

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.