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# **Central Asia Security Policy Brief No 3**

## **Trust in a Traditional, Tolerant and Transparent Multi-level Game? The Kazakhstani OSCE Chairmanship 2010**

Anna Kreikemeyer

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## **Trust in a Traditional, Tolerant and Transparent Multi-level Game? The Kazakhstani OSCE Chairmanship 2010**

by Anna Kreikemeyer

### **Key Points**

- The Kazakhstani OSCE Chairmanship 2010 has been met with by excitement, support, scepticism and criticism.
- Kazakhstan prepared for its Chairmanship early and comprehensively by capacity building, and seized many opportunities to cooperate with OSCE institutions before beginning its tenure in 2010.
- The fact that under the Kazakhstani Chairmanship the OSCE will have its first summit meeting in eleven years can be regarded as a resounding success.
- The Kazakhstani government had difficulties acting simultaneously and consistently across different political levels -- the international, the multilateral, the intraregional and the domestic levels.

NB: The views expressed in this paper are entirely and solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek or the GCSP.

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OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Botanichesky 1A, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 72004 Tel: 996 312 54 32 00

Fax: 999 312 54 23 13 [www.osce-academy.net](http://www.osce-academy.net)

Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Avenue de la Paix 7bis P.O. Box 1295, CH-1211 Geneva 1 [www.gcsp.ch](http://www.gcsp.ch)

Dr Anna Kreikemeyer is a senior research fellow at the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) of the Institute of Peace Research and Security Policy (IFSH) at the University of Hamburg (Germany). Her field of research is foreign and security policies of Central Asian states as well as the development of the OSCE.

## Introduction

The Kazakhstani OSCE Chairmanship has received much more attention than previous OSCE Chairmanships in recent years. Looking at the perceptions since 2003, we can see excitement, support, scepticism and criticism.<sup>1</sup>

Questions whirled around the Kazakhstani Chairmanship from the very beginning; it was the first post-Soviet and the first Asian state to fill this role. States were unsure what to make of the situation as far back as 2003, asking – Will its application have support? Will it become Chair when the first spot opens in 2006? Will it get it in the second instance in 2007? Will it get a summit? What will the agenda of this summit be? And who, ultimately, will attend?

Support was there from the very beginning significantly for example from Germany's then-chancellor Schröder as early as 2003.<sup>2</sup> The Kazakhstani Chairmanship was seen as both a challenge and an opportunity. Supporters expected an easing of tensions between East and West, and that the ownership crisis in the OSCE would be overcome. Furthermore, supporters believed that the OSCE could become more significant, that consensus could be restored, that Central Asia would receive more attention, and that conflicts - between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, for example - could be bridged. Supporters also saw the Chairmanship application as a way to bolster Western-leaning members of the Kazakhstani government. Last, but not least, they warned of repercussions should the application be rejected.

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<sup>1</sup> On 18. February 2003 Kazakhstan applied for the OSCE Chairmanship 2009. The Brussels Ministerial Council Meeting (2006) decided to postpone a decision for one year as the USA and Great Britain, in particular, complained that Kazakhstan had not made enough progress in implementing its OSCE commitments. At the Madrid Ministerial Council Meeting (2007) the Kazakhstani Foreign Minister Tazhin promised decisive reforms and the OSCE participating states decided, for the first time, on three subsequent chairs (Greece 2009, Kazakhstan 2010, Lithuania 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See “Kanzlerbesuch in Zentralasien”, <http://www.zeit.de/2003/50/kasachstan> (last accessed 1 November 2010).

