

# **The Challenges and Opportunities Awaiting Kazakhstan in 2010**

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DOI: [10.1163/187502309787858057](https://doi.org/10.1163/187502309787858057)

In 2010 Kazakhstan will assume the 20th Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, convening a Troika with the outgoing Greek Chairmanship and the incoming Lithuanian Chairmanship. This year, Kazakhstan entered the Troika as the incoming Chairmanship, joining the outgoing Finnish Chairmanship in supporting the 2009 Chairmanship of Greece in exercising the highest level of leadership within the Organization.

Participating States created the Chairmanship-in-Office at the 1992 Helsinki Summit when they sought to strengthen and institutionalize their approach to comprehensive security within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Countries serving as the OSCE's leading role hold a weighty position as they seek to promote the shared values and norms of the 56 participating States (pS), encourage each country to uphold its commitments, and promote the principles of the Organization. Indeed, many pS look to the Chairmanship as a country that itself embodies the highest standards.

### **Kazakhstan's Aspirations to Chair the OSCE**

Several years ago, Kazakhstan aspired to assume this preeminent role and volunteered to take the responsibility of leadership upon itself. Kazakhstan was the first country from Central Asia, indeed from the Commonwealth of Independent States to seek this role, indicating a growing interest in, and ownership of, the Organization. Participating States welcomed Kazakhstan's aspirations. Some wholly supported Astana's ambitions, although others questioned them, given the country's on-going transition and democratic reform process. Kazakhstan and several other participating States reminded all pS that all countries should have an equal opportunity to Chair the Organization.

Kazakh leaders sought to demonstrate the seriousness of their aspirations and engaged in a frank dialogue both domestically, and within the OSCE framework about the country's ability to uphold its commitments. Domestically, officials and representatives of civil society participated in roundtables, some of which were organized by the OSCE Centre in Almaty (now, Astana), in order to debate key aspects of the democratic reform process. The lively civil society actively encouraged reforms based on OSCE principles, and sought to contribute to the decision making process as parliamentarians deliberated over revisions to key pieces of legislation. These groups have also encouraged their officials to take greater responsibility for the implementation of the reforms as well. At the same time, the authorities engaged in an intensive dialogue and consultative process with the OSCE, in particular through its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative of the Freedom of the Media.

Astana's top leadership demonstrated good will and transparency and kept the participating States informed of the domestic debates and reform process. During 2006 and 2007, Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin and other high-level officials regularly addressed the Permanent Council. Occasionally, representatives of civil society were invited by the Foreign Ministry to participate in these delegations. At the 2007 Ministerial Council meeting in Madrid, Minister Tazhin went a step further, and outlined the country's reform programme to his counterparts in order to assure other pS of Kazakhstan's intentions to reach the Organization's highest standards. He focused on four key areas of legislative reforms: election laws, the law on political parties, the law on local self governance and the law on media.<sup>2</sup> His openness was ultimately successful as Kazakhstan's

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1 Conference on Security and Co-operation, 'Helsinki Document: The Challenges of Change', 1992

2 MC.DEL/38/07, 29 November 2007, 'Address by H.E. Marat Tazhin, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the OSCE Ministerial Council,' accessed on 15 December 2008 at [http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2007/11/28529\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2007/11/28529_en.pdf)

aspirations were supported at the Ministerial Council.<sup>3</sup> Since then, Kazakhstan's envoy to the OSCE has continued to be very proactive and kept the Permanent Council informed of the progress.

## The Challenges for Chairmanships

As the eminent Russian author, Leo Tolstoy, once wrote, each happy family is alike, but each unhappy family is unique in its own way. A parallel description can be made about Chairmanships: each country is faced with similar challenges, while trying to define its unique role. Kazakhstan will be no different. Like the current Greek Chairmanship, as well as previous Chairmanships, Kazakhstan will face a number of challenges as it seeks to exercise the responsibilities of this high function.

The Chairman-in-Office will be faced with seeking to promote the Organization's shared values and norms among a diverse group of pS with differing views. When the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation was concluded in 1975, participating States agreed on some lofty goals in spite of their differences. Ten years later, then U.S. President, Ronald Regan, stated, 'The CSCE process has long been a source of hope that the division of Europe can be overcome and that the freedoms enjoyed in the West will be honored and respected throughout the continent. The Helsinki process offers the peoples of East and West the way that, by patient and serious dialogue, we can improve the lives of our individual citizens and increase security and co-operation among our States.'<sup>4</sup> Eduard Shevardnadze, Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union at the time expressed similar views, saying 'No one, naturally, counted on Helsinki immediately leading to a golden age of cloudless relations. But much of what was achieved during that period has taken root and stood the test of time. Even the serious aggravation of tensions, which could not but affect the situation in Europe, has not killed the roots of détente.'<sup>5</sup> Since the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, participating States have continued to agree on a number of key documents further outlining their shared principles and norms.

