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Kazakhstan's OSCE Chairmanship: History and Challenges

The OSCE participating States unanimously approved the application of the Republic of Kazakhstan to chair the Organization during 2010. There can be no doubt that this represents a major diplomatic triumph for Kazakhstan and an acknowledgment of the country's accomplishments. A dignified compromise was found, which enabled all the parties to retain their integrity.

However, this Chairmanship may be fraught with problems that could complicate Kazakhstan's standing in the international system as a whole. The OSCE's current problems may go beyond the customary discussion of the Organization's objectives in the areas of security and co-operation. Indeed, the OSCE's partnership with the post-Soviet states affects their relations with the West in general, and with the European Union, other European institutions, NATO, and the USA, in particular. In recent years, the question of European "energy security" has also been included in the issues discussed within the framework of the OSCE, in which regard Kazakhstan's relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are set to be recontextualized.

Kazakhstan's Chairmanship of the OSCE is a unique geopolitical test of the country's maturity, as it involves a range of key issues concerning relations with the West, including security and geo-political and geo-economic affairs. Currently, these relations are developing along the following lines:

Ever since 1992, one of the OSCE's principle activities has been the preservation of interethnic concord and the observation of the rights of national minorities. OSCE representatives first expressed concern at the situation in Central Asia at the Istanbul Summit in 1999, remarking upon the increased threat posed by international terrorism, the growth of aggressive extremism, organized crime, and illegal trafficking in weapons and drugs. The 1999 Istanbul Summit resulted in the signing of the Charter for European Security and the adoption of the Istanbul Summit Declaration, in which a number of issues dealt directly with security problems emerging in Central Asia.

Relations between Kazakhstan and the OSCE took on a special character in 2000. Astana's policies have at times been subjected to intense criticism by the Organization and its affiliated institutions in connection with issues such as human rights compliance, the observance of democracy, and election campaign techniques. These bilateral problems generally occurred at times of stress in international relations and the geopolitical situation in the Eurasian space. Not just Kazakhstan but all the post-Soviet states were exposed to such criticism, including Russia and the other Central Asian republics. Under these circumstances, Kazakhstan lined up with a group of other

states that criticized the OSCE for applying double standards and being biased in its criticism. In particular, Astana joined the states that issued a collective *démarche* to the OSCE at the 2004 Sofia Ministerial Council.

In September 2003, the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the OSCE announced a confidential memorandum entitled “On the Issue of Reform of OSCE Field Activities”.¹ The memorandum accused the Organization of overemphasizing the human dimension. The field missions were subjected to scathing criticism, which centred on the accusation that they had collaborated with non-governmental organizations and human rights protection agencies. It was suggested that missions be set up in accordance with an agreement reached with the host country, and that their mandate be restricted to one year, to be extended only with the agreement of the OSCE Permanent Council. This would ensure that the work of mission members would be subject to control by the governments of host countries.

At a session of the Permanent Council in July 2004, a joint statement initiated by Moscow and signed by all CIS states except for Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkmenistan was announced. It reproached the Organization for its inability to “adapt in the current conditions to the requirements of the changing world and ensure an effective solution to issues of security and co-operation in the Euro-Atlantic area”² and for non-observance of the Helsinki principles, including non-interference in internal affairs and respect for national sovereignty.

Concurrently, however, Kazakhstan started developing its policy to consolidate the integration of the Organization and to reduce the opposition between the Northern American and European countries, on the one side, and the Eurasian states, on the other. In this connection, Astana applied for the OSCE Chairmanship for the year 2009. This suggestion was approved of by Moscow and supported by all the other post-Soviet states. Later, they were joined by many Eastern European countries and a number of Western European states.

There were significant developments in relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the OSCE during 2005, during which period agreement was reached in principle on Kazakhstan’s future Chairmanship. By 2006, the consensus was nearly complete. Nevertheless, the United States and the United Kingdom, two influential states, questioned Kazakhstan’s level of democratization and urged the postponement of the Chairmanship until 2012 or even later. At the Brussels Ministerial Council in 2006, the OSCE participating States failed to achieve a consensus on the Kazakhstani Chairmanship, despite the support of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and France.