Sceptics mostly emphasized benchmarks in the area of crucial human dimension commitments and their implementation. Critics still stronger pointed to the poor performance in the democratisation process since independence and foresaw possible damage to the OSCE.<sup>3</sup>

From the outset, Kazakhstan was very active and worked intensively to deal with the expectations mentioned above. The Kazakhstani leadership continuously emphasized its will to become OSCE Chairman and showed no fear in admitting that there was a need for domestic reform, adding that it was voluntarily accepting support. On 30 October 2003, the former foreign minister Tokaev declared in Brussels: "As far as Kazakhstan is concerned, we know that there are some doubts abroad. [...] We want to apply for this Chairmanship in the OSCE because first of all, we fully understand the importance and the difficulty of this issue. It is a challenge not only for the OSCE itself, but for Kazakhstan. It is an impetus for us to follow up with the political reforms in order to make the country in full compliance with the international standards and those adopted by the OSCE itself. So our commitment in this respect is quite clear. When addressing the OSCE, our partners within this Organisation, we want to see your support, to obtain your spiritual assistance and your understanding [...]. Pursuing drastic liberal reforms during the last several years has not been so easy because of the complicated geopolitical situation around the Central Asia."<sup>4</sup>

The Kazakhstani authorities prepared early and comprehensively for their Chairmanship by capacity building, in which the German Centre for OSCE Research (CORE), among others, was heavily involved between 2007 and 2009 providing three wide-ranging OSCE-related training courses for officials of the Kazakhstani Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Despite the fact that Kazakhstan had signed the Moscow Declaration and the Astana Appeal, which were critical of the OSCE, in 2004, the government was able to seize many opportunities to cooperate with OSCE institutions even before 2010.<sup>5</sup> In 2005, Ambassador Sultanov participated in the Panel for Eminent Persons and in the Working Group "Transnational Threats." Kazakhstan hosted an ODIHR Implementation

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive overview on Kazakhstan's OSCE policy between 2003 and 2006 see Andrei Zagorski, "Kazakhstan's Chairmanship Bid: A Balance Sheet of Pros and Cons", in: Daniel Warner (ed.), *The OSCE at a Turning Point: OSCE Chairmanship and Other Challenges*, (PSIO Occasional Paper 4/2007), pp.93-124.

<sup>4</sup> Kassymzhomart Tokaev, "The major Geopolitical Challenges of Central Asia Today", Lecture at Egmont Institute, Brussels, 30 October 2003, <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/speechnotes/02-03/031030-TOKAEV.pdf> (last accessed 1 November 2010).

<sup>5</sup> See Anna Kreikemeyer, Preparing for the OSCE Chairmanship – CORE Training Courses and Capacity Building, in: IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2008*, Baden-Baden 2009, pp. 353-358.

Meeting on Tolerance in 2006, and in 2008 a session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Almaty, organised a meeting of the secretaries-general of the CICA and OSCE. Additionally, Kazakhstan participated in the first informal Quintet since 2008 and in the 2009 Troika.

This proactive behaviour generally characterizes the Kazakhstani candidacy for OSCE Chairman since its application, and is related to its self-perception as a regional leader following the path of economic nationalism and international profiling through a multi-vector strategy rooted in Eurasianism. This energy- and feedstock-exporting country wants to achieve a place among the 30 leading nations in the world. In this context, President Nazarbayev does not shy away from making far-reaching proposals for integration at the global level. During the international financial crisis, for example, he suggested a global currency, the Akmetal. In the international debate over Iran's striving for possession of nuclear fuel, Nazarbayev suggested hosting an international nuclear fuel bank.<sup>6</sup> Despite extraordinary capacities for international balancing, Kazakhstan is still heavily dependent on Russia and relations with Moscow can often be seen as a determining factor for its policy towards the West. However, in cases of differences between Russia and the West, Kazakhstan's room to manoeuvre is growing. With the aim of bridging East and West in accordance with Strategy 2030, Kazakhstan follows the „Way to Europe Program“ and interprets the OSCE Chairmanship mainly in this context.<sup>7</sup>

Looking back, the Kazakhstani leadership and authorities made great efforts to cope with the challenges and – given the fact that under their Chairmanship the OSCE will have the first summit meeting in eleven years – can claim a relatively great success. However, a more comprehensive overview also points to shortcomings and problems with the performance.

