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The 2010 OSCE Astana Summit: An Initial Assessment

OSCE Summits are no routine matter. Although the 1992 Helsinki Document provides for a Summit every two years, eleven years passed between Istanbul 1999 and the OSCE Summit Meeting that was held in the Kazakhstani capital of Astana on 1-2 December 2010. Expectations were all the higher as this was the first OSCE Summit to be held in a Central Asian state, the first in a CIS country, and the first in a country with a predominantly Muslim population. These high hopes were largely disappointed. While the Summit adopted the “Astana Commemorative Declaration”,¹ it failed to reach consensus on the “Astana Framework for Action” because of disagreement over the unresolved conflicts. This proved the truth of the observation made by the Polish Foreign Minister, Radosław Sikorski, on the second day of the Summit Meeting that “holding the Summit now is not a risk-free venture”.²

This article starts with some deliberations on the nature of political success and failure within the CSCE/OSCE framework. This is followed by an account of the Astana Declaration. An analysis of why agreement on the Framework for Action could not be achieved is followed by a brief description of the Framework’s major elements. Finally, it addresses the concern of what steps the Organization can take after Astana.

Political Success and Failure in the CSCE/OSCE Context

Political success stories in the CSCE/OSCE context have occurred for quite different reasons. The success of the 1975 Helsinki Summit was based on a grand compromise between the Soviet interest in legitimizing the territorial and political status quo in Europe, and the Western objective of changing precisely that state of affairs. Thus, motivations for signing the Helsinki Final Act were quite contradictory. At the other end of the spectrum, the 1990 Paris Summit expressed great joy over a new era of democracy, peace, and unity shared by all states. In this respect, Astana 2010 was less epoch-making, driven neither by great elation nor by fundamental decisions about the European security order. The Astana Summit agenda – arms control in Europe,

1 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Summit Meeting, Astana 2010, *Astana Commemorative Declaration: Towards a Security Community*, SUM.DOC/1/10, 3 December 2010, at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/73962>.

2 *Address by H.E. Radosław Sikorski, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, VII OSCE Summit, Astana, 2nd December 2010*, SUM.DEL/59/10, 2 December 2010, at: www.osce.org/cio/73956.

transnational threats in Central Asia and Afghanistan, human dimension issues – was rather of a kind that does not concern heads of state or government on a daily basis.

Recognizing political success or failure is also a matter of chronological distance. Thus, the historical importance of the Helsinki Final Act only became clear much later, while in 1975 even some participants did not attribute major relevance to this Summit Meeting. By contrast, the 1999 Istanbul Summit was immediately assessed as a great success. In hindsight, however, it has become clear that it marked more the starting point of a decade of disputes and disagreement among states that led to a decline of the political relevance of the OSCE. In addition, the line separating success and failure is sometimes very thin. The 1999 Istanbul Summit, for instance, nearly failed because of disputes over Chechnya. For all these reasons, it might be too early to form valid conclusions on the Astana Summit. Any assessment can only be preliminary, if only because the final success and/or failure of Astana depends largely on the conclusions the participating States draw from it. This is particularly true for a Summit Meeting like this, which is characterized by a complex mix of success and failure.

The Astana Commemorative Declaration

In spite of its brevity – it is three-and-a-half pages in length – the Astana Declaration is a fully fledged political document, only the third at the level of Ministerial Council Meetings and Summits since the 1999 Istanbul Summit. Although the main purpose of the Astana Declaration is to reconfirm existing CSCE/OSCE commitments, its character is not solely commemorative. The Declaration does contain new elements, the most striking being the “vision of a free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok, rooted in agreed principles, shared commitments and common goals” (para. 1). The idea of a “security community” was introduced within the OSCE’s Corfu Process in the first half of 2010. According to Karl Deutsch, who devised this concept, “the existence of a pluralistic security community would be tested operationally by the absence of systematic advance preparations for warfare in terms of significant amounts of manpower and resources”.³ From this, it is clear that the term “security community” cannot be used as a description of the current state of affairs, but rather represents a bold vision of a completely new quality of international relations within the OSCE area. This is reflected in the phrasing of the Astana Commemorative Declaration, which is subtitled “*Towards a Security Community*” (emphasis added).

