

New impetus for OSCE

KAZAKHSTAN'S CHAIRMANSHIP BRINGS NEW PERSPECTIVE TO OSCE OBJECTIVES



Reflecting the realities of a multi-polar world, the young Kazakh republic has adopted a 'multi-dimensional' foreign policy to protect its independence

As the first Central Asian, post-Soviet, and predominantly Muslim state to lead the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Kazakhstan's chairmanship over the last year is a landmark event, closed with another: the first OSCE summit since 1999.

For Kazakhstan the post has been a strategic national project that will allow the country to develop closer ties with both Europe and the US, while also contributing to broader Eurasian security and prosperity. It is a further reminder of the role of emerging economies in a rapidly changing, multi-polar, world.

With 56 participating States from Europe, Central Asia and North America, the OSCE is the largest regional security organisation in the world. It deals with three dimensions of security – the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimension. Thus, the OSCE can play an important role in early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation, though its decisions are politically, but not legally binding.

The OSCE's reasoning behind choosing Kazakhstan was first that the OSCE chairmanship could serve as a strong incentive for Kazakhstan to make good on its promises of reforms, notably in support of democratic principles. Second, by choosing for the first time a country from the former Soviet Union that has maintained reasonably good relations with all the former republics, the post will give Kazakhstan leverage and credibility when dealing with crisis management such as in the Caucasus. Third, Kazakhstan is also a moderate Muslim country that has been a strong advocate of multi-confessional and inter-ethnic dialogues: at a time of growing tension with the Muslim world, Kazakhstan's conciliatory approach could foster a better dialogue with OSCE countries and beyond. Fourth, being blessed with large oil and gas resources, and thus familiar with Russia's control over energy export routes, Kazakhstan could play an important role as a mediator to tackle energy security issues involving the Russian Federation and European countries. Fifth, it is in a better position to understand the issues involving countries of the former Soviet space in light of their past shared history, and would be a country without direct stakes when dealing with some issues involving European countries.

Speaking in January 2010, marking Kazakhstan's assumption of the OSCE Chairmanship, President

Nursultan Nazarbayev said his chairmanship would be defined by the "four T's" – trust, tradition, transparency, and tolerance. The new OSCE Chairman-in-office, Kazakh Foreign Minister and State Secretary, Kanat Saudabayev, framed the priorities for Kazakhstan's 2010 chairmanship as addressing specific OSCE issues such as the resolution of protracted conflicts, the reconstruction of Afghanistan, countering terrorism and other transnational threats, enhancing Eurasian transportation, and promoting inter-ethnic and inter-religious understanding. Mr Saudabayev also stated that Kazakhstan would continue the OSCE's assessment of measures to improve the current security architecture in Europe, mentioning in particular a new draft security treaty proposed by Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, in November 2009.

Kazakhstan takes pride in its multi-vector foreign policy and its balanced relationship between its two powerful neighbours, Russia and China, while at the same time fostering greater economic and security collaboration with the US and Europe. Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship has brought to the organisation its expertise in balancing relationships with powerful partners without sacrificing its own interests. Kazakhstan is ably equipped to deal with territorial issues involving Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria, and bring Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Moldova to the negotiating table.

Kazakhstan is also playing a growing role in today's increasingly multi-polar world by coordinating and avoiding the duplication of efforts of the organisations it belongs to, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) with larger organisations such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank, or regional programmes such as the Central Asia or the Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) programme which focuses on energy, transportation, and trade issues. Furthermore, such coordination could apply to all the international reconstruction efforts conducted in Afghanistan, a country which Mr Saudabayev considers a top priority: "without the stabilisation of Afghanistan it's impossible to talk about stability in our region, but more generally about stability and security well beyond our region, so Afghanistan should be the main focus of international efforts."

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