

Kanat Saudabayev

Foreword by the Chairperson-in-Office

When Kazakhstan assumed the duties of the OSCE Chairmanship at the beginning of this year, we were proud to become the first Central Asian state, the first former Soviet republic, and the first majority-Muslim country to chair the Organization. Now, as our year at the helm concludes, we remain proud – proud of the work that the Organization has accomplished this year. At the beginning of December, at President Nursultan Nazarbayev's initiative, OSCE Heads of State or Government gathered in Astana for the first OSCE Summit in eleven years. They reaffirmed their adherence to all agreed-upon OSCE norms, principles, and commitments, and laid out an ambitious vision of a free, democratic, common, and indivisible security community stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

In January, in a video address to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna, President Nursultan Nazarbayev announced that Kazakhstan's Chairmanship would be guided by "four Ts" – trust, tradition, transparency, and tolerance. We endeavoured to live up to these principles, to be worthy of the confidence placed in us, and to meet the expectations of the OSCE community. We also endeavoured to enhance trust in the OSCE area and to strengthen the Organization itself. Special conferences marking the 20th anniversary of the Charter of Paris and the Copenhagen Document in France and Denmark, as well as the informal meeting of the OSCE foreign ministers in July in Almaty contributed to this, as did, of course, the Astana Summit in December.

In the politico-military dimension, our Chairmanship has supported joint efforts to revive and strengthen the arms control regime and confidence-building measures. Together with our partners in the Forum for Security Cooperation, we began looking at a much-needed update of the Vienna Document 1999, and we hope that a revision will be agreed upon next year. We also adopted a plan of action to tackle the threat of small arms and light weapons. A roundtable in February highlighted the importance of the principles inherent in the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security.

In the economic and environmental dimension, we prioritized good governance at border crossings and the development of secure and efficient land transportation. The 18th Economic and Environmental Forum focused on this topic and contributed to crucial international deliberations at a time when we are emerging from the global financial crisis. The link between the environment and security was also in focus, particularly the potential of using the work to address the challenges of the Aral Sea region as a model for resolving environmental problems elsewhere in the OSCE area.

In the human dimension, Kazakhstan put the spotlight on tolerance as an essential element of security. We focused attention on interethnic and interreligious tolerance with a view to reducing the risk of conflict in the OSCE area. The OSCE High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination held in June in Astana was part of this work. The Chairmanship spared no effort in fostering constructive co-operation with civil society and ensured the broadest possible involvement of non-governmental organizations in the OSCE's activities. We also strongly supported the work and the independence of the OSCE institutions, which serve as important tools for ensuring respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democratic principles, and the rule of law throughout the OSCE area.

We endeavoured to enhance co-operation in countering transnational threats and challenges, including those originating outside the OSCE area. In addressing these and other challenges, we sought to strengthen the OSCE's interaction with its Partners for Co-operation, particularly Afghanistan, and with other international and regional organizations.

As with all OSCE Chairmanships, our agenda was also set by unforeseen events and crises. The crisis in Kyrgyzstan was a challenge for all of us. Our Special Envoy, Ambassador Zhanybek Karibzhanov, together with colleagues from the OSCE Secretariat, immediately travelled to Bishkek to support negotiations with all stakeholders to restore public order and confidence. In close co-operation with the United Nations, the European Union, and others, the OSCE played an important role in supporting Kyrgyzstan's efforts to return to stability, first in April and then in June when renewed violence broke out. While strengthening the activities of the OSCE field operation in the country we led complex negotiations on how the OSCE could contribute to the process of restoring public safety. In the end, we agreed on sending a group of international police advisors to Kyrgyzstan for a year as part of a Community Security Initiative. The advisors will help restore confidence between the police and the local population, and between the different ethnic communities. The Organization will remain committed to stabilizing the situation in the country and to its sustainable development.

We also worked to resolve the protracted conflicts that continue to threaten security in the OSCE area. The Transdnistria conflict settlement process remains a priority, and we saw some positive dynamics this year, including the holding of regular informal 5+2 meetings, which include the three mediators – the OSCE, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine – and the two parties to the conflict, as well as the EU and the United States as observers. The Minsk Group continued its intensive efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and we hope that further progress can be made in this respect in the coming year. The Geneva International Discussions served as a useful tool in the search for solutions in the area of security, stability, and humanitarian issues following the August 2008 conflict in Georgia. A positive sign here was the resumption of the Dvani/Ergneti Incident Prevention

and Response Mechanism, which was reconvened in October, following a one-year hiatus. We are convinced that the proper functioning of this mechanism will help increase the level of trust and expand the opportunities for resolving security and humanitarian questions.

Much of the second part of the year, following the decision by participating States to hold a Summit in Astana, was devoted to preparations for this top-level meeting. Over two intensive days, we welcomed presidents, prime ministers, government ministers, and other top officials to our young capital. As expected given the complex political environment, negotiations were difficult. The Astana spirit kept us working, seeking constructive solutions to build consensus. It was late at night when President Nazarbayev chaired the final session of the Summit, where the “Astana Commemorative Declaration: Towards a Security Community” was adopted. This declaration is a strong document that reaffirms our adherence to the norms and principles that form the basis of security in the OSCE region. Just as importantly, it lays out a common vision for the future.

“We are determined to work together to fully realize the vision of a comprehensive, co-operative and indivisible security community throughout our shared OSCE area. This security community should be aimed at meeting the challenges of the 21st century and based on our full adherence to common OSCE norms, principles and commitments across all three dimensions,” the leaders said in the declaration.

As Kazakhstan’s Chairmanship draws to a close, we stand ready to do all we can to help the incoming Lithuanian Chairmanship, and the Irish and Ukrainian Chairmanships that follow, to move this vision closer to reality.