1 *On the Issue of Reform of OSCE Field Activities – A Food-for-Thought Paper*, PC.DEL/986/03, 4 September 2003. The Memorandum was prepared in conjunction with the OSCE Delegations of Russia, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan.

2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Information and Press Department, *Statement by CIS Member Countries on the State of Affairs in the OSCE*, Moscow, 3 July 2004, at: http://www.ln.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/3be4758c05585a09c3256ecc00255a52.

The decision was postponed until the Madrid Meeting of the Ministerial Council, scheduled for November 2007. There, a consensus was achieved only two hours before the end of the final session. In Madrid, it was decided that Kazakhstan would chair the OSCE in 2010, a year later than originally intended. In Kazakhstan, the triumph gained in Madrid was perceived as an acknowledgment of the country's accomplishments and, in particular, a recognition of the contribution made by its president. When Kazakhstan's bid was submitted for discussion, the country had to decide between two possible strategies: either to exacerbate the dispute with the OSCE, which could only end in the country's withdrawal from the Organization, or to attempt to use this opportunity to enhance its national prestige and increase its influence. The second alternative was preferable.

At the beginning of 2009, Kazakhstan joined Greece and Finland in the OSCE Troika. However, Kazakh representatives had already started working actively in OSCE structures as early as 2008, first by joining the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA), then by assuming the deputy chairmanship of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, heading the OSCE Contact Group for the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, and providing the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims.

Kazakhstan's 2010 Chairmanship is a remarkable event for both Kazakhstan itself and for the OSCE. For Kazakhstan, it represents not just international recognition of its achievements in domestic and foreign policy, but also the realization of its responsibility for their further development and a readiness to share responsibility for security in the entire space of the OSCE.

Kazakhstan's Chairmanship bid confronted the participating States with several potential precedents: It would be the first time that a CIS country undergoing political transformation had held this post; the first time a country largely located in Asia had done so; and the first time a predominantly Muslim country had chaired the Organization. These factors account for the difficulty in reaching consensus on Kazakhstan's Chairmanship, which Kazakhstan first proposed in 2003, with the initial aim of holding the Chairmanship in 2009. This initiative caught the OSCE participating States by surprise.

The delay in deciding on Kazakhstan's Chairmanship bid, which was only finally approved in November 2007 in Madrid, uncovered institutional problems in the Organization and a discrepancy between the formal basis of its activities and their execution in practice. It turned out that the Organization lacked clear formal criteria for assessing a hopeful country's bid to chair the Organization. The decision on Kazakhstan's Chairmanship depended more on overcoming Western partners' bias against CIS countries and on current NATO-Russia and EU-Russia relations.

The decision that Kazakhstan would chair the Organization in 2010 instead of 2009 as requested was a compromise. The delay was justified as

providing an opportunity for Kazakhstan to undertake further political, judicial, and social reform and to prepare Kazakh officials to work in OSCE structures.

The invitation of the then Finnish Chairman-in-Office to Kazakhstan to take part in the expanded OSCE Troika from 2008, which would draft long-term OSCE programmes, was unprecedented. As a result of entering OSCE structures two years ahead of its Chairmanship, Kazakhstan received a real opportunity not only to acquire work experience but also to draw the Organization's attention to Central Asia's current problems. Kazakhstan also joined the Troika at a difficult time in its history. The global economic crisis damaged the entire system of international relations. And while the OSCE is an influential organization, it still cannot play a primary role in solving modern conflicts.

The OSCE managed to establish a dialogue between the sides in the bipolar era of the Cold War, and retained its significance after the demise of the USSR, helping the newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union to establish themselves. The Organization now needs to find new forms of co-operation and add new understanding to its accumulated experience, because it will only be able to respond adequately to modern challenges if it changes radically.

From the very beginning, the OSCE's activities have evolved along three distinct dimensions: the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the humanitarian. The first two spheres developed relatively steadily, while the third started to cause heated debate in the final years of the 20th century, as it became a kind of politically motivated tool for the democratic transformation of the post-Soviet countries.

