OSCE Permanent Council adopted a new mandate, Decision No. 797, officially creating the OSCE Centre in Astana, while keeping open an OSCE Liaison Office in Almaty.

The current mandate charges the OSCE Centre in Astana with the following tasks: promoting the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments in all three OSCE dimensions within the OSCE framework approach to co-operative security; facilitating contacts and promoting information exchange between Kazakhstani authorities and OSCE structures; establishing and maintaining contacts with central and local authorities, universities, research institutes, and civil society; arranging regional OSCE events, seminars, and visits; and providing assistance to the government of Kazakhstan in raising awareness of OSCE activities, training Kazakhstani officials, facilitating information exchange between OSCE institutions and relevant state agencies on OSCE activities.²

The Centre's Activities

Military Co-operation

A key priority of the Centre in the field of military co-operation is enhancing regional confidence- and security-building measures. The implementation of relevant OSCE documents, particularly the Vienna Document 1999, is the regular focus of workshops organized in co-operation with the Ministry of

2 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 797: Mandate of the OSCE Centre in Astana*. PC.DEC/797, 21 June 2007. The Centre staff currently comprises six international officers and about 20 national experts representing seven of the 56 OSCE participating States (France, Germany, Italy, Norway, USA, Austria, and Kazakhstan).

Defence of Kazakhstan. A series of training seminars for military officials take place every year. In May 2009, a two-day seminar of a somewhat different nature took place, involving experts and military representatives from both Central Asia and the Caucasus. The purpose of this event was to present new approaches on confidence- and security-building measures given recent international strategic developments, such as the uncertain situation in the Caucasus and the emergence of non-traditional threats including terrorism, organized crime, and trafficking in drugs and human beings.

As part of another important military initiative, the Centre, together with the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) in Vienna, is working to secure and destroy aging stocks of arms and ammunition depots, and to dispose of the toxic rocket fuel component known as *mélange*. These efforts are part of a two-pronged strategy that considers the dangers of these materials in terms of their potential environmental harm and the risks they pose if they fall into the hands of extremist or other dangerous groups.

To ensure broad effectiveness on the regional level, the Centre is working on military issues in co-ordination with other Central Asian field presences. In September 2008, within the framework of a sustained regional effort, the Centre in Astana and the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) in Vienna organized a three-day seminar in Almaty on fostering co-operation in military structures and helping the five Central Asian countries implement their commitments under the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security. The seminar emphasized ensuring democratic control of armed forces and promoting security in Central Asia and the whole OSCE region.

Combating Terrorism and Organized Crime

Terrorism and organized crime are serious threats to security that span all of Central Asia. In addition to the financial tools developed to fight terrorism and organized crime listed later in this article, one of the major initiatives pursued by the Centre, alongside the other OSCE missions in Central Asia, was a four-month joint training programme in which police dog handlers were trained in combating terrorism and organized crime. In 2006, the Centre, in co-operation with the OSCE's Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), held a training module for senior public officials aimed at familiarizing the audience with international legislation in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms protection and discussing major developments and dilemmas for human rights in the fight against terrorism. In addition to these activities, the Centre has sponsored the participation of Kazakhstani officials in high-level meetings abroad on combating trafficking in illicit drugs and strengthening international legal co-operation to combat transnational organized crime and terrorism.

Law Enforcement

The OSCE Centre in Astana also emphasizes law enforcement reforms and the promotion of democratic principles in law enforcement authorities. A key accomplishment in this field has been the establishment of the Police Development Co-operation Project. With the support of the Kazakhstani Ministry of Internal Affairs, ODIHR, and the OSCE Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU), this programme incorporates four component targets of reform: community policing, public oversight, education, and legislative reform.

In police-related issues, a top priority is to bring national laws into accordance with international standards, and the Centre is currently working to develop a set of recommendations to achieve this goal. In addition, international experts have been invited to advise Kazakhstani officials and support reforms to the law enforcement sphere in Kazakhstan. Major recent accomplishments include a series of regional events in co-operation with the SPMU on the practical implementation of the Guidebook on Democratic Policing, a long-term pilot project on international standards in police stations and pre-trial detention centres in Almaty, and a five-part training programme on improving community policing practices in Kazakhstan.

