



# BULLETIN

No. 14 (90) • January 28, 2010 • © PISM

Editors: Sławomir Dębski (Editor-in-Chief), Łukasz Adamski, Mateusz Gniazdowski,  
Beata Górka-Winter, Leszek Jesień, Agnieszka Kondek (Executive Editor),  
Łukasz Kulesa, Marek Madej, Ernest Wyciszkievicz

---

## Kazakhstan's 2010 OSCE Presidency Priorities: A Review

by Tomasz Sikorski

*At the 14 January 2010 session of the Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Kazakhstan presented its priorities for the twelve-month Presidency in the organization. The Presidency will be Kazakhstan's means for self-promotion and creating the country's positive international image. Kazakhstan's Presidency is expected to offer active support for the dialogue on the Nagorno-Karabakh issues, greater non-military assistance to Afghanistan, and deeper OSCE involvement in Central Asia problems. Even though the Kazakh Presidency asserts it attaches significance to human rights issues and democracy, reason tells one to be skeptical about such declarations.*

The Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev presented on 14 January in Vienna his country's priorities for the 2010 Presidency in OSCE. His address was accompanied by a playback of a speech by Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev. It is the first time that a post-Soviet and authoritarian country, with a large Muslim population (47%), has taken over the OSCE Presidency.

It was a considerable gain in prestige for Kazakhstan to obtain the rotating Presidency. Actually, however, given the OSCE's *consensual* decision-making principles, Kazakhstan's chances of creating the organization's policy look rather slim.

The OSCE conducts its range of activities in three dimensions—the politico-military, the economic-environmental, and the human, comprising the promotion of human rights, the rule of law, and the development of democratic institutions. Kazakhstan will focus its attention largely on the first dimension. That is very much in line with the standpoint of the autocratic countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Russia, which have repeatedly criticized the alleged lack of balance between the first and third dimensions as well as the application of the double standards to countries 'east' and 'west of Vienna'.

**The Politico-military Dimension.** Among the issues that remain a priority Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev named: a dialogue on a new security architecture in the vast Eurasian region, stepping up efforts aimed at non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, strengthening confidence- and security-building measures in Europe (Vienna Document and CFE), assisting in the resolution of protracted conflicts (he mentioned South Caucasus), and paying greater attention to countering terrorism and combating illicit drugs trafficking. Saudabayev paid special attention to the question of Afghanistan, which is not an OSCE member state, but is the organization's cooperation partner since 2003.

Saudabayev also proposed a dialogue within the OSCE on a new Treaty on European Security, an idea keenly generated by Russia's President Dimitry Medvedev. Reaching an agreement here would not be the purpose of the dialogue—for the Russian project stands little chance of being widely accepted.<sup>1</sup> Kazakhstan wishes to increase the impact of its Presidency; therefore it will promote the OSCE as the main forum for discussion on the Russian proposal, in spite of Russia's unwillingness to hand over significant competence on the discussion to the OSCE.

By addressing issues of non-proliferation and utilization of nuclear weapons, areas that Kazakhstan succeeded in (successful nuclear disarmament of the country, shutting down nuclear ranges, sealing the Semipalatinsk deal on a nuclear-free zone in Central Asia), the country is

---

<sup>1</sup> See: R. Śmigielski, R. Tarnogórski, "The Russian Project of a Treaty on European Security," PISM *Bulletin* No. 69 (601), 7 December 2009.

supposed to create its positive image in the world. Kazakhstan may in fact be attempting to use its OSCE Presidency to promote the idea of hosting "a nuclear fuel bank." Even though the idea may have its advantages, it seems doubtful it will ever be effected due to Kazakhstan's rampant corruption and the consequent fears over fuel security.

Kazakhstan also pledges to strengthen OSCE efforts to resolve conflicts. Saudabayev vowed to pay a visit as OSCE Chairman to South Caucasus in mid-February, a fact showing signs of Kazakhstan's willingness to engage itself in the Karabakh problem. Armenia and Azerbaijan, which are at loggerheads over the region, look ready for dialogue, which increases the chances of their positions finally converging. As regards the Georgia question, owing to Russia's potentially negative reaction and hardly any chances of the conflict being resolved in a flash, Kazakhstan's involvement in Georgia will not grow. The Kazakh Presidency will most likely restrict its activities concerning Georgia to co-chairing (along with the EU and the UN) the Geneva talks on Georgia, scheduled for 28 January 2010.

Kazakhstan advocates a broader use of non-military stability measures in Afghanistan, particularly through investment in infrastructure, relief aid, Afghan police and border guard training, combating illicit drug trafficking, and securing borders. Kazakhstan will have the opportunity to draw attention to these problems while acting as discussion leader (for example, at the forthcoming counterterrorism conference in Astana). However, it needs to be noted that the OSCE has been involved in Afghanistan only to some extent until now. Thus, given the ongoing military operations in Afghanistan, the Kazakhstan-endorsed non-military security measures perform only a supporting role. What is more, the OSCE operations may only be effective when closely coordinated with those by NATO, the EU and the UN.

**The Economic-environmental Dimension.** For economic and environmental questions Kazakhstan proposed developing safe overland transport, creating a comprehensive system for monitoring and responding to environmental threats and the continuation of measures agreed upon at the December 2009 Ministerial Council in Athens.

Most of the mentioned proposals will be discussed at the 18th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, whose first part will take place in February 2010 in Vienna. Considering the nature of the work, Kazakhstan (just like the previous countries during their presidencies) is slated not to be active in the economic and environmental dimension. If anything, the environmental issues alone may be a part of Kazakhstan's promotion as an environment-conscious state, which succeeds in saving its part of the Aral Sea.

**The Human Dimension.** Within the human dimension Kazakhstan will continue to support the work of the Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), seek to organize the OSCE Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in Astana, combat trafficking in human beings, promote equal rights for women, and strengthen the rule of law.

However, there is increasing concern that most of these declarations have a tactical nature. Accordingly, credibility of the authoritarian Kazakhstan is likely to fall short in this particular dimension. In 2009, for instance, the authorities exerted financial and administrative pressure on independent media, while on July that year the country's new internet law considerably curbed online freedom of speech. On top of that, major procedural shortcomings were indicated by observers in legal suits filed against NGO activists. It also needs to be noted that Kazakhstan's appraisal of the electoral process in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States frequently clashed with the judgment of the ODIHR. Similar discrepancies are likely to emerge this year during parliamentary elections in Tajikistan (February) and Azerbaijan (November).

By contrast, Kazakhstan will shun upsetting the western countries. Therefore, limiting the ODIHR mandate (an idea upheld by Russia) seems barely realistic especially that it would require consensual arrangements within the organization. Kazakhstan's pragmatic policy points to leaving the usual human dimension business to the specialized OSCE institutions. It is significant that Saudabayev, while enumerating the tasks, appealed to the OSCE member countries for substantive support, a sign which shows understanding of his country's own limitations.

**Prospects.** Kazakhstan will use 2010 to promote its positive image in the world. The country pledged to organize a number of conferences and events, such as a summit at head-of-state level, as well as an informal meeting of foreign ministers in Almaty. Kazakhstan will pursue a cautious policy, limiting its activities to areas where there is much likelihood of reaching a consensus, while avoiding at the same time contentious issues that could potentially antagonize either Russia or the western OSCE members.