

# **Kazakhstan's OSCE Chairmanship: a Halfway State of Affairs**

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## Introduction

The Silk Road was a nexus of trade roads across the Asian region, connecting the Eastern, Western and Southern regions of the world. It facilitated a global exchange of trade, ideas and cultures in Central Asia. At the dawn of the 21st century, Kazakhstan has now gained a unique opportunity to breathe new life into this glorious heritage by bridging, once again, what was at that time known as ‘the seven seas’ of the world. At the beginning of 2010, Kazakhstan commenced its OSCE chairmanship. It was a disputed designation as Astana is regularly blamed by many other participating states for not fulfilling human rights standards, a key value promoted by the OSCE. The genuine question is now: how has Kazakhstan performed in the first six months of its chairmanship?

In order to answer this question, the first section of this paper will pay particular attention to the domestic situation of Kazakhstan and its international commitments. The purpose is to determine in what way and to what extent the country meets the requisites of the organisation and to find out whether it has the capacity to run it. The second section will bring to light the basic reasons as to why Kazakhstan should be placed at the helm of the OSCE, and will also weigh the consequences for the country and for the organisation. Ultimately, this paper will shed some light on the achievements of this peculiar chairmanship after six months for the participating states.

Extremely positive consequences may be expected if Kazakhstan takes this historic challenge seriously in spite of some inherent — and unavoidable — drawbacks. The OSCE could serve as a springboard for Kazakhstan to rebrand its image on the international scene, while Kazakhstan could help build a new destiny for the OSCE. Thanks to what is commonly known as the domino effect, such a dynamic approach could have a positive outcome for the whole Euro-Asia region.

This paper, written at the time when Kazakhstan was halfway through its chairmanship, does not aspire to assess the performance of Kazakhstan in this role. It is too early to carry out such an evaluation. The paper is rather an interim description of the state of affairs and it provides some prospects for Kazakhstan and the OSCE.

## The profile of Kazakhstan

To appoint a country at the helm of the OSCE, it is vital to assess its domestic situation to determine in what way the country meets the basic democratic principles of the organisation and consequently whether it has the ability to chair it. This section shows both the intrinsic challenges Kazakhstan is facing and the strengths contributing to its favourable reputation in terms of chairmanship. It will unveil the weaknesses of the Kazakh political system, its troubled human rights — in particular political rights — situation, two huge environmental disasters, its economic situation, and its visibility on the international scene.

### *The political system*

Kazakhstan was the last of the Soviet republics to declare its independence on 16 December 1991. Nursultan Nazarbayev, who had been the head of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan since 1989, and second Secretary before that, was elected president in 1991. Since then, he has made no secret of his iron-fist policy.

President Nazarbayev was re-elected in 1998 and 2005 in landslide victories with over 90% of the votes. However, the OSCE concluded that these elections did not meet international standards due to 'significant shortcomings'.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, when compared to other Central Asian states, where reports by OSCE Election Observation Missions stated that the elections 'had failed to meet key OSCE commitments for democratic election'.<sup>3</sup> the assessment of Kazakhstan's election was still relatively positive. In May 2007, the President amended the Constitution to shorten the presidential term from seven to five years, and to limit the presidency to a maximum of two consecutive terms. This new regulation will only come into effect once his term ends. It means that he could run the country for life.

President Nazarbayev's clout is strengthened by the fact that he is the one who appoints the Council of Ministers and the governors, while also controlling the Upper House (the Senate) and the Lower House (the Majilis). To win seats in Parliament, the opposition parties must receive no less than 7% of the vote (threshold value), which they failed to do during the last parliamentary election in 2007.

President Nazarbayev's sway over the executive and the legislative branches is uncontested, but his personal grip on the judicial branch is far more difficult to assess. However, several influential political leaders or businessmen have been sued and they were suddenly accused of robbery, organised crime, or even murder when they expressed their opposition to the regime or fell from grace. This might demonstrate that the President exerts a tremendous influence over the judiciary.

Overall, for the last two decades the President has had an undisputed sway on his population. Hence democracy, which is one of the key values of the OSCE, has so far not gained ground.

## *Human rights*

In November 2007, when the OSCE was considering whether to grant the chairmanship to Kazakhstan for 2010, the then Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin pledged to improve human rights policies and practices. However, no significant progress has so far been recorded.<sup>4</sup> This section will focus on Human Rights, covering freedom of the media, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly, primarily correlated to political rights.