At the regional level, the Centre emphasizes joint activities and exchanges with other Central Asian states, often with the support of ODIHR. In June 2008, together with the Kazakhstani Ministry of Internal Affairs and local implementing partners, the Centre hosted a conference on ways to improve police activities through more effective co-operation with civil society, legislative reforms, and the protection of human rights.

Border Management

Border security is a key area for OSCE engagement, not just because of the ways that it benefits the host country domestically, but also due to its regional importance. It is a cross-cutting issue that encompasses priorities from regional confidence and security building to fighting corruption, from facilitating trade and transportation to combating human trafficking. As such, the OSCE Centre in Astana continues to co-operate with a range of stakeholders in order to improve Kazakhstan's border security and border management. In 2009, it collaborated with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in conducting a series of training courses for border guards on modern border inspection techniques, the detection of illegal border crossings and smuggling activities, and fighting corruption on the border.

One recent border-security activity of regional significance was a five-day workshop in June 2008 at the Merke border crossing between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which focused on passport control, human trafficking, and vehicle inspection techniques. Twenty border officials from across Kazakhstan, under the instruction of local and international experts, were joined

by their Kyrgyz counterparts to discuss co-ordination of border management. The workshop was made possible through co-operation with the IOM, the EU Border Management Programme for Central Asia (BOMCA), the UNHCR, and the Kazakhstani Border Service.

In July 2008, the Centre also participated in a two-day workshop in Bishkek that included all five OSCE Central Asian field presences. The focus of that workshop was border management and security as a gateway for enhanced co-operation.

Combating Corruption and Money Laundering

The central topics of the OSCE Centre's activities in the economic field focus upon sustainable development through good governance in order to help build an open society and democratic institutions that rely on the rule of law. This approach recognizes the fact that an open economy is a cornerstone of a stable society and is a key for the prevention of emergent social tension.

Thus, the primary area of activity for the Centre in the economic field is its anti-money-laundering framework, which continues to promote legislation to combat the financing of terrorism and give support to national anti-corruption measures by providing expertise and the introduction of international best practices. The Centre has been involved in facilitating training for the Kazakhstani Financial Police in investigating corruption cases and a legal review of the fight against corruption in the underground economy. It also promoted the creation of the Kazakhstani Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) to deal specifically with issues of money laundering and terrorist financing. The FIU came about as the result of consultations on a draft law and an inter-agency working group.

Transportation and Trade

Another important economic priority for the Centre is the facilitation of stable and secure cross-border trade and transportation, which, along with integrity in the sphere of customs, is significant from the perspective of both economic efficiency and security, as it reduces opportunities for corruption, illicit trafficking, and transnational crime and terrorism. The Centre has worked closely with the Office of the Co-ordinator on OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) in Vienna to streamline customs and border-crossing procedures, which pose a particular obstacle to trade for landlocked Kazakhstan. One recent initiative brought together some 50 representatives of customs departments from Kazakhstan's regions, international experts, including some from the UN and the World Customs Organization (WCO), and private sector representatives to improve the implementation of international legal instruments to facilitate cross-border trade and transport. The First Preparatory Conference to the 18th OSCE Economic and Environ-

mental Forum, held in Astana in October 2009, also named land transport and good governance at border crossings as key OSCE priorities.

Environmental Transparency

The OSCE Centre concentrates on raising awareness of the importance of environmental issues for regional security. The Centre is a leader in promoting the implementation of international environmental agreements in Kazakhstan, especially with regard to public access and participation in environmental decision-making.

In the past year, the Centre has conducted events to train judges in applying relevant national and international standards of environmental transparency and to encourage the involvement of grassroots NGOs in environmental decision making. The Centre is also currently involved in a project to open Aarhus Centres (based on the 1998 UN Aarhus Convention) on environmental transparency and public participation in environmental decision making in several Kazakhstani regions. This is part of a long-term plan to promote the implementation of the Aarhus Convention among governmental institutions and civil society in Kazakhstan.

A related area in which the Centre is also engaged is the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), to which the Centre has given significant attention. EITI, an arrangement under which companies and host governments voluntarily publish payments and receipts relating to extractive industries, has achieved significant resonance in Kazakhstan with the help of the Centre. Not only did it help facilitate an EITI training seminar for journalists in 2008, but this year the Centre co-hosted a seminar for EITI stakeholders in western Kazakhstan on increasing revenue transparency across the extractive-industry value chain, especially in social infrastructure projects.

