

Kazakhstan's OSCE Chairmanship Agenda in 2010

CSIS-IND Conference

June 11, 2009

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Institute for New Democracies (IND) hosted a conference on Kazakhstan's 2010 Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The conference featured a keynote address by Ambassador George A. Krol, Deputy Assistant Secretary for South-Central Asia at the U.S. Department of State, as well as a strategic overview by CSIS Counselor and former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. The event brought together regional experts, diplomats, U.S. and Kazakh policymakers, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations and former OSCE chairing countries.

The conference was chaired by Janusz Bugajski, director of the CSIS New European Democracies Project. Bugajski opened the conference with a letter from Senator Mircea Geoana from Romania, who chaired the OSCE in 2001. Senator Geoana stressed that Kazakhstan will be the first Central Asian country to chair the OSCE. In his letter he wrote: "I am confident that Kazakhstan's ambitious agenda will encourage further transition in the region towards OSCE values and proves the international community's readiness to take notice of Central Asia's growing importance in the world community."

The conference identified the challenges and opportunities that the OSCE Chairmanship presents for Kazakhstan in 2010. Erlan Idrissov, the Ambassador of Kazakhstan to the United States, and Solomon Passy, Bulgaria's OSCE Chairman-in-Office (CiO) in 2004, delivered opening remarks. Ambassador Idrissov spoke about Kazakhstan's intentions to fulfill its responsibilities as OSCE Chair. He emphasized that Kazakh officials are aware of the reform challenges they face and noted that nation-building and consolidation are not easy processes. He further stated that the OSCE Chairmanship will help Kazakhstan to proceed faster with its political changes. Dr. Passy asserted that Vienna is no longer the dividing line within the OSCE. The line moved to the Black Sea during Bulgaria's CiO and will shift to the Caspian Sea with Kazakhstan as the Chair. This shift will transform the nature of multilateral dialogue and will empower the OSCE to engage China in dialogue.

The first panel on "Kazakhstan's Strategic Position" was moderated by Vladimir Socor (*Jamestown Foundation*) and featured presentations by Martha Olcott (*Carnegie Endowment*), Stephen Blank (*U.S. Army War College*), Edward Chow (*CSIS*) and the Advisor to the Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Talgat Kaliyev. The speakers outlined Kazakhstan's strategic role in Central Asia and Astana's relations with the U.S., Russia, and China. Olcott focused on Kazakhstan's national interests and pointed out that Washington should not exaggerate its influence in the country. Although Astana has its own vision for the country's development, its interests are not shaped in a vacuum as regional players and international powers also have an impact. Olcott believes that "Kazakhs have to be very good in coordination," but "they do not

have to be democratic to be good diplomats.” The only way of moving Kazakhstan forward on its internal democratization is to bring this debate to Kazakhstan.

Stephen Blank touched upon the internal and external challenges that Kazakhstan will face as CiO. He emphasized the importance for Astana to take the lead in resolving a number of security problems in Central Asia, such as border disputes, water management issues, and the local arms race. Blank also pointed out that Kazakhstan may be instrumental in defending OSCE principles against Russia’s attempts to dominate Eurasia and undermine the OSCE, NATO, and the EU. He asserted that, “if Kazakhstan can address these problems, then it can emerge with much greater prestige and credibility, and as a true leader in Central Asia.”

Talgat Kaliyev (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan*) underlined Kazakhstan’s cooperation with its neighbors Russia and China within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The country is preparing to enter into a customs union with Russia and Belarus. Kazakhstan has always been a leader in Central Asian integration, but the other countries in the region have not always been supportive of the idea. Islamic extremism is present in the region and drug trafficking is also a serious problem. Kazakhstan is cooperating with Afghanistan with numerous agreements underway to assist in the reconstruction of the country. The OSCE chairmanship is an opportunity for Kazakhstan to strengthen its relationship with Europe and the United States.