Currently, the freedom of the media is very limited. An amendment to the media law was passed in February 2009, but the shortcomings are still not fully addressed. If journalists criticize the President, or the government, they face criminal penalties for libel. Furthermore, the Administrative Code allows any mass media outlet to be closed down. Therefore, the vast majority of these outlets remain under governmental control. Additionally, the amendment allows for the filtering of online content by the government, which infringes the very principle of a free information flow. The internet media are vital, but the national provider Kazakh Telecom has blocked access to certain websites of independent internet newspapers. The proposed new law also bans the use of the media to interfere with election campaigns and this will affect the chances of the opposition parties because TV and radio broadcasts are controlled by the government.

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2 OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, 'Republic of Kazakhstan – Presidential Election – 4 December 2005, 21 February 2006', OSCE, [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2006/02/18133\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2006/02/18133_en.pdf).

3 OSCE/ ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, 'Kyrgyz Republic – Presidential Election – 23 July 2009, 22 October 2009', OSCE, [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2009/10/40901\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2009/10/40901_en.pdf).

4 Human Rights Watch, 'First 100 Days of OSCE Chairmanship Disappointing', April 10, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/04/10/kazakhstan-us-should-press-rights-reform>.

The freedom of worship is also restricted and another newly proposed law could be enacted by the government.<sup>5</sup> This amendment tightens the requirements for the registration of religious communities, restricts the diffusion of religious literature and penalises non-traditional religious activities. Nevertheless, this legislation should be understood from the point of view of Islamic radicalism, primarily from Afghanistan.

Freedom of assembly has not yet been liberalized by the government. Any public meeting with political motivations which are different from the official policy has to be requested 10 days in advance. This gives the authorities the opportunity to designate a remote place for the gatherings of the 'opposition'. Under that regulation, the police intervened against the Talmas opposition movement in Almaty on December 16, 2008 and several protesters were taken into custody.

For years, and more specifically since being given the chair of the OSCE, the international community has been looking at Astana with scepticism, because human rights and, in particular, political rights seem to be neglected. The human rights situation in Kazakhstan certainly does not meet OSCE standards.

### *Environmental disaster*

Kazakhstan is facing two major ecological concerns with a tremendous direct impact on the health of the population: the severe shrinkage of the Aral Sea and the high level of nuclear radiation.

In 1960, the Aral Sea was the fourth largest inland body of water in the world, with a surface of 68,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Nowadays, only 10% of its original surface area remains, and the sea is divided into three lakes.<sup>6</sup> This terrible shrinkage is due to the agricultural policy of the Soviet Union which imposed the cultivation of crops such as cotton ('white gold') and rice. Hence the two main rivers (Syr Darya and Amu Darya) sustaining the Aral Sea have been diverted for irrigation purposes. This policy has had many disastrous consequences on the environment and, of course, public health.

The remaining lakes have such high concentrations of salt and minerals that fish species have dropped from 32 to 6. Consequently, commercial fisheries became bankrupt and related jobs were lost (water retreated up to 150 km from the original coastline). Where the Sea retreated, vast stretches of barren desert covered with salt and chemical residues were unveiled. The desiccation of the former seabed changed the regional climate, causing extreme temperatures in winter as well as summer. Storms, carrying a toxic dust of fertilizers, salt and pesticides, affect the whole region. Underground water has become contaminated and drinking water contains dangerous levels of salt and other minerals.

A second major environmental problem concerns nuclear radiation. The Soviet regime located its nuclear weapons testing programme in Semey (Semipalatinsk), in the eastern part of Kazakhstan between 1949 and 1989, conducting a total of 456 nuclear tests. High rates of cancer, birth defects and childhood leukaemia plague villages neighbouring Semey. The problem is aggravated by the uncontrolled release of radioactivity from the 30 uranium mines in Kazakhstan and the testing of atomic bombs in nearby areas of China. Therefore, Kazakhstan sought the support of the international community to persuade China to cease its experiments and to play a vanguard role in the global effort to promote nuclear disarmament. The 'Treaty on a nuclear free

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5 Sanat Urnaliev, 'Kazakhstan's record under scrutiny at OSCE event', Institute for War & Peace Reporting, October 10, 2009.