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<sup>6</sup> See President Nazarbayev at the Opening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Astana Economic Forum “Economic Security of Eurasia in the System of Global Risks”, 11 March 2009, [http://www.akorda.kz/en/news/2009/03/president\\_nursultan\\_nazarbayev\\_takes\\_part\\_in\\_the\\_opening](http://www.akorda.kz/en/news/2009/03/president_nursultan_nazarbayev_takes_part_in_the_opening) (Oct. 28, 2010); Pavel Voronin, “New world order impossible without morality and spirituality”, <http://www.inform.kz/eng/article/2295654> (last accessed 27 October, 2010). In 2011, Kazakhstan will be Chairman of the SCO.

<sup>7</sup> See the addresses by President Nazarbayev to the people of Kazakhstan, [http://www.akorda.kz/en/speeches/addresses\\_of\\_the\\_president\\_of\\_Kazakhstanistan/address\\_by\\_the\\_president\\_of\\_the\\_republic\\_of\\_Kazakhstanistan](http://www.akorda.kz/en/speeches/addresses_of_the_president_of_Kazakhstanistan/address_by_the_president_of_the_republic_of_Kazakhstanistan) (last accessed 28 October 2010) and “Prosperity, security, and ever growing welfare of all the Kazakhstanis”, [http://www.akorda.kz/en/Kazakhstanistan/Kazakhstanistan2030/strategy\\_2030](http://www.akorda.kz/en/Kazakhstanistan/Kazakhstanistan2030/strategy_2030) (last accessed 28 October 2010).

### **Different political levels of the Kazakhstani Chairmanship**

From a political science point of view, many of the unique features of the Kazakhstani Chairmanship are related to the fact that, as a relative newcomer in the multilateral arena, it has been confronted with the difficulty of acting simultaneously and consistently across different political levels - the international, the multilateral, the intraregional and last, but not least, on the domestic level. In so doing the Kazakhstani authorities have had to play a multi-level game to balance their domestic and foreign policies.<sup>8</sup> This balancing act was and still is necessary in order to gain international influence on the one hand while preserving domestic stability on the other. What seems important, however, is the lack of consistency between actions on the different levels of this multi-level game, especially the domestic and the external levels.

In the following I will first elaborate on the levels mentioned, and second show the characteristic disconnect in two areas of performance: Kazakhstan's 2007 Madrid promises regarding the human dimension and its crisis management in Kyrgyzstan 2010. I will conclude by explaining the forthcoming OSCE Summit in terms of this multi-level game.

First of all, *international relations* between 2003 and 2010 could be characterized not only by hegemonic competitiveness between the United States and Russia but also, to a growing extent, in the economic arena with China. Second, since 2001 more and more states in the OSCE area have gotten involved in the uncertain future of the war in Afghanistan. Third, Russia has sought to restore a sphere of influence in the South Caucasus and in Central Asia; however, its hegemonic power is declining. Fourth, despite its Central Asia Strategy (2007), the EU cannot compete with Chinese pragmatism and financial power in the region.

The OSCE as a *multilateral organisation* has suffered and, to a certain extent, is still suffering, an institutional crisis due to conflicting political interests among its participating states since 2004. This crisis peaked between 2004 and 2005 with the Moscow and Astana declarations in 2004, the OSCE reform efforts by the Panel of Eminent Persons and the budget crisis in 2005. Since 2005, the

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<sup>8</sup> Speaking here about multi-level games, I do not want to go into details of Robert Putnam's (1988) methodological approach in international relations theory, but merely use the term multi-level game as an illustration to better clarify the different arenas of Kazakhstani foreign policy in general and during the OSCE Chairmanship in particular.

situation has slightly improved and new perspectives such as the Kazakhstani Chairmanship application and the reset in US-Russian relations have, since 2009, paved the way for the OSCE Corfu process in which the future of the institution has been discussed productively without much international attention.<sup>9</sup>

*Intraregional relations* among post-Soviet states are characterized by nation-building and growing diversification. These processes are taking place in the context of domestic and intraregional instability. Security threats on different levels can exacerbate each other. What is lacking is an adequate security policy. Due to prevailing nationalism and bilateralism, intraregional cooperation in Central Asia is very weak and security vacuums, such as the one in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010, have become obvious.