Today, over thirty years after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, these common values and commitments have withstood the test of time. Indeed, each Chairmanship has traditionally sought to take on certain commitments as priorities during the year. Seizing on the opportunity of having appointed five Chairmanships in a row, the 2008 Finnish Chairmanship convened a 'Quintet' as an informal mechanism to consult and coordinate these priorities on a more long-term basis, while continuing to address the current realities. This new initiative was also intended to engage both Kazakhstan and Lithuania in dialogue with the 2008 Chairmanship at an earlier stage.

Greek Foreign Minister, Dora Bakoyannis, at the time, the incoming Chairperson-in-Office, observed that 'Our common efforts for cooperation are rooted in the principles of joint consultation, dialogue and cooperation among participating states, in a spirit of transparency and equality. ... The OSCE is a living organism that has for more than thirty years stood by the peoples of Europe in their efforts to realize a vision of stability, democracy and progress for all. The OSCE has the extraordinary ability to swiftly adapt to Europe's new

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3 MC.DEC/11/07, 30 November 2007, 'OSCE Chairmanships in 2009, 2010, and 2011,' accessed on 15 December 2008 at [http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2007/12/28637\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2007/12/28637_en.pdf)

4 Press Release, Helsinki, 1 August 1985, 'Tenth Anniversary of Helsinki Final Act,' accessed on 15 December 2008 at <http://www.osce.org/item/15801.html>

5 Ibid.

geopolitical challenges.<sup>6</sup>

The challenge will be for Kazakhstan, when it assumes its Chairmanship, to translate this noble vision into real action and co-operation. In one respect, Kazakhstan's work could be easier than for past Chairmanships since many of the shared values have been codified into common principles and commitments. In another respect, however, Kazakhstan will be faced with greater tests, as many of the participating States' shared values and common commitments that are fundamental to the OSCE community are themselves being challenged and their implementation under threat. Unresolved conflicts within and between pS, the erosion of fundamental rights and freedoms in some countries, threats to environmental security and the scourge of terrorism and violent extremism are some of the issues challenging the basic principles and goals identified in 1975. As previous Chairmanships have learned, states in the OSCE community often share views on the nature of current threats and challenges, but occasionally have differences over how to address them, thereby making it difficult to build consensus on key issues.

During recent years, these challenges and divisions have been a factor in a sort of identity crisis within the OSCE, in particular with growing differences between 'East' and 'West'. Efforts have been made to strengthen the OSCE effectiveness in order to reinforce a sense of common purpose. During 2008, participating States began to explore ideas on reinvigorating their approach to comprehensive security. Events prompted some pS to propose new ideas. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev called on countries east and west of Vienna to redefine Europe's security architecture.<sup>7</sup> French President Nicholas Sarkozy observed that the OSCE would provide a logical platform for such a discussion.<sup>8</sup>

This topic became a leading issue for discussion at the 2008 Ministerial Council in Helsinki. During the two day meeting, a record number of almost 50 Foreign Ministers took part.<sup>9</sup> The Ministers gathered together over constructive and substantive discussions about such a meeting and a reaffirmation of their commitment to the OSCE and its principles. There was a clear interest among pS to continue the talks about convening a high level meeting or summit to outline revitalizing the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security architecture. The incoming Greek Chairperson-in-Office confirmed Greece's willingness to continue the discussion.<sup>10</sup>

Astana will be expected to support and build on Greece's efforts to reinvigorate the OSCE. Kazakhstan will be called upon to work with other pS to strengthen the Organization's fundamental principles based on its shared values and to meet new threats and challenges.