6 Philip Micklin and Nikolay Aladin, 'Reclaiming the Aral Sea', Scientific American Magazine, April 2008.

zone in Central Asia' was signed by the five Central Asian republics on September 8, 2006.<sup>7</sup>

Facing these environmental calamities, Kazakhstan certainly has a particular sensitivity and has developed a great deal of expertise addressing ecological and nuclear disasters on the international scene. Consequently, Astana could play a vital role in further boosting the environmental dimension of the OSCE.

### *Economic issues*

Kazakhstan is a landlocked country with a great deal of natural resources on its vast territory. Its basic resources are oil, natural gas, coal, iron ore, chrome ore, manganese, copper, nickel, cobalt, gold and uranium (30 % of the world's known reserves).

According to the Energy Information Administration, Kazakhstan's proven reserves amount to 30 billion barrels of oil and 2,832 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, globally being ranked in eleventh place for both fossil fuels.<sup>8</sup> Its own consumption is very limited, making most of its production available for export. Therefore, the country is very attractive for the 'big consumers'.

Extracted oil is exported in four directions: to the world market through the Black Sea (via the Caspian Pipeline Consortium) and through the Mediterranean Sea (via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline), to Russia (via the Russian Pipeline), to China (via the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline) and to the Persian Gulf (due to an agreement with Iran). This profusion of oil pipelines demonstrates the eagerness of Astana to diversify its customer base, building strong ties with new partners, while denying Moscow's ability to dictate the price of Kazakh oil.

Natural gas is exported primarily to Russia and China. In 2007, a pipeline was built with connections to the 'Central Asia-Centre gas pipeline' system and to the 'Russian natural gas pipeline'. On 12 December 2009, the 'Central Asia-China gas pipeline' was unveiled to meet the tremendous and growing energy needs of China. The gas pipelines policy shows that cooperation among the Central Asian countries is possible when a financial deal is at stake. It also highlights the eagerness of the Kazakh authorities to distance themselves from Moscow and to diversify their customers and apply a multi-vector energy policy.

Since 2000, Kazakhstan has enjoyed an idyllic growth of about 10%, thanks to its booming energy sector.<sup>9</sup> On top of that, in June 2010 the World Bank assessed 'the record of the crisis management in Kazakhstan to be quite impressive'. Nowadays the country is considered to be an indispensable and trustworthy partner at the regional and international level. Its national economy relies heavily on the extraction and exploitation of fossil fuels and other mineral and metal reserves.

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7 The five signatories are legally bound not to test, develop, acquire, manufacture or possess nuclear weapons on their territories. See Center for Non-proliferation Studies, 'Treaty on a nuclear free zone in Central Asia', [http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/week/pdf\\_support/060905\\_canwfs.pdf](http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/week/pdf_support/060905_canwfs.pdf)

8 World Proved Reserves of Oil and Natural Gas, Most Recent Estimates, Posted on March 3, 2009, on <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/international/reserves.html>.

9 Annual GDP real growth rate: 2000 – 0.9%; 2001 – 8.1%; 2002 – 12.3%; 2003 – 7.41%; 2004 – 9.2%; 2005 – 11.7%; 2006 – 9.5%; 2007 – 10.6%; 2008 – 8.5%; 2009 – 2.4% (see [nationmaster.com](http://nationmaster.com) and [indexmundi.com](http://indexmundi.com)).

## International visibility

Thanks to President Nazarbayev's numerous initiatives, Kazakhstan has gained high international visibility. His country has become a synonym for dynamism, and this quality is now needed on the international scene.

During the 1992 session of the UN General Assembly, President Nazarbayev announced his willingness to establish the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). After many expert meetings, the Almaty Act was signed in 2002 by 16 nations pledging to promote peace, security and stability in Asia.<sup>10</sup> The role of the CICA was praised by the UN and therefore it obtained an observer status in the General Assembly. Besides the signatory countries, the work of the CICA is observed by the UN, the OSCE and the League of Arab States. That forum offers a unique occasion for states with seemingly irreconcilable differences such as India and Pakistan, Israel and Palestine to sit in the same room and discuss sensitive topics.<sup>11</sup>

Having the largest reserves of uranium and being the first country to voluntarily renounce its nuclear arsenal, the Kazakh leadership has high visibility on the international scene on this issue. For that reason, President Nazarbayev offered in April 2009 to host a 'nuclear fuel bank' on its territory, under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The purpose is to avoid any need to spread the enrichment technology and therefore, by doing so, to minimize the risk of nuclear proliferation. That move gave an additional boost to Kazakhstan's international stance.