On the *domestic level* Kazakhstan is a rapidly emerging country, but quick economic modernization has not necessarily been followed by an equally quick liberalization of the traditional society. Had that been the case, political stability might probably have been eroded. The politics and the society of this Central Asian state are still rooted in economic-clannish neo-patrimonialism. This system is characterized by the strong role of informal structures, based on the acquisition and redistribution of resources and on the centralisation and personalisation of power around a leader (“big man”) and his clan network.<sup>10</sup> In such a system, foreign policy often has a very instrumental character and serves the domestic legitimisation of the authorities.

### **Performance in the human dimension**

One of the great achievements of the OSCE is its community of values laid down in its commitments (*aquis*). Thus any OSCE participating state and even more an OSCE Chairman is confronted with the challenge of bringing into line the domestic and the multilateral levels of its policy. The Kazakhstani leadership has reacted on various levels to the multilateral demand for domestic liberalization. First, a certain discrepancy between multilateral and domestic level

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<sup>9</sup> See Wolfgang Zellner, *Managing Change in Europe. Evaluating the OSCE and Its Future Role: Competencies, Capabilities, and Missions*, CORE Working Paper No. 13, Hamburg; Wolfgang Zellner, “From Corfu to Astana: The way to the 2010 OSCE summit”, in: *Security and Human Rights*, Vol. 21/2010, No. 3 (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> See among others Edward Schatz, “Reconceptualizing Clans: Kinship Networks and Statehood in Kazakhstan” in: *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 33/2, 2005, pp. 231–251.

behaviour was accepted and ultimately bridged by declaratory commitment. Second, Kazakhstani authorities emphasized tolerance with respect to global diversity and thus legitimized their specific path of democratization from above through the National Commission for Democratisation (since 2004), the National Human Rights Action Plan (2009-2012) and the Legal Policy Concept (2010-2020). Third, noticing a certain discrepancy between the domestic barriers to reform and the necessary commitments on the multilateral level, the Kazakhstani government did not shy away from proactive public self-promotion campaigns.<sup>11</sup> Thus, to a certain extent, the Kazakhstani authorities were able to cope with the disparity problem. While observers had talked a great deal about the critical performance in the OSCE human dimension *before* the Madrid decision to grant Kazakhstan the OSCE Chair, this criticism has subsided considerably since the beginning of the Chairmanship when Kazakhstan opened a new arena with the summit issue. From then on, most people were preoccupied with the question of “summit and substance”.

Nevertheless it should be emphasised that some controversial domestic decisions have been taken by the Kazakhstani authorities and demonstrate the disconnect with the multilateral level: The proposal to exempt President Nazarbayev not just from term limits but from elections altogether; a proposed election law clause that bans a one-party parliament and the fact that Kazakhstan still has a one-party parliament; draft laws on party registration rules which are not in line with OSCE standards; laws limiting opportunities for public protest in the areas of freedom of expression, assembly and religion; an increased grip on mass media outlets and incidents of cracking down on the Internet.<sup>12</sup>

### **Performance in crisis management in Kyrgyzstan**

From the point of view of the political levels involved, the regime change in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan in general and the violence in Osh and Jalal Abad in particular again confronted the

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<sup>11</sup> The joint high level conferences with the US Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Institute for New Democracies (IND) as well as accompanying newsletters and reports, but also PR activities with European researchers, both financed by the Kazakhstani government were aimed at promoting the Chairmanship.

<sup>12</sup> See Nargis Kassenova, “Kazakhstan on the eve of OSCE Chairmanship. Madrid commitments and domestic political landscape”, in: *EUCAM Commentary*, No. 7/December 2009; Michael Ludwig, “Opposition gegen den Einheitsstaat” [Opposition against the unitary state], in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 December 2010 as well as reports of international human rights NGOs.