The work of the OSCE showed an imbalance in functional and geographical terms. Its activities in the economic and politico-military dimensions either overlapped with or were duplicated by the activities of the EU and NATO. The same applied to its work in the human dimension and the Council of Europe. These organizations adopted specific legally binding decisions in these spheres, whereas the meetings of OSCE participating States were merely advisory, and its documents remained declarations. Geographically, the work of the OSCE, which has 56 members from North America, Europe, and the former Soviet Union, was imbalanced towards the work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in the countries of the former Soviet bloc.

The OSCE's capabilities have been influenced by US domination, the expansion of the EU and NATO, the colour revolutions in post-Soviet countries, Russia's growing role, and the energy crisis. 2008 was the most complicated year in the OSCE's history, as the recognition of Kosovo's independence, the war between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia, and the declaration of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia took place outside a platform for dialogue.

The political reality is that in the current global crisis and with the principle of universal security within the OSCE not implemented, it is necessary to change the ideological approach to the entire security system. This idea is shared by French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. The creation of a new European security system in which CIS and EU countries could benefit from a new security architecture and which will be adequate to new challenges and threats is a logical response to current global developments. The OSCE's short-term task is to strengthen its role in the global system of international relations.

What is the uniqueness and potential of the OSCE and what can Kazakhstan propose during its Chairmanship? Despite the current complications, the OSCE is an unusual organization that unites North American, European, and former Soviet countries, and all participating States have equal rights, including the right to chair the Organization.

The OSCE's principle of consensus allows Kazakhstan and the other CIS countries to influence the course of discussion and decision-making on key security issues. At the 2009 Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Chairman of the Kazakh Senate, Kasym-Zhomart Tokayev, stressed that in the modern world a system of security and co-operation should not be considered European or Asian.³

The belief that ensuring one's own security is only possible at the expense of the security of others is no longer acceptable.⁴ This view was also stressed by the Kazakh and Russian delegations at the Parliamentary Assembly's Winter Meeting in 2009 and the proposals for a new European security architecture were the leitmotif of a special debate at the meeting.

The OSCE participating States have treated all the initiatives proposed by Kazakhstan with due consideration. The Finnish Chairman of the OSCE in 2008, Alexander Stubb, praised the work of Kazakh representatives in the economic and environmental sphere and Kazakhstan's efforts in reforming its political system. The country's "Path to Europe" programme does not just aim to expand political and economic co-operation and attract investment and technological know-how, but also raises Kazakhstan's relations with EU countries to the level of strategic partnership.

With its comprehensive concept of security, the OSCE is capable of creating a single Eurasian security system, one that is adequate to global challenges and threats. It has also invited NATO, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

3 Cf. *Statement by H.E. Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at the Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Vienna, 20 February 2009*, PA.DEL/3/09/Corr.1, 24 February 2009, p. 1.

4 See, e.g., *Delegation of the Russian Federation, Statement by Mr. Alexander Groushko, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the Special Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on a New European Security Architecture, 20 February 2009*, PA.DEL/1/09, 20 February 2009, p. 2.

(SCO), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to cooperate with it in this. The OSCE's co-operation partners are, in Asia: Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Afghanistan, and Mongolia; and in the Mediterranean: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia.

The OSCE has the potential to prevent and solve interethnic and religious crises, which will help overcome a clash of civilizations. The Charter for European Security, adopted at the Istanbul Summit in 1999, gave an impetus to close co-operation with partners, and there is now a need to amend this Charter and create a common Eurasian security system. From 2003, the main priorities of the OSCE's Chairmanships have been to reform the OSCE, solve regional conflicts, fight terrorism and drug trafficking, support democratic processes, counter human trafficking, and promote tolerance and freedom of religion.

At an OSCE meeting on cultural, religious, and racial tolerance in 2006, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev set clear goals for Kazakhstan's Chairmanship:

- With regard to the situation in Central Asia, Kazakhstan is ready to act as a regional guarantor, ensuring genuine and long-term security;
- Kazakhstan, with its positive experience of interethnic and religious accord, aims to democratize its political system and, as an active member of the OSCE, intends to strengthen the Organization, taking into account the interests of all member states.