Besides these initiatives, Kazakhstan is a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Community<sup>12</sup> (EEC), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and an OSCE participating state.

Under the President's direction, the country enjoys high visibility abroad. Hence, Kazakhstan has a long history of working in regional organisations and has proved its ability to take its obligations seriously. For that reason, it is considered to be a trustful partner in international organisations, another prerequisite for the OSCE chairmanship.

## Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship

Having described the situation of Kazakhstan, this section will focus on the Kazakh chairmanship. It will describe the novelty of Kazakhstan's designation, it will question the priorities announced by the CiO, and it will then focus on the achievements after six months, as well as expressing some considerations on that chairmanship.

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10 The CICA members vow to solve their disputes peacefully, to increase trade and economic cooperation, to protect human rights, to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, to maintain the lowest level of armament and military forces, to eradicate terrorism, to condemn separatism and to fight illicit drug trafficking. See the Almaty Act on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

11 On 1 June 2010, the Member States of CICA are: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, India, Israel, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and the Palestinian National Authority.

12 The EEC was created in June 2001 on President Nazarbayev's initiative.

## *An unprecedented designation*

In November 2007 at the Madrid Ministerial Meeting, after campaigning for it ‘for almost five years’<sup>13</sup>, Kazakhstan was awarded the chairmanship for the year 2010. This designation is actually the result of long debates and compromises over the East-West divide. The OSCE participating states wanted to demonstrate that a CIS country could also be granted the Chair, after a long series of European Union member states and like-minded countries.<sup>14</sup> For that reason, Astana also identifies its role as an historical achievement.

This designation to chair the largest European organisation is unprecedented. Kazakhstan is the first CIS member country, the first predominantly Muslim country, the first Asian country, the first with a semi-authoritarian regime, and the first with an OSCE field mission on its soil to lead the organisation. But was it an unwise choice?

For the Kazakh leaders who had submitted their candidature as of 2003, it was an acknowledgement of their achievements. Their selection recognised their ability to run their multi-ethnic society well, and reinforced their position on the international scene. It is also a unique opportunity to forge Kazakh national pride and to develop the country’s national identity. That is why the OSCE Chairmanship was identified as a Kazakh national project, irrespective of the real significance of the organization. However, to be entrusted with this role, Kazakhstan had to pledge to improve its domestic situation in the field of human rights, and to preserve the mandate of the human dimension. Astana was perfectly aware that it was going to be under severe scrutiny during both the preparation and the chairmanship periods. It was also conscious that any infringement of human rights would be widely reported.

Those who opposed Kazakhstan’s Chairmanship argued that Kazakhstan has a semi-authoritarian regime, lacks political pluralism and political rights, where the elections are not fair and transparent, the institutions are anything but democratic and the state’s powers are intertwined. Kazakh and OSCE standards vary greatly with regard to the freedom of the press, religion and assembly. Additionally, the Kazakh leadership has many domestic problems which have to be tackled: poverty, drug trafficking, corruption, and possibly terrorism in the future. As such, Kazakhstan is hardly able to lead by example.

However, if we focus on Kazakhstan from a strategic perspective, we get a totally different picture. Since its independence in 1991, the leaders have managed to maintain peace and stability in the country. This is a major achievement, particularly if one takes into consideration the ethnic mix of the country and the wealth of natural resources that may increase the temptation to engage in resource rivalry when political power may mean privileged access to them. The domestic stability of Kazakhstan is in stark contrast to nearly every other Central Asian state.

The leadership committed their country to many organisations such as: CIS, SCO, CSTO, CICA, EEC, Organisation of the Islam Conference, and NATO PfP. The aim of these memberships and partnerships is to foster dialogue, enhance security and develop economic ties. The leaders succeeded in their commitment and gained a great deal of international experience, to such an extent that, today, they can be considered to be

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13 See the attachment to the Ministerial Council decision, ‘OSCE Chairmanships in 2009, 2010 and 2011’, MC.DEC/11/07 dated 30 November 2007, [http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2007/12/28637\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2007/12/28637_en.pdf).

14 Greece (09); Finland (08); Spain (07); Belgium (06); Slovenia (05); Bulgaria (04); the Netherlands (03); Portugal (02); Romania (01). The next countries will be Lithuania (11) and Ireland (12).

a trustful partner. On that path, Kazakhstan managed to evade the sway of the great powers and developed a kind of foreign policy which is better balanced between different directions, called 'open diplomacy'. Moreover, being a member of all these organisations, Kazakhstan developed a robust network, putting it in a good position to link up with other organisations.