Lawrence DeNardis (*IND Chairman*) moderated the second panel on “Shaping Kazakhstan’s OSCE Agenda.” Speakers included Ambassador Stephan Minikes, who served as the U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE. Michael Laubsch (*Eurasian Transition Group*) called Kazakhstan a catalyst of change in Central Asia and expressed hope that the country will play the same role for the OSCE. He recognized that the European Union has not been involved sufficiently in building a geopolitical partnership with Kazakhstan. To ensure further cooperation between the EU and Kazakhstan, the European states should elaborate a program that would reward progress with a clearer understanding of Kazakhstan’s objectives. Ambassador Madina Jarbussynova (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan*) clarified Astana’s objectives as a flexible CiO that will strive to make the OSCE a stronger organization in order to better cope with various global threats. The threats and challenges were discussed in detail by Vladimir Socor (*Jamestown Foundation*), who spoke of the “frozen conflicts” that Kazakhstan will inherit as OSCE Chair. Socor focused on Russia’s muscle-flexing in Georgia, the arms race between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the precarious political situation in Moldova, and Moscow’s numerous attempts to undermine international norms and law.

The conference featured an important strategic presentation by CSIS Counselor and Trustee Zbigniew Brzezinski. He reminded the audience of how difficult it had been for Kazakhstan, with its ethnic and religious diversity, to stabilize its independence and acquire its own image and credibility abroad. The highly personalized rule seemed inevitable and at the time there was no credible alternative to President Nazarbayev. He underscored that Kazakhstan is not an autocracy as the country is engaged in an ongoing democratic transition that must be maintained and fostered. The real model for Kazakhstan should not be Russia but Ataturk’s Turkey, in

developing loyalty to the state and the constitution instead of loyalty to one individual. He focused on three core issues and graded Astana's achievements: consolidation of independent statehood (A-); diversification of international access (B-); and institutionalization of the democratic process (C-). When asked whether Kazakhstan has to be criticized for its political record, Dr. Brzezinski noted that Kazakhstan has to be encouraged to change it but without undermining its independence.

The keynote speaker was Ambassador George Krol, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for South-Central Asia. He expressed the willingness of the U.S. to support Kazakhstan in its efforts to abide by the democratic rules of the OSCE and uphold the spirit of the Helsinki Final Act. He encouraged Kazakhstan to make the OSCE more effective through confidence-building and constructive debate, while fulfilling its promise for domestic democratic reforms made at the OSCE Madrid Ministerial Meeting in 2007.

The third panel was moderated by Michael Haltzel (*Center for Transatlantic Relations*) and was devoted to "Kazakhstan and the OSCE Human Dimension." It featured presentations by Lorne Craner (*International Republican Institute*), Marat Bashimov (*Institute of European Law and Human Rights, Astana*) and Gerald Hyman (*CSIS*). Lorne Cramer outlined the major criticisms that Kazakhstan faces during its preparations for the OSCE Chairmanship, including a single-party parliament, the high threshold for parliamentary entry, and the draft law to regulate the internet. Marat Bashimov acknowledged the low level of political pluralism, but pointed out that such trends are shaped by domestic realities and legacies including an underdeveloped political culture and an embryonic civil society. Gerald Hyman stated that it would be naive to dictate to Kazakhstan the American democratic model. Nevertheless, he pointed out that any anti-democratic trends in Kazakhstan are worrisome. It was important that Kazakhstan chose to become a Chair of a democratic organization such as the OSCE. Hyman further stated that it is in everybody's interest that Kazakhstan does "not retreat into other organizations that do not have a human dimension."

In conclusion, Margarita Assenova (*IND Executive Director*) stated that the CSIS-IND project seeks to assist Kazakhstan in developing a workable OSCE agenda and to foster an open debate on questions surrounding Kazakhstan's chairmanship, including the human dimension. In this respect, the conference was successful. More substantial democratic changes will occur when such a dialogue takes place in Kazakhstan and the reform process is carried out by all segments of Kazakh society. Kazakhstan has no historic memory of a state, nation, or a democratic society before 1991. Kazakhstan proved successful in building its national institutions and developing its economy. The process of democratization started only recently, but it can take hold relatively quickly in a stable economic environment. Assenova ended by stating that Kazakhstan can be a responsible Chairman-in-Office and that it is also important for Kazakhstan to enjoy the experience as it begins to play a role on the global stage. This open discussion will continue in both Washington and Astana. The project's next conference will be held in Astana this fall.