

Kazakhstan Faces OSCE Hurdles

Nation confident it will make a difference

Kazakhstan is leading the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, or OSCE, this year, making it the first Asian nation to hold the post. Kanat Saudabayev, Kazakhstan's secretary of state and foreign minister, replaced Greek Prime Minister and Foreign Minister George Papandreou on January 1, 2010.

Choosing the first former Soviet state to chair the 56-nation alliance raised a few eyebrows. Kazakhstan has been criticized for its poor record on democracy and human rights — both fundamental OSCE goals — the BBC reported in January 2010.

But Central Asia's largest nation has a “commitment to uphold the fundamental principles and values of the organization,” read a statement on the OSCE Web page. “This is evidence that the principle of equality among the participating states remains valid, as well as recognition of the increasing role of Kazakhstan in a strategically important region and in the OSCE generally,” Saudabayev said.

Saudabayev knows oil-rich Kazakhstan, the world's largest land-locked country, will face tough issues during its one-year OSCE term. But he is optimistic his country's tenure will bear fruit.

“We want to contribute to strengthening peace and security ... improving confidence within the OSCE,” he said in a May 2009 interview for the New Europe Web site. To do that will require “strengthening the European security architecture, developing transit and transport potential, stabilizing OSCE regional partners — Afghanistan — and promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence in diverse societies, a very timely subject for Europe.”

Roughly the size of Western Europe, Kazakhstan is in the right place to influence the Afghan deadlock and other conflicts that run along Central Asia's borders, euronews.com reported.

“Accordingly, we intend to focus particular attention on Afghanistan,” Saudabayev said in story posted on Central Asia Online in January 2010. The country is instrumental in the effort to stabilize Afghanistan, providing ground and air transit routes for non-lethal cargo destined for coalition forces as part of the Northern Distribution Network. And the country's military provides support to the Afghan Army. He also said that for many years Kazakhstan has been providing humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and Afghan refugees.

But resolving the Afghanistan war is a tall order, as is fixing other ongoing regional conflicts. To have any influence over these events, Kazakhstan will have to use its “mediating potential to support existing frameworks of negotiations to settle protracted conflicts in Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia,” Saudabayev said.

“Assisting in resolution of protracted conflicts remains a priority for any chairmanship,” Saudabayev told Radio Free Europe in January 2010. “We shall endeavor to do all we can to make a contribution to this difficult process. At the same time, our organization must try to find a way of preventing the emergence of similar



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Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev said his nation's leadership of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe will boost European security.

In its leadership role, trust, tradition, transparency and tolerance will guide his country's efforts, Saudabayev said. He wants “to bring closer the positions” of all group members “based on the principles of impartiality and balance.” Another goal is to “advance the organization's role in strengthening security and deepening cooperation.”



Mélange, a toxic rocket fuel component, is pumped into a special railway tank car from a Soviet-era storage depot in Kalynivka, Ukraine, in November 2009. The chemicals had posed an environmental and security threat to states — including Kazakhstan — within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

ANTON MARTYNYUK, OSCE

conflicts which result in human tragedy and humanitarian disasters.”

Many world organizations acknowledge there is a definite link between the drug trade and terrorist funding. Saudabayev said he will put fighting the illicit drug trade and counterterrorism high on the OSCE priorities list. But the cleanup must start in his own country, which is a highway for illegal drugs bound from Afghanistan to Russia.

Additionally, events in the country have led many to believe the Kazakhs are not moving fast enough to resolve their own human rights and other issues. The nation’s promises to liberalize its media, political parties and election laws have yet to materialize. Its internal issues might make it harder for Kazakhstan to lead the OSCE by example.

But the nation has “done much right since independence,” William Courtney, the first U.S. ambassador to an independent Kazakhstan, wrote in a January 2010 opinion piece for *The New York Times*. “Whether it has the moral authority and diplomatic gravitas to shepherd the OSCE to a fruitful year, however, depends on how it leads and the support it obtains.”

Though it faces challenges, Saudabayev is confident of Kazakhstan’s OSCE leadership role. “We believe the unanimous decision by the OSCE’s 56 member states to elect Kazakhstan as chairman of the organization ... marks Kazakhstan’s recognition as an independent state,” Saudabayev said during the New Europe Web site interview.

Kazakhstan’s OSCE leadership is an “opportunity for us to contribute to security and cooperation in Europe,” he said. “From that, everybody will benefit.” □

ABOUT THE OSCE

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is the world’s largest regional security group. Its 56 member states are from Europe, Central Asia and North America. Started as a series of conferences in August 1975, the group gained permanent status in 1990. In 1994 it changed from the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe to its current name.

A primary instrument for early warning, the group effects conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. It does that with 19 missions or field operations in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

OSCE deals with the three dimensions of security: politico-military, economic-environmental and human. It addresses a wide range of security-related concerns, including arms control, confidence and security building, human rights, national minorities, democratization, policing strategies, counterterrorism, and economic and environmental activities.

All members enjoy equal status, and decisions are made by consensus on a politically but not legally binding basis. OSCE