At the outset of Kazakh independence, the country's leaders immediately renounced their nuclear arsenal which they had inherited from the Soviet Union. They closed down the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and became fervent advocates of disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. They are now facing tremendous domestic man-made disasters such as toxic pollution, the lack of adequate water management and the resulting shrinkage of the Aral Sea. All these issues require extensive expertise and should be discussed at international forums, also covered by the OSCE.

At the OSCE level it was somewhat risky to appoint Kazakhstan to take over the chairmanship, but this designation pursued the aim of boosting reforms in Astana with a positive spill-over effect for its neighbouring countries as it allows Central Asia to occupy centre stage. Furthermore, the OSCE may expect to rely on the Kazakh leadership to anchor the course of the organisation, thanks to the country's commitment in many organisations and its expertise in specific domains such as non-proliferation and environmental issues.

### *The priorities of the Kazakh Chairmanship*

The priorities of the Kazakh Chairmanship were presented on January 14th, 2010 by Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev during the first Permanent Council of the year. Oddly enough, his statement was preceded by a video address from President Nazarbayev, stressing the national dimension of that important duty and the historical dimension of Kazakhstan's new responsibility.

In his video address, President Nazarbayev highlighted the congruence between the current problems facing the OSCE and the foreign policy of his country, emphasising regional and global security, energy security and the sustainable development of Central Asia. Considering the geographical scope of the OSCE, he underlined its key role in terms of international security and cooperation. He advocated the improvement of its effectiveness in order to meet new challenges, and asked whether the organisation would remain segmented in two blocs 'where the West remains aloof from the space 'east of Vienna''.<sup>15</sup> He urged participating states to hold a summit in 2010, covering security issues in the OSCE area and the situation in Afghanistan.

In his statement, Mr Kanat Saudabayev insisted on fifteen topics constituting the priorities of the Kazakh Chairmanship<sup>16</sup>:

- Comprehensive, collective and indivisible security, referring to the Russian initiative on the European Security Treaty;
- Co-operation between the OSCE and other international organisations — namely the CICA.
- Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe;

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<sup>15</sup> President Nazarbayev, 'Text of the video address by President Nursultan Nazarbayev on the occasion of Kazakhstan's assumption of the Chairmanship of the OSCE — January 2010', CIO.GAL/4/10, January 14, 2010, [http://www.osce.org/documents/cio/2010/01/42302\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/cio/2010/01/42302_en.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Kanat Saudabayev, 'Statement of Mr. Kanat Saudabayev, Chairman-in-office of the OSCE and secretary of state and minister for foreign affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at the 789th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council', CIO.GAL/5/10, January 14, 2010, [http://www.osce.org/documents/cio/2010/01/42290\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/cio/2010/01/42290_en.pdf).



- Assisting in the resolution of protracted conflicts;
- Supporting efforts towards nuclear disarmament;
- Focusing on the fight against illicit trafficking and terrorism;
- Paying particular attention to Afghanistan (an agreement has been signed to provide education at Kazakh universities for 1000 Afghan citizens – \$50 million from Astana’s budget);
- Promoting secure and efficient land transportation;
- Responding to environmental threats;
- Supporting the work of the 3 special bodies of the OSCE, namely ODIHR, RFOM and HCNM;
- Promoting tolerance and intercultural dialogue;
- Improving the mechanisms to combat trafficking in human beings;
- Promoting a policy of gender equality;
- Paying attention to the rule of law related to human rights and democracy;
- Emphasising fundamental human rights and freedoms (pushing further democratisation steps in Kazakhstan).

By identifying these 15 priorities, it is obvious that, by the end of 2010, the Kazakh Chairmanship is likely to produce some positive results. Some of the identified priorities will certainly be tackled successfully, although other issues will not be addressed. Besides, the human dimension is under-emphasized in the statement, which raised some criticism from participating states in their responses.<sup>17</sup>

Although the statement is diplomatic, it seems that it lacks some relevance to influence the fate of the OSCE. Somehow, it is a missed opportunity to revitalise the organisation. It is also a failed opportunity for Kazakhstan to advocate a strong stance on pivotal issues.