In addition, as a follow-up to the 16th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum in May 2008 in Vienna, the Centre raised stakeholder awareness on international maritime conventions in order to improve the effectiveness of oil-spill response plans in Kazakhstan. A three-day seminar in Aktau, organized by the Centre, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, and the NGO coalition EcoForum, identified measures to strengthen the legal and institutional framework relating to oil-spill prevention and response and emphasized regional co-operation and the need for a balance between economic development and environmental protection.

Sustainable Development

On sustainable development, the Centre in Astana has assisted Kazakhstan in implementing its Concept on Transition to Sustainable Development 2007-2024, raising awareness among state officials and NGOs. In 2008, the Centre finalized its project on sustainable development education, as a result of

which modules on ecology and sustainable development will be included in national education curricula. It also helped launch a sustainable development training course for business managers and is currently involved, together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and local partners, in developing a Kazakhstani model of sustainable production and consumption.

Regional Environmental Co-operation

The environment is a primary focus of the Centre's work, and is critical for enhanced co-operation between neighbouring Central Asian states. The settlement of environmental issues, particularly the rational and co-ordinated use of water resources, can brighten prospects for bilateral and regional co-operation across Central Asia. The Centre not only supports concrete activities related to co-operation of this kind, but also works hand-in-hand with other OSCE missions in Central Asia to realize these benefits. In co-operation with the United Nations, the Centre has organized regional events on transboundary co-operation in the management of groundwater resources and has also assisted in developing the mandate of the bilateral water commission between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan on the Chu and Talas rivers.

In 2009, the Centre also supported a series of Integrated Water Resource Management training seminars for regional basin council members and formalized co-operation with the Kazakhstani branch of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS).

Judicial Reforms

The OSCE Centre in Astana, in co-operation with ODIHR, supports efforts to reform the criminal justice system, assists Kazakhstan in implementing international human rights agreements, and provides international expertise in the drafting of legislation related to human rights and civil society. It is involved in judicial and legal reforms, including the analysis of the status of judicial reforms, the penitentiary system, the humanization of criminal justice policies, investigative procedures, legal aid, and the draft administrative code. The Centre also observes the human rights situation in Kazakhstan, monitoring trials and maintaining contacts with local partners. This is part of the broader goal of strengthening civil society, including local human rights and women's organizations and a wide range of other NGOs.

Human Rights and Religious Issues

In the area of human rights and civil society, it is the aim of the OSCE Centre in Astana to work with governmental and non-governmental actors to promote a constructive dialogue on human rights issues. Because respect for human rights constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for the development of a

democratic society, awareness-raising and education are important means of ensuring that citizens know their rights and how to protect them.

An important example of this is in the sphere of religion. In co-operation with NGOs and with the involvement of parliamentarians, state officials, and religious leaders, the Centre has organized debates on legislation concerning religious freedom. It also assisted ODIHR in arranging consultations between national authorities and international experts to ensure that the rights of all religions, majority and minority, are taken into account in legislation, which is made compliant with international commitments.

Anti-Trafficking

One of the Centre's main activities is to support Kazakhstan's efforts in the fight against trafficking in human beings. This means raising awareness among the general public, NGOs, and local and national government authorities. The Centre facilitates discussion on this problem between relevant parties, including on how to identify and protect victims of trafficking and investigate cases. In addition, it supports national anti-trafficking measures, which include a national referral mechanism and a co-operative framework for victims' rights. In the area of human trafficking, the Centre concentrates on labour exploitation, given Kazakhstan's role as a destination for labour migrants from neighbouring Central Asian countries.

Over the past two years, the Centre has supported an initiative of the Ministry of Justice to co-organize an enlarged session of the Interagency Commission on Fighting Trafficking in Persons, with the participation of NGOs from Kazakhstan's regions. Together with the SPMU, the Centre also conducted a three-week training course for prosecutors and police on new investigative techniques, and continues to train regional officials on international standards with the help of ODIHR experts and an extra-budgetary contribution from Germany. In October 2009, the Centre co-organized a training seminar for Kazakhstani judges on good practices in handling human trafficking cases.