As the outgoing Chairman-in-Office, Alexander Stubb, said, 'Let's stick to our work on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.'... He called on participants to help renew and refresh the OSCE to respond to the

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6 MC.DEL/17/08, 4 December 2008, 'Statement of Mrs. Dora Bakoyannis, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, at the 16th Ministerial Council,' accessed on 15 December 2008 at [http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2008/12/35358\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2008/12/35358_en.pdf)

7 Speech of Russian Federation President Dmitry Medvedev at a meeting with political parties, parliamentary and civil society circles in Berlin, accessed on 17 December 2008, at [http://www.kremlin.ru/appears/2008/06/05/1923\\_type63374type63376type63377\\_202133.s.html](http://www.kremlin.ru/appears/2008/06/05/1923_type63374type63376type63377_202133.s.html)

8 Pop, Valentina, 14 November 2008, 'Sarkozy wants new EU-US-Russia security accord,' EU Observer, accessed on 17 December 2008 at <http://euobserver.com/13/27113>

9 Press Release, Helsinki, 5 December 2008, 'OSCE 'Revitalized' at Helsinki Ministerial Council, high level talks on European security to continue,' accessed on 15 December 2008 at <http://www.osce.org/item/35566.html>

10 Ibid.

challenges of today.<sup>11</sup> Thus, as for previous Chairmanships, it will be up to Kazakhstan to guide all pS in upholding the Organization's commitments.

During its 2010 Chairmanship, the responsibility of building consensus on pressing issues through multi-lateral negotiations will also be an important aspect requiring Kazakhstan's leadership. In this respect, Kazakhstan will be called upon to build on the accomplishments of the 2009 Greek Chairmanship in addressing issues such as: frozen conflicts, engagement with Afghanistan, and election observation missions, to give a few examples. Kazakhstan's position as the first member of the CIS to Chair the OSCE could provide it with a unique opportunity to find a new impetus for consensus building and addressing unresolved conflicts.

## Conclusions

The year 2010 will be an interesting and challenging year for Kazakhstan. The country will face many of the same challenges as its predecessors, yet it will have to address them in an evolving Euro-Atlantic security environment. However, Kazakhstan will have a unique opportunity to help shape the future of the Organization.

As Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin stated in his address to the Ministerial Council, 'I think, the OSCE is a good platform to tackle the issues of consolidating [a] common security architecture in the Euro-Atlantic [area]. The OSCE must adjust to the changed reality, preserve its influence and become a renewed platform for dialogue that unites [the] Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian areas.'<sup>12</sup> Kazakhstan will have the opportunity to contribute views on this evolution drawing upon its own experience with transition and its geographical position.

As the first country from both Central Asia and the CIS to Chair the Organization, Kazakhstan will have the opportunity to try to seek to be a bridge in countries between the 'East' and 'West.' Leaders consistently presented the country as providing a unique forum for political dialogue between cultures. During an address to the Permanent Council in April 2007, Minister Tazhin stated that, 'Kazakhstan was pinning high hopes on the uniqueness of the geographical outreach and platform for dialogue which constitutes the OSCE. In Kazakhstan this was perceived as a step towards the formation of a new architecture of European security driven by equal rights and the absence of dividing lines.'<sup>13</sup>

Foreign Minister Tazhin also described a high-level conference called 'Common World Forum: Progress through Diversity' with participants from over fifty countries of various cultural and religious backgrounds.<sup>14</sup> In 2010, the country will have the opportunity to draw on its unique experience and perspective and contribute to the political dialogue within an OSCE context.

And finally, as with all Chairmanships, Kazakhstan will be under scrutiny for its efforts at home to uphold

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11 Press Release, Helsinki, 4 December 2008, 'Finnish Chairman calls on Foreign Ministers to strengthen the Organization,' accessed on 15 December 2008 at <http://www.osce.org/item/35349.html>


12 MC.DEL/38/07, 29 November 2007, 'Address by H.E. Marat Tazhin, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the OSCE Ministerial Council,' accessed on 15 December 2008 at [http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2007/11/28529\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2007/11/28529_en.pdf)

13 PC.DEL/365/07, 30 April 2007, 'Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Dr. Marat Tazhin, at a Special Meeting of the Permanent Council of the OSCE.'

14 MC.DEL/38/07, 29 November 2007, 'Address by H.E. Marat Tazhin, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the OSCE Ministerial Council,' accessed on 15 December 2008 at [http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2007/11/28529\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2007/11/28529_en.pdf)

its commitments. By exercising leadership at home on domestic reforms, Kazakhstan has an extraordinary opportunity to be a model for all members by actively striving towards the highest aspirations established by the OSCE community. Indeed, such efforts will be an occasion for Kazakhstan to strengthen not only its own image, but that of the Organization as a whole.





This article was published by the Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHRM).

Security and Human Rights (formerly Helsinki Monitor) is a journal devoted to issues inspired by the work and principles of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It looks at the challenge of building security through cooperation across the northern hemisphere, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as well as how this experience can be applied to other parts of the world. It aims to stimulate thinking on the question of protecting and promoting human rights in a world faced with serious threats to security.

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