### **Achievements during the first six months**

During his initial statement, the incoming Chairman demonstrated his commitment to this challenging position. His involvement has been striking. He promised to pay his first visit to the countries of the South Caucasus and to visit the EU and the UN which is exactly what he did. In addition to the everyday, highly loaded agenda of the OSCE, the first six months of the Kazakh Chairmanship has highlighted two main issues: the eagerness to organise a summit of the heads of state and government, and the handling of the Kyrgyz crisis.

On the one hand, from the very first day of the chairmanship, in January 2010, President Nazarbayev announced his willingness to organise a summit in Astana this year to gather the heads of state of all 56 participating states. Theoretically, such a summit is required every two years, alternating with the meeting of the foreign ministers. But in practical terms, the last summit was organised in 1999, eleven years ago. So, it is quite a legitimate concern to organise such a major event in 2010.

President Nazarbayev has not spared any effort in soliciting the support of all the participating states and

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<sup>17</sup> The US and the EU expressed concerns on that issue (see Carol Fuller, ‘Response to Kazakhstani Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev’, PC.DEL /3/10 of 14 January 2010 and Spanish Presidency of the European Union, ‘EU statement in response to the address by the CiO, Secretary of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, H.E. Kanat Saudabayev’, PC.DEL/4/10 of 14 January 2010).

has made concessions to repay that support. That is the case with Uzbekistan where, for the first time ever, President Nazarbayev endorsed the proposal of the Uzbek leader, Karimov, to ban the construction of hydropower facilities in the upstream countries. This is apparently a shared interest of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as both countries depend upon the water resources originating from the upstream states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

President Nazarbayev also agreed with the US to open an air route, called the 'Northern Distribution Network', allowing the US to support the Afghan war across the North Pole, Russia and Kazakhstan instead of passing through Europe. By doing so, it will save time and money for the US when moving troops and supplies.

Finally, after some hesitation, all participating states agreed, during the informal meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in July, to organise the summit on December 1st and 2nd in Astana. The organisation of that summit is already a success for the Kazakh leadership and for President Nazarbayev personally. The agenda has still to be agreed upon by the participating states.

The chairmanship will be considered to be a totally successful one if the 'Astana Declaration' will emphasise strong decisions with an action plan for key and sensitive issues.

On the other hand, the Kyrgyz crisis, which broke out on April 7th, put the Chairmanship at stake for two reasons. The first reason is the geographic neighbourhood of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the good relationship between the Kazakh President Nazarbayev and the ousted Kyrgyz President Bakiyev. It is also at risk because of the turmoil in one of the participating states of the OSCE. Under the banner of the OSCE, Kazakhstan took the initiative to prevent the spreading of the uprising by helping the Kyrgyz President to resign and by evacuating him on April 15th, after obtaining the consent of the US, Russia and China. All three were deeply concerned by the developments, as were the UN and the EU. The Kyrgyz crisis was placed high on the international agenda in April, and Kazakhstan managed the crisis both adequately and peacefully to the contentment of all key actors.

On June 10th, clashes emerged in the Southern cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks where the Uzbeks represent 50 percent of the population in this region. This inter-ethnic violence gave rise to many deaths and hundreds of thousands of people fled the violence. The OSCE decided on July 16th to send a 52-strong police advisory group for an initial period of four months to the southern province so as to monitor the situation and to train the Kyrgyz security agencies.

Although Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members of several of the same organisations, the OSCE appeared to be the only one which was able to address the Kyrgyz uprising. The CIS was totally passive, while the SCO remained disengaged from the crisis and the CSTO declined to intervene arguing that it was a domestic political event and not an act of aggression requiring a collective response. This posture of the CSTO could be regarded as an indication that this organisation does not want to be involved in predominantly domestic contingencies even though they may have international repercussions.

The effective intervention of the Kazakh Chairmanship gilded the OSCE's coat of arms.

## *Some considerations*

Kazakhstan is at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, but also between the Muslim and the Christian world. As such, it has the potential to bridge the divide between the different civilisations which are present in the OSCE. Moreover, Kazakhstan boasts a dynamic image on the international scene and is known to have good ties with all its partners, thanks to its constructive multi-vector foreign policy. Here are some considerations as to why the choice of Kazakhstan at the helm of the OSCE is a good one for the OSCE and for Kazakhstan, notwithstanding some inherent drawbacks.