Gender Equality

The work of the Centre also encompasses gender equality and the prevention of domestic violence. Here, the primary focus is on raising awareness of gender issues and developing a strategy for greater female political participation. The Centre has been involved with parliamentarians, state officials, national and international experts, and NGOs in organizing a wide range of events and round-table discussions on how legislation can ensure gender equality and women's rights. The Centre recently worked together with NGOs and government to develop a Strategy for Gender Equality and the National Action Plan for its implementation. In co-operation with national stakeholders and

other international organizations, the Centre assists in drafting legislation on equal rights and opportunities and the prevention of domestic violence, and supports capacity-building for women's organizations. In October 2009, the Centre, ODIHR, and the Kazakhstani Parliament organized an OSCE round-table meeting to discuss a draft law on combating domestic violence and present ODIHR commentaries on its compliance with international standards.

Elections

Open and transparent elections are a cornerstone of the OSCE as a whole. They are a key element of the democratic process and can increase trust in the political system. The Centre therefore co-operates with Kazakhstan's Central Election Commission (CEC), political parties, and civil society to promote OSCE electoral standards. Since 2001, the Centre has organized round-table discussions on electoral legislation reform, an effort which led to a comprehensive package of proposals on amending and improving electoral legislation. The first draft of the proposed amendments was delivered in July 2003 and a second draft in September 2003. Reviews of the draft legislation by ODIHR in September 2003 and August 2004 gave additional recommendations for the improvement of the Kazakhstani electoral system. Today, the Centre continues to facilitate co-ordination between ODIHR and the CEC in order to reform legislation in accordance with the 2004 assessment.

Prior to the 2005 presidential election, training courses on electoral education and civic awareness, especially for teachers and young voters, were made possible by the OSCE. In the run-up to the 2007 parliamentary elections, the Centre also sponsored training modules for local observers and journalists. ODIHR and its election observation missions hold the mandate for the monitoring of the elections in Kazakhstan, but the Centre supports co-operation between ODIHR and the CEC of Kazakhstan. Once again, the focus of this co-operation remains the reform of Kazakhstan's election legislation and efforts to bring it into compliance with OSCE commitments in the field of democratic elections and OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.

Media Development

The promotion of freedom and independence of the media in Kazakhstan is a priority of the OSCE Centre in Astana. Co-operation with the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFOM), another OSCE institution based in Vienna and providing international expertise, is indispensable for addressing infringements of press freedom, monitoring problems encountered by journalists in carrying out their work, and improving media legislation in the country. The Centre actively co-operates with the media community and civil society to promote wider public discussion of press freedom and media legislation reform.

In the past, the Centre has led a series of workshops to draft amendments to Kazakhstani media laws, with the participation of local journalists, NGOs, legal, and media experts, and state officials. It has also sponsored activities to increase the skills of Kazakhstani journalists through training courses on topics such as journalism basics, economic and environmental issues, human rights, terrorism, and investigative journalism. Other activities in this area have included sponsorship of publications for journalists on international standards and journalism practices, legislative provisions, and how to deal with government press officers and NGOs. The Centre also helped set up internet cafes for media professionals in the cities of Astana, Kostanai, Pavlodar, and Taraz and offered special training courses on the use of the internet as a research tool for local journalists and journalism experts.

One noteworthy regional event took place in October 2008, when the OSCE Centre aided the Office of the RFOM in organizing the tenth Central Asia Media Conference, which brought together media professionals and government officials to discuss media developments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The conference found that, if introduced, public-service broadcasting in Central Asia would foster the process of democratization and ensure effective implementation of civil and political freedoms. Representative on Freedom of the Media, Miklós Haraszti, also reinforced the importance of public-service broadcasting as a basic tool of democracy and encouraged Central Asian governments to transform state-owned broadcasters into independent public services.

Conclusion

The tenth anniversary of the OSCE field presence in Kazakhstan and the entry of Kazakhstan into the OSCE Troika is an appropriate occasion to highlight the progress made by the OSCE Centre in Astana, and broadly speaking by the OSCE, in providing the best possible assistance and expertise, and also to recognize Kazakhstan's achievements on its journey towards democracy. When the OSCE Centre in Almaty opened in 1999, no one could have predicted the remarkable situation in which we find ourselves today. The fact that much of the Centre's work today is cast in terms of preparations for the 2010 Kazakhstani OSCE Chairmanship tells a meaningful story. Kazakhstan will become the first former Soviet country to take the reins of the OSCE. In doing so, it holds the potential to usher in a new era of OSCE engagement and bring Central Asia closer to the countries "West of Vienna", while enabling the latter to better understand developments taking place "East of Vienna". This after all is what lies at the core of the unique endeavour that is the OSCE.