

Editorial: Special Issue Kazakhstan OSCE Chairmanship

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At the Ministerial Council meeting in December 2007 the Foreign Ministers of 56 participating States of the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) decided positively on the Kazakh bid to chair the Organization in 2010. Kazakhstan is the first state from the Commonwealth of Independent States to seek this role. In the current issue, Ambassador Herbert Salber and Dr. Andrei Zagorski explore the reasons of why Kazakhstan has applied for this challenging task and both offer interesting views in their contributions.

This special issue of *Security and Human Rights – formerly Helsinki Monitor* – is fully dedicated to the upcoming OSCE Chairmanship of Kazakhstan. In contrast to the many different chairmanships in the past one and a half decade, the decision-making on the Kazakh bid was highly controversial and took a long time, several OSCE participating States claiming that the country would not yet fully qualify for this responsible function, in particular from the point of view of the human dimension of the OSCE. In the many contributions to this issue a large number of different expectations, opportunities and challenges for the 2010 Chairmanship are covered. All of the articles in this special issue of the journal deal with Kazakhstan and its role in the region of Central Asia in one way or another. The range of topics is non-exhaustive, but they do cover a wide range of different areas. The authors focus on different aspects in mainly short articles and look not only into aspects of the upcoming Kazakh Chairmanship, but also regional issues that are of common concern to Central Asia and beyond. The articles by Ambassador Daan Everts and Dr. Tim Epkenhans belong to the latter category.

Ambassador Everts' article on Afghanistan presents interesting analysis and views on the Afghan conflict which are highly relevant for Central Asia. Afghanistan is a Partner for Co-operation for the OSCE and there might be room during the Kazakh Chairmanship to increase the awareness of the challenges that the region is facing due to the situation there. Repercussions of the events in Afghanistan on Central Asian states are part of a regional setting, where neighbouring states have a large stake in the outcome.

The factor of Islam is not to be neglected either when we look at the region of Central Asia and Dr. Tim Epkenhans shows, on the case of Tajikistan, how developments concerning the freedom of religion in this country are symptomatic for Central Asia.

The focus of the other articles vary from the larger picture, for instance Dr. Erica Marat and Dr. Neil Melvin who look into Kazakhstan's co-operation with a number of international organizations (e.g. NATO, the EU, the CIS and the CSTO), to Daniyar Kairatovich who has chosen a much more narrow focus (penitentiary reform in Kazakhstan). This variety is meant to underline that it is not only international relations that matter, but also how a country deals with a host of internal issues.

Jeff Goldstein and well-known Kazakh human rights activist Yevgeni Zhovtis point to a number of shortcomings in Kazakhstan's human rights record and they see the upcoming Chairmanship as an immense challenge. Dr. Oskar Lehner writes about the discrepancy that sometimes exists with norms and commitments on paper and their implementation in practice. He suggests using the Kazakh OSCE Chairmanship to advocate for improved respect of human rights in Central Asia.

Dr. Eltje Aderhold poses the question concerning elections in the larger context with a special focus on Central Asia. Nina Suomalainen contributes her views on the challenges the Finnish Chairmanship faced in 2008 and how they were dealt with. Dr. Walter Kemp's article highlights the role of successive chairmanships and how each chairmanship tries to tackle the challenges in their own way only to find out that they are merely the first among equals for a year. He also refers to the support they receive from other participating States and the


OSCE Secretariat and the Institutions. Alexander Vinnikov outlines the engagement of NATO in Central Asia and also dwells on the possibilities the Kazakh OSCE Chairmanship may bring about with regard to security in the region.

Of course not all areas of the three OSCE dimensions have been covered extensively, but the 14 articles in this special issue reflect an impressive range of topics and opinions. There are some points that have only been touched upon in passing, like the situation of the media.¹ The same holds true for energy security matters. Even though Dr. Neil Melvin refers to a number of points in his contribution, we hope to have more focus on those matters and the current financial crisis in the OSCE area in some of the upcoming issues.

The violent events in the Caucasus last year have once again reminded us that peace is not a given, but something that needs constant nurturing. An organization like the OSCE which encompasses a space from Vancouver to Vladivostok still has an important role to play not only by providing a forum for dialogue, but also as a constant reminder of common values and principles. Kazakhstan can contribute to this through steering the organization into a direction of common understanding and trying to help bridge differences. Due to its experience from the Soviet past and its combination of European and Asian features, it is well suited to bring its experience to leading the organization. At the same time Kazakhstan itself will also be strongly scrutinized with regard to its implementation of OSCE standards. If this is assessed positively Kazakhstan can serve as an important example to others. In this context a number of shortcomings— be it in the sphere of legislation or implementation — should be urgently addressed.

2010 will be a fascinating year and it will be particularly interesting to follow the decisions and deliberations that Kazakhstan will bring to solidifying and foster OSCE principles and values.

1 In this regard we would like to draw attention to the recently published Human Rights Watch Report 'An Atmosphere of Quiet Repression' which critically assesses the freedom of religion, expression and assembly in Kazakhstan in detail. See: <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/12/01/atmosphere-quiet-repression>.



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