On 30 April 2007, in Vienna, Kazakhstan's then foreign minister, Marat Tazhin, presented Kazakhstan's vision of the future development of the OSCE. Under conditions of rapid global change, the priority objective of increasing the efficiency of the OSCE could be solved through the creation of a genuine platform for dialogue that will unite the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian spaces.

In 2007, Kazakhstan implemented a range of political reforms, including amending its constitution to increase the role of political parties, holding an election to the lower house of Parliament (Mazhilis), continuing reforms in the judicial and local self-government spheres, and starting to build an efficient model of co-operation between the government and civil society. In 2008, amendments were made to the Kazakh laws "On Political Parties", "On Elections", and "On the Media".

At the 2009 OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Winter Meeting, Kazakh Senate Speaker Tokayev detailed Kazakhstan's priorities during its OSCE Chairmanship in 2010, describing them as clear and irreversible:

- Kazakhstan aims to increase Central Asia's significance in the OSCE. It seeks to enroot the OSCE's common values in the region. Kazakhstan

- aims to make its contribution to ensuring security and stability in Eurasia.
- Kazakhstan has considerable experience in chairing regional organizations, including the CIS, the SCO, and the CICA. Kazakhstan's Chairmanship of the OSCE opens up new possibilities for establishing constructive co-operation between various regional organizations.
 - As OSCE Chair, Kazakhstan intends to boost the role of the Organization as a unique platform for dialogue between Europe and Asia.⁵

Thus, during its Chairmanship Kazakhstan intends to focus the Organization's activities on maintaining stability in Central Asia and, as a consequence, strengthening stability in the entire space of the OSCE.

Kazakhstan also plans to take urgent measures to fulfil socio-economic programmes in Afghanistan; to strengthen economic relations between Central Asian countries; to develop transport and transit routes in Central Asia; and to support the rational use of water and energy resources in the region.

Kazakhstan is also ready to share its experience of interethnic and religious accord. It is precisely these spheres, which are at the core of the OSCE's activities, that need a new vision. Kazakhstan's Chairmanship of the OSCE confirms the main principle of the Organization – the equality of all its members and their interest in sustainable development.

It was always apparent that the activities of the European Union will influence Kazakhstan's Chairmanship of the OSCE. It is therefore necessary to take into consideration Brussels' principal targets and incentives with regard to Central Asia. It was also beyond doubt that the Kazakhstani Chairmanship would be impacted by North American influences. In January 2009, a new Democratic administration came to power in the United States, with Barack Obama, the newly elected President, in the White House. US policy towards Eurasia, and the OSCE in particular, was always going to be linked to Russian-American relations, relations with the CIS, NATO expansion, the situation in Afghanistan, the situations in Iran and Pakistan, and definitely American-Chinese and America-Indian relations.

Alongside the OSCE, the North Atlantic Alliance is the other major international security organization to encompass North America and a large part of Eurasia. Consequently, the NATO factor will certainly influence the OSCE situation and the behaviour patterns of the Alliance's members within the framework of the Organization's activities.

The crucial role in supporting Kazakhstan's Chairmanship was played by Russia and other post-Soviet states. The CIS states supported Astana's bid, granting Kazakhstan a collective mandate to protect their interests within the OSCE. Even apart from that factor, there are certain objective circumstances that ensure that Kazakhstan should and presumably will co-ordinate

5 Cf. *Statement by H.E. Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev*, cited above (Note 3), pp. 6-7.

its moves with Moscow in the course of its Chairmanship. Kazakhstan is also committed to the Central Asian republics. However, there currently exist a number of intricate circumstances that might at times lead to different understandings and interpretations of purposes and objectives on the part of Russia and Kazakhstan.

The OSCE Chairmanship is certain to be a milestone in the history of the foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and will also announce that country's coming of age as a regional leader. But for Russia, at least according to Russian politicians, this will probably lead to more problems than opportunities. They do not expect Kazakhstan to demand (as Russia does) changes to the OSCE's pattern of operations. For Astana, given its geopolitical status, it will be enough to gain the benefits that can accrue from fulfilling the Chairmanship function. But Moscow aims to change the rules of the game altogether, admittedly a far greater challenge. Furthermore, Russia possesses a far wider range of levers than does Kazakhstan.