3 Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community at the International Level. Problems of Definition and Measurement*, 1970, p. 41.

One can ask whether such an objective is not overly ambitious, particularly since the participating States could not even agree on a working programme in Astana. Apparently, the desire among states was to transcend, at least at the normative declaratory level, the previous *acquis* of the Organization, which was summarized in the Astana Declaration as “comprehensive, co-operative, equal and indivisible security, which relates the maintenance of peace to the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and links economic and environmental co-operation with peaceful inter-State relations” (para. 2). To go beyond this normative level, which had already been achieved with the 1990 Charter of Paris, it was obviously necessary to resort to the vision of a security community, a community that has moved so far from the idea of violent conflict among its members that they no longer prepare for war. On the other hand, the proclamation of a security community focuses even more sharply on the distance between this lofty political objective and the dire political realities that are recognized in the Declaration via the statement that “mistrust and divergent security perceptions must be overcome” (para. 7). Time will show whether this ambitious political vision will inspire states to change political realities for the better, or whether unchanged or even worsening political circumstances will undermine the goal of a security community.

The security community to which the Declaration aspires is qualified as Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian. The term “Eurasian”, in particular, might be considered an expression of recognition that the Central Asian States have finally arrived in the OSCE; it might also reflect their increased political relevance and self-confidence. And it is certainly tied to the 2010 Kazakhstani Chairmanship, without which there would have been no Summit in 2010, nor such a prominent place for Central Asia on the OSCE’s agenda.

Another important feature of the Astana Declaration is that it reconfirms the famous formula of the 1991 Moscow Document: “We reaffirm categorically and irrevocably that the commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned” (para. 6). That the language of 1991 could be reconfirmed now, and for the second time in a Summit Document (after the 1992 Helsinki Summit Declaration), is by no means politically trivial, but rather points to the durability of the OSCE’s normative *acquis*, even if this *acquis* is not yet (completely) implemented in all participating States.

Why the Astana Framework for Action Failed

According to negotiators, 95 per cent of the Astana Framework for Action had already been agreed upon – everything apart from the sections concerning the unresolved conflicts, particularly Georgia and Moldova – before this

eight-page plan of action failed precisely because of disputes over these conflicts. While the EU and Russia would have been able to find common language on these conflicts, this was not seen as sufficient by the USA, Georgia, and Moldova. One speculation was that the USA was seeking to achieve very strict language on these conflicts in order not to provide the US Senate with any pretext for blocking the ratification of the New START Treaty.⁴ Again, as in the final years of the Clinton administration, the Republican Party has started to co-govern in Washington.

The failure to adopt the Astana Framework for Action has shown again how powerful and destructive the disputes over the protracted conflicts, which, for a certain period, were erroneously called frozen, still are. Before Astana, the dominant perception was that the Summit would trigger difficult discussions, but would most probably lead to at least a modest success, including some kind of working plan. After Astana, it is once again clear that, as in 2008, the explosiveness of the unresolved conflicts, particularly in Georgia, has been underestimated, and the amount of confidence newly created by the discussion processes of the last year and a half has been overestimated. The failure of Astana to adopt a plan of action is all the more relevant as it was, in a sense, preceded by a lengthy preparation phase, namely the Corfu Process. During this process, it was frequently said that the discussions were substantive, and that the atmosphere and mutual understanding had improved. Apparently, all this was not enough to achieve an agreement on concrete action. This is a sobering discovery, but probably also a healthy one.

The inability of OSCE meetings to agree on political documents because of disagreement on sub-regional conflicts is admittedly nothing new. Since the 2000 Ministerial Council Meeting in Vienna, we have become used to the fact that OSCE Ministerials, with rare exceptions, have not been able to agree on final declarations. However, these meetings were able to agree on other decisions. If Astana had been a Ministerial, it would have achieved more than other Ministerials because it adopted a final declaration. But Astana was a Summit, which had raised much higher expectations, particularly regarding the overcoming of past tensions and disputes, and the re-establishment of a meaningful OSCE agenda through a concrete and detailed working programme. Thus, the level of disappointment this time is much higher.

