

Kazakhstan rejuvenating OSCE

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Kazakhstan under the leadership of President Nursultan Nazarbayev has substantively contributed towards creating peace and stability not only in Central Asia but in a much larger regional and global context. It has been making efforts for strengthening multilateral and multi-faceted structures such as SCO, CICA, OSCE, ECO, besides many other forums aiming at regional integration based on economic, security and cultural cooperation.

On January 1, 2010, Kazakhstan assumed the Chairmanship of Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), a 56-member organization spanning areas from Vancouver to Vladivostok; thus becoming the first Central Asian and former Soviet state to assume such a high-profile position. The assumption of chairmanship of the OSCE is reflective of the fact that its member states have reposed confidence and trust in Kazakhstan's ability and capacity to handle responsibly an extensive mandate.

President Nursultan's address on January 14, 2010, on the occasion of assuming Chairmanship of OSCE, acknowledged the complexities of contemporary challenges to peace and stability of the world, such as the global financial crisis, transformation in the global order, weakening of the non-proliferation regimes, menace of terrorism, ecological and humanitarian disasters, poverty, depleting energy resources, ethnic and religious conflicts, etc. To formulate appropriate responses to the current challenges has made the task of Kazakhstan's chairmanship tough. Kazakhstan will have to add up to its existing capacity for dealing with these challenges during its chairmanship.

The first test case which Kazakhstan has passed as chair of the OSCE happened to be the task of containing and ending the violent turmoil in Kyrgyzstan in early April 2010. Kazakhstan's Secretary of State and Foreign Minister, Kanat Saudabayev, who is currently the Chairperson of OSCE, played a very pro-active role throughout the crisis situation in Kyrgyzstan. Hectic diplomacy enabled him to announce a few days after the bloody riots rocked Bishkek, on April 15, that "As a result of joint efforts of Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, U.S. President Barack

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Obama and Russia's President Dmitriy Medvedev, as well as active mediation by the OSCE, along with the United Nations and European Union, an agreement was reached with the Interim Government of Kyrgyzstan and President Kurmanbek Bakiyev."

This was an important achievement by the chairperson of the OSCE towards containing and stabilizing the situation and allowing re-establishment of the rule of law. A timely intervention with the right kind of diplomatic approach to the evolving situation helped prevent a civil war in Kyrgyzstan.

Since the country's independence, Kazakhstan's leadership has been a proponent of peace, stability and intra-State and intra-regional cooperation for development. In the last two decades or so, Kazakhstan has made a significant contribution towards strengthening regional and global security. For example, the shutting down of the nuclear test site in Semipalatinsk, voluntary renunciation of nuclear weapons and total dismantling of related infrastructure was a historic decision taken by the leadership. As a result of Kazakhstan's efforts, besides the efforts by other member States, the entire Central Asia has been declared a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone through a treaty.

On the economic front, Kazakhstan is fully aware of its role as a responsible player in the regional and global economic processes and actively supports the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals of the U.N. Kazakhstan gives much importance to its regional environment and its top priority in Central Asian region is to create conducive conditions for sustainable development. As a country which is increasingly becoming a reliable source of energy to the world market, Kazakhstan pays much attention to use this advantage for the overall development and integration of the entire region.

Given this policy orientation, Kazakhstan considers that OSCE with its unique geographic stretch, experience and structures offers opportunities for enhancing international security and cooperation. Its leadership feels that they should fully support OSCE-based efforts at bringing the East and the West closer together in order to develop better understanding of the key issues of the modern world. While cognizant of the fact that the OSCE has been suffering from stagnation, Kazakhstan intends to rejuvenate it under its chairmanship. President Nazarbayev has announced several proposals to this effect which include convening an OSCE summit in 2010 to renew the consensus on security challenges facing the OSCE. The last summit of OSCE was held ten years back.

Kazakhstan has revealed a 4-T approach to be adopted during its chairmanship which focuses on “Trust, Tradition, Transparency and Tolerance”. Also, it intends to focus on achieving the optimum balance among all three OSCE “baskets” (politico-military, economic and environmental, and humanitarian).

The current OSCE chairperson has specified that in the political and military dimensions, Kazakhstan will concentrate on raising the OSCE’s capabilities to contribute to the international community’s efforts to counter new security threats and challenges, including combating terrorism, extremism, organized crime and drugs trafficking. Based on its experience of nuclear disarmament, Kazakhstan is well placed to address issues of proliferation of dual-purpose technologies and weapons of mass destruction. He has further said that Kazakhstan would seek progress in resolving the “protracted conflicts”, especially in the former Soviet space. The involvement of the OSCE in post-conflict reconstruction of Afghanistan has been identified as a priority for Kazakhstan’s chairmanship.

In the economic and environmental sphere, Kazakhstan would promote a dialogue on cooperation in transport and transit corridors connecting Europe and Eurasia. Three conferences are being planned to take place in Vienna, Minsk, and Prague in 2010, focusing on raising the effectiveness and security of land border crossings and facilitating international car and rail links in the OSCE region. Kazakhstan will pay close attention to issues of environmental monitoring and reactive capabilities and will support the use of OSCE’s potential to address regional environmental problems that could have global consequences such as the Aral Sea.

It will also continue OSCE’s work in the areas of effective management of water resources and measures to counter land degradation and soil contamination. Kazakhstan’s agenda will include migration issues and development by the OSCE of appropriate laws and integrated approaches to migration policy to improve global management of migration. On energy security, Kazakhstan will continue to support the consolidation of the international community’s efforts to provide stable and secure export routes for hydrocarbons as part of the mutual dependency of producers, consumers, transit States and transnational corporations.

In the humanitarian field, Kazakhstan’s efforts will centre on the basis of global security – the promotion of tolerance, inter-cultural dialogue and peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups in the OSCE area. With its experience of developing dialogue and harmony between different ethnic and religious groups, Kazakhstan will convene a high-level OSCE conference on tolerance and non-discrimination in Astana in June 2010.

Also, Kazakhstan will pay close attention to the development of democratic institutions, protection of human rights and provisions of gender equality. In this area, it will give priority attention to addressing the problem of human trafficking.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev had floated the idea of a Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in 1992 at the United Nations General Assembly, and it took him a decade to make his dream come true when the organization held its first summit in 2002. Kazakhstan's initiative and conviction has made CICA a viable forum for multilateral dialogue and discussion on the common issues and challenges faced by Asian countries. Similarly, Kazakhstan's initiatives on creating harmony among major religions through inter-faith dialogue could not go unnoticed by the international community.

However, the most pertinent question regarding the future course of OSCE has been raised by none other than President Nazarbayev himself, when he said during his January 14 speech: "The decisive question for OSCE in the future is whether it can turn into a structure which recognizes the diversity of 21st century world, or it will remain as an organization segmented into blocs where the West stands apart from the space 'from the east of Vienna'."