OSCE Chairman with the challenge of harmonizing the domestic, the intraregional and the multilateral levels. In retrospect, we can again observe a disconnect with respect to negative steps and barriers for the Kazakhstani Chairman-in-Office during the crisis management in Kyrgyzstan.

With the "green light" given at the international level by Washington and Moscow, the Kazakhstani president played a key role in resolving the standoff between ousted President Bakiev and the interim government. The subsequent crisis management was organized in forms that were, to a great extent, pre-structured on the multilateral level by the OSCE itself: the consultations of both the Chairman-in-Office and his Special Envoy in coordination with the OSCE Centre in Bishkek and the Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna as well as with the UN and EU special representatives. Kazakhstan created no barriers to activities of the OSCE Permanent Council, to the High Commissioner on National Minorities' early warning, to the Office for Democratisation and Human Rights' observation of the referendum and the subsequent elections, to the plans for deploying a Police Advisory Group or to the Parliamentary Assembly's efforts to coordinate an international investigation.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond the institutional reactions of the OSCE Chairman, Kazakhstan's intraregional reactions to its neighbour's crisis were quite contradictory and not really connected to the multilateral level. During the days of unrest in April and June 2010 the Kazakhstani leadership was keen on preventing spill-over effects from the neighbouring country and closed its border with Kyrgyzstan for several days. Thus, for domestic reasons, Astana contributed to damaging its neighbour's economy. Kazakhstan has also unilaterally denied entry to ethnic Uzbeks refugees and deported Kyrgyz migrants since the unrest in Bishkek in April.<sup>14</sup> President Nazarbayev did not meet with the provisional Kyrgyz President Otunbayeva until the day after her inauguration. At the same time, a joint Kazakhstani-Kyrgyz working group for post-conflict rehabilitation was established and a \$10 million package of aid, as well as donor conferences, were promised.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> On the OSCE conflict management in Kyrgyzstan see <http://www.osce.org/cio/43441.html> - On the proposal for an OSCE Police Advisory Group in Southern Kyrgyzstan see <http://www.osce.org/bishkek/45652.html> .

<sup>14</sup> *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, "Kazakhstan Deports Kyrgyz Labor Migrants En Masse", 6 October 2010, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Kazakhstanistan\\_Deports\\_Kyrgyz\\_Labor\\_Migrants\\_En\\_Masse/2182666.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Kazakhstanistan_Deports_Kyrgyz_Labor_Migrants_En_Masse/2182666.html) .

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.eurodialogue.org/Kazakhstanistan-And-The-OSCE-Can-Take-The-Lead-In-Kyrgyzstan>

The reactions of the OSCE Chairman were also not really compatible with Astana's intraregional policy. Due to the notorious problems with intraregional cooperation and the prevailing bilateralism, as well as the political role of the Russian Federation in security in Central Asia, the crisis management of the OSCE Chairman Kazakhstan had to be brought into line with the obligations resulting from the strategic partnership with Russia and the membership in the CSTO, both of which declined any military involvement. It became more than clear that Astana would not pursue a crisis management strategy that called into question the decisions of its CSTO partners. Thus, despite its self-image as a regional leader, it could not prevent a security vacuum in the region. As a consequence the German and the French foreign ministers Westerwelle and Kouchner demanded stronger involvement of the OSCE Chairman in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>16</sup>

In summary, the Kazakhstani contribution to conflict management in its neighbouring country had mixed success. While any OSCE Chair would have had a difficult job creating or coordinating a rapid reaction to stop the violence due to the institutional limits of OSCE crisis management and without joint rapid reaction possibilities at its disposal, it became clear once again that the domestic and the intraregional levels of the Kazakhstani foreign policy could not be related to the multilateral-institutional level. The national power structures and related interests on the intraregional level, as they are reflected in the CSTO, resulted in non-interference in Kyrgyz internal affairs. Barriers both on the domestic and on the intraregional level led to counterproductive actions.