At Astana, once again, an important document failed because of specific unresolved conflicts. While Georgia and the other protracted conflicts do possess inherent importance, they have more significance as symbols of deep mistrust and suspicion. The fact that the Astana Framework for Action failed because of these conflicts is particularly worrisome because it was the shock

4 On the role of the so-called Istanbul commitments – the obligation of Russia to withdraw its armed forces from Georgia and Moldova – for the non-ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty by the NATO member states, and their pre-history in the US Senate, see Ulrich Kühn, *From Capitol Hill to Istanbul: The Origins of the Current CFE Deadlock*, CORE Working Paper 19, Hamburg 2009.

of the 2008 Georgia war – the shock that a war between two participating States could actually happen – that was one of the main drivers of the Corfu Process. Now, the dynamics of the process have changed again, but in the wrong direction.

Is this partial failure of Astana primarily the consequence of regrettable accidents, such as the excessive negotiation tactics of this or that delegation, or is it more structural in nature? Although the former would be convenient, as it would allow us to lay the blame on one side or another, unfortunately the second option seems to be more convincing. Because the syndrome of unresolved conflicts points to far deeper layers of existing confrontational elements, it would be superficial to look for a “guilty” party.

This notion that structural causes are to blame is supported by the fact that the expectations various parties had of the Summit were significantly different or even contradictory: While the Western states – the USA and the EU states alike – wanted to achieve concrete results, Russia’s aim was to avoid adopting a too detailed working programme. The results achieved in Astana correspond more with Russia’s expectations, while the Western countries have not secured their stated objectives.

All in all, the failure to adopt the Astana Framework for Action means that the Summit was unable to break the unfortunate tradition that OSCE Ministerial Council Meetings have established over the last decade of failing to achieve consensus on key documents because of disagreement over sub-regional conflicts. In this respect, Astana rather represents the political status quo, albeit this time at Summit level. Significantly, however, the most important objective tied to the Summit – making a decisive and visible step forward – has not been achieved.

Major Points of the Non-Adopted Astana Framework for Action

The failure of the Astana Framework for Action is all the more deplorable given that this working plan, which covers all the major items on the OSCE agenda, is a document of considerable substance. Its section on early warning and crisis management aims at, among other things, enhancing the analytical and operational capacity of the OSCE executive structures, developing the capacity of the Secretariat to support mediation efforts by the Chairmanship, reinforcing the OSCE mechanisms and procedures, and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the OSCE decision-making bodies in preventing and dealing with emerging and existing conflicts.

In the economic and environmental dimensions, the Framework for Action calls for the dialogue on energy security, transport security, and migration management to be strengthened, and tasks the OSCE bodies with reviewing the 2003 OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension.

The Framework's section on the human dimension is particularly well written. Among other things, it tasks the OSCE bodies with taking concrete measures to ensure the protection of journalists, considering updating media freedom commitments, countering manifestations of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, discrimination, and intolerance, and strengthening the implementation of OSCE commitments with respect to Roma and Sinti.

The section on transnational threats and challenges seeks to make the 2003 Maastricht Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century more operational by means of actions including consolidating the existing counterterrorism mandates, establishing a strategic framework for police-related activities, adopting an OSCE concept to combat trafficking in illicit drugs and chemical precursors, and implementing the 2005 OSCE Border Security and Management Concept. In addition, the Framework for Action plans to upgrade assistance to OSCE Partner State Afghanistan by providing training to Afghan police, border guard, and customs officials; continuing election support by ODIHR; developing and co-operation in areas such as good governance, economic development, rule of law, tolerance and non-discrimination, and human rights and fundamental freedoms; and other measures.

Finally, the Framework for Action contains a paragraph on strengthening the effectiveness and efficiency of the OSCE in several ways, among them strengthening the role and responsibilities of the Secretary General, considering possible improvements in the structure of the Secretariat, strengthening the effectiveness of OSCE field operations, and tasking the incoming Chairmanship with examining ways in which the legal framework of the OSCE could be strengthened.