A further question concerns the essence of the viewpoint and claims of the Russian Federation with respect to the OSCE's goals. Russian politicians point out imbalances in OSCE activities: specifically the geographical imbalance (the activities of the Organization are focused primarily on the area "East of Vienna", mainly in the countries of the former Yugoslavia and USSR) and the thematic imbalance (from the point of view of Russia, there has been an unjustified shift in favour of human rights protection at the expense of other aspects of the OSCE's work, namely: politico-military security and the economic and environmental dimension). Moscow is also displeased with the autonomy of a number of OSCE institutions, above all ODIHR, which is involved in election monitoring.

The Russian leadership has publicly accused the independent OSCE institutions of bias, castigated them for their double standards, and argues that they have been "privatized" by the Western countries, foremost among them the United States. Time and again, Russian leaders have made statements proclaiming that there is no sense in maintaining the OSCE in its current form, and calls for Russia to withdraw from the Organization are becoming more persistent.

In addition, Kazakhstan's Chairmanship of the OSCE may be fraught with problems that could complicate Kazakhstan's standing in the international system. In order to act effectively as the Chair of the Organization, Kazakhstan will have to implement the following scenario: elaborate a clear-cut and precise scheme of democratic reorganization in the country in the immediate future; take the initiative in such reforms to ensure that they are not viewed in the West as measures that have been imposed from outside or taken under pressure from the internal political opposition.

As well as an opportunity to overcome the dividing lines within the OSCE, Kazakhstan's Chairmanship offers a chance to take greater account of the interests and views of the countries "East of Vienna". Under Kazakh-

stan's Chairmanship, the CIS countries will be sure to have better opportunities for the implementation of the projects they initiate. In this regard, Kazakhstan has an opportunity to consolidate the Organization.

There has long been an open question regarding the prioritization of the OSCE's activities – whether it should focus on the humanitarian sphere or security matters during Kazakhstan's Chairmanship period. At the moment, it seems that the advisable course of action would be to shift the OSCE's emphasis on democratization, including in terms of practical measures, towards cultural co-operation, inter-confessional concord, and the dialogue of civilizations.

These are precisely the spheres in which Kazakhstan is capable of contributing a great deal to the OSCE's work. In the area of security enhancement, it will be important to accentuate items essential for regional stability, such as efforts to combat terrorism, drug trafficking, and illegal migration. At the same time, it is important to be cautious, especially when dealing with issues associated with regional conflicts and the unrecognized states.

The prospects of reinforcing the connection between the European and Asian security systems – the OSCE and CICA – seem to be good. Having bolstered Kazakhstan's application for the OSCE Chairmanship, Western states might attempt to encourage Kazakhstan to engage in various types of anti-Russian campaign within the Organization. The toughest cases will be those where Astana, as the holder of the OSCE Chairmanship, will be obliged to face the challenge of criticizing its allies and CIS partners. In these cases, the only way out for Kazakhstan will be to try to tone down the statements and shift the accents.

Although, with Kazakhstan's Chairmanship, the OSCE will somehow acquire a "Eurasian countenance", in order to avoid any irritation among the Western partners it will be sensible to minimize the use of the term "Eurasian" in official documents, records, and ceremonial rhetoric, and instead to emphasize Kazakhstan's "European choice". This will contribute to promoting dialogue between the parties in the language they are used to. But the uppermost objective of Kazakhstan's 2010 Chairmanship of the OSCE should be the enhancement of the country's standing in the international system.

Early on in Kazakhstan's Chairmanship, however, the stormy events of 2010 in Central Asia changed Kazakhstan's agenda. The situation in Kyrgyzstan became the most radical challenge not only for security and stability in the region, but also for the Kazakhstani Chairmanship.

Since the meeting of OSCE foreign ministers at Almaty in July, the main goal of the Kazakhstani agenda has been to revive the custom of OSCE Summits by holding a Summit Meeting at the end of the year – which would be the first since Istanbul in 1999. And the main question for Central Asian security is an open one: how to construct a dialogue between the various organizations responsible for regional (including Afghanistan) security and sta-

bility, i.e. the OSCE, NATO, the CSTO, and the SCO. Perhaps, a new OSCE summit could answer all these questions and solve all these security problems.