For the OSCE, the designation of Kazakhstan moves the organisation's centre of gravity eastwards. It is the best way to rectify the fractured relations between the western and eastern participating states. The Kazakh appointment is the result of a consensus, which means that the 'big' countries — or the main players — did not oppose this choice. This chairmanship will not leave the participating states indifferent; some of them will have high expectations, while others consider it with some apprehension, due to Kazakhstan's poor achievements on human rights. Indeed, after the first 100 days of its chairmanship, Human Rights Watch qualified the situation as a 'disappointing human rights record'.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the OSCE participating states may expect significant struggles on key issues during the Kazakh Chairmanship. The way these issues are tackled will put the credibility of Astana at stake. Anyway, the support of the other participating states is vital to achieve any success.

The Russian Federation and the United States have agreed to accept the Kazakh Chairmanship for different reasons. On the one hand, Moscow saw a unique opportunity to have a CIS member state and a close partner at the helm of the OSCE, serving as a 'Trojan horse' to push forward certain issues. But Astana has always had ambiguous relations with its northern neighbour, avoiding any direct interference. Questions remain open as to the position the chairmanship will adopt if opposition escalates between Russia and other participating states on specific questions such as the fate of the European Security Treaty pushed by Moscow. On the other hand, Washington (enmeshed in the Afghan conflict) saw in Astana an ideal opportunity to tighten relations with a steadfast partner and guarantee energy exports for the benefit of Europe. It is also important to bear in mind that Astana maintains positive relations with Beijing and constructive ties with the countries of the European Union.

The OSCE has chosen Kazakhstan in order to revive latent issues which have not demonstrated any significant progress for a while. Kazakhstan has the 'privilege' of suffering from environmental woes and of being situated in the vicinity of protracted conflicts. Having specific economic ties with the countries involved, Astana could foster a cessation of disputes. It is certainly the case for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is a unique opportunity for the OSCE to tackle certain concerns and to make significant progress. Eventually, the participating states will all have an interest in unfolding their full-fledged support for the chairmanship so as to stir up a positive domino effect in the whole region. Sticking to the principles of the OSCE can be a source of admiration for neighbouring countries. This 'best case scenario' should create a virtuous circle, quintessentially identifying the organisation.

The appointment of Kazakhstan at the helm of the OSCE is a unique opportunity for Kazakhstan and the organisation. The fairly effective way in which the Kyrgyz crisis was handled is a striking example thereof.

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<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'First 100 Days of OSCE Chairmanship Disappointing', April 10, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/04/10/kazakhstan-us-should-press-rights-reform>.

Kazakhstan simply deserves this designation. We could say that, up to now, the dedication of the country is very high, and the appointment has been beneficial for the OSCE and for Kazakhstan.

## Conclusions

The OSCE handed over its chairmanship to Kazakhstan for various purposes. The Western countries' aim was to foster changes in Astana in terms of human rights and democratic issues. For Russia it was a unique opportunity to bring about its favoured policies through Kazakhstan, a CIS member and a post-Soviet state. And Astana views its appointment as recognition of its domestic achievements since its independence, and as a token of appreciation for its multi-vector foreign policy.


From a domestic point of view, Kazakhstan promised to improve its human right situation, both prior to and during the chairmanship period. Unfortunately, no significant movement has been noticed. This is a big disappointment for the participating states that rely on the commitment of Astana to promote OSCE values and also to implement them.

The Kyrgyz crisis of April this year was a pivotal moment for the chairmanship. It could have turned into a large-scale uprising, but thanks to the personal dedication of President Nazarbayev, and Kazakhstan's thoroughly insightful management as the OSCE chairman, the turmoil has been contained.

The special ties with this neighbouring country, the relations based on confidence between Astana and Washington, Moscow and Beijing, and the lack of any effective response from the other international organisations, gave a free rein to Kazakhstan to tackle the crisis in a resolute manner under the banner of the OSCE. This well-managed uprising rebrands the reputation of Nazarbayev's country and that of the largest regional organisation.

Another chairmanship success is the organisation of a summit of the heads of state on December 2010. Now, the world is looking forward to see the agenda of this summit and how the 'Astana Declaration' will be a hallmark for the OSCE.

Thanks to this chairmanship, the divide within the OSCE can be bridged, and the recognition of Kazakhstan strengthened. Further, the achievements of Kazakhstan can be taken as an example by other post-Soviet countries, creating a very positive spill-over effect for the entire Euro-Asian region.



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