The adoption of all these tasks, which in their entirety would have provided a fairly solid working programme for the OSCE – or at least a better one than the Organization has had over the last decade – has been subordinated to the dispute on the unresolved sub-regional conflicts in Georgia and Moldova.

What Next?

The OSCE has tried to achieve results through a comprehensive security dialogue, the Corfu Process, which was intended to create more common ground and thus enable states to agree on relevant action. This process was necessary, but, as the results of the Astana Summit show, not sufficient. Now, after the experience of Astana, there is no choice but to start activities in those areas where consensus is possible. In other words: Building confidence by co-operating on relevant concrete tasks is the order of the day. To this end, the Organization needs what it failed to adopt in Astana – a working programme.

Paragraph 12 of the Astana Declaration tasks the incoming Chairmanships with “developing a concrete action plan” that would take into account ideas and proposals made during the Corfu Process and the preparations for Astana. In a way, the Chairmanships have been burdened with a task that the Astana Summit failed to perform. The successful construction of an action plan presupposes that states stick to the “95 per cent” agreement on the Astana Framework for Action they have already achieved. However, if the current situation is (mis-)used to redo the already-achieved consensus on the working plan and to make this consensus again conditional on national priorities, then it will be nearly impossible to achieve an action plan or even elements of such a plan.

Some issues deserve special attention. Enhanced efforts to resolve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh through peaceful means are particularly pressing. It is alarming that, despite the Minsk Group’s declaration “that the time has come for more decisive efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”,⁵ the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan chose to speak in fairly irreconcilable terms. Each questioned the political will of the other side to resolve the conflict by peaceful means. The Armenian President, Serzh Sargsyan, said that “it once again became clear to me that at this stage Azerbaijan has no interest in settling the Karabakh issue: Its sole purpose is to inflict as much damage on Armenia as possible.”⁶ And the Azerbaijani President, Ilham Aliyev, came to the same conclusion in reverse: “The way how Armenia behaves during the negotiation process leads us to the conclusion that Armenia does not want peace, doesn’t want to liberate occupied territories, but wants to keep the status quo as long as they can and make the negotiation process endless.”⁷ Apparently, the presence of the three Minsk Group co-chairs at a very high level was not sufficient to prevent the two presidents from engaging in this kind of rhetoric. One can only hope that after the 2008 Georgia War, no further war will be needed to understand how quickly those unresolved conflicts – which can in no way be considered “frozen” – can re-explode into hot conflicts and outright war.

Another area where urgent action is required is addressing transnational threats and challenges, including those from outside the OSCE area, not only but particularly in relation to Central Asia and Afghanistan. As this is widely undisputed among the participating States, there should be no obstacles to starting action on these issues.

5 OSCE, *Joint Statement by the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries and the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia at the OSCE Summit in Astana, Kazakhstan*, CIO.GAL/200/10, 1 December 2010.

6 *Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia H.E. Serzh Sargsyan at the OSCE Summit, 2 December 2010, Astana*, SUM.DEL/67/10, 3 December 2010, at: www.osce.org/cio/73967.

7 *Statement by H.E. Ilham Aliyev, The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, OSCE Summit 2010, 1-2 December, Astana*, SUM.DEL/30/10, 1 December 2010, at: <http://www.osce.org/cio/73919>.

The same is true regarding a number of human dimension issues. The text in the Astana Framework for Action over which agreement has already been reached includes a number of tasks mentioned above. There should be no major obstacles to addressing them.

The real litmus test, however, is conventional arms control: CFE. The Astana Declaration states that “[...] we [the participating States] express our support for the ongoing consultations aiming at opening the way for negotiations in 2011” (para. 8). The most difficult issue in these consultations is the principle of host nation consent related to Georgia and Moldova. In a wider context, this is precisely the issue on which the Astana Framework for Action failed. If the resumption of new CFE negotiations in 2011 fails again because of disputes over Georgia and Moldova, then we will (again) be faced with the structural problem that major elements of the European security order cannot be addressed and worked on because of disputes over sub-regional conflicts.

For all these reasons, it is imperative that States now draw the right conclusions from Astana – that there is no alternative to joint action. If this happens, the Astana Summit can ultimately still lead to success.