### **The way to the OSCE Summit Meeting**

On 3 August, after an Informal Ministerial Council Meeting in Almaty on 17 July 2010, the OSCE Permanent Council decided to convene an OSCE Summit meeting in Astana on 1-2 December 2010. Given the framework of the interplay between different political levels, this forthcoming event can be interpreted as the convergence of interests at three different levels:

Kazakhstan which is greatly interested in national prestige and accustomed to making far-reaching summit proposals, has, since the beginning of its Chairmanship, continuously urged a summit

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<sup>16</sup> See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 17 September 2010.

meeting in Astana in 2010. At its initiative this aim was already laid down in the Athens Ministerial Council Declaration. Following that, the Kazakhstani president and his authorities emphasized this goal with a more or less empty summit agenda on the one hand, but successful multi-vector balancing on the other. In his video address on the occasion of Kazakhstan's assumption of the Chairmanship of the OSCE, President Nazarbayev already announced his interest in having a summit (*domestic and international levels*). With rather empty arguments in the beginning - the need for renewed consensus after 10 years and the celebration of 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Charter of Paris, the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II - he started an intensive public relations campaign and relevant discussions among the participating states to encourage them to position themselves around the summit issue.

A summit meeting is very much in the interests of the OSCE as an organisation. After a decade of growing tensions and the subsequent weakening of the OSCE as a security-relevant organisation, a summit offers an opportunity for the institution to become more visible in the international arena and to confront the participating states with the need to re-evaluate the commitments and the advantages of cooperative security. This intention is in line with the interests of the Western States in the continuation of the OSCE Corfu process (*multilateral level*). More important, however, is the fact that an OSCE summit meeting corresponds, to an increasing extent, with the strategic interest of the US in an increase in OSCE activities in Central Asia with respect to Afghanistan. As early as his visit to Kabul in December 2009, Kazakhstani Foreign Minister Saudabayev announced "As Chairman of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) next year, we intend to do everything possible to use the potential of this organisation in order to assist Afghanistan." He also announced that Kazakhstan would spend \$50 million over the next five years to educate 1,000 Afgans.<sup>17</sup> This strong emphasis on strengthening the recovery of Afghanistan was the basis for the April 2010 agreement between the US and the Kazakhstani president on the OSCE summit proposal. Soon afterwards both sides issued food-for-thought papers on possible OSCE contributions to stability in Afghanistan that list a large number of tasks. Thus, in the summit issue the national level of Kazakhstani foreign policy successfully joined the international level. However, this historic consensus must be filled with concrete action on the ground (*intraregional and domestic*

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.osce2010.kz/en/content/Kazakhstani-spend-50million-ed> (last accessed 1 November 2010); On the US interests see Jacqueline McLaren Miller, "Central Asian Security: Two Recommendations for International Action", in: *EWT Briefing Papers*, April 2010; William Courtney, Joint Statement: Meeting of President Obama and Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev, 12 April 2010.

*levels*), where OSCE participating states still have to work on tightly linking the different levels of their policies in order to be more effective than they were in Southern Kyrgyzstan. The OSCE as an Organisation has not yet won the struggle for greater ownership in the Central Asian region itself.

## **Conclusions**

In assessing the Kazakhstani OSCE Chairmanship 2010 we find different answers on different levels: On the international level the challenge of opening up room to manoeuvre between competing participating states and integrating Russia into the summit proposal was managed and thus the Chairmanship has created an opportunity to bridge tensions between East and West. On the multilateral level a constructive continuation of the Corfu process and support for the OSCE institutions, mostly ODIHR, was managed as well. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan could have shown stronger support and initiative in fostering OSCE instruments, such as the Police Advisory Group in Southern Kyrgyzstan. On the intraregional level the management of regional crises and conflicts was not fully achieved as domestic barriers prevented the Kazakhstani OSCE Chairman from engaging not only multilaterally but also nationally. On the domestic level the opportunity to strengthen the reform process by implementing OSCE commitments could not be seized due to strong control of formal democratisation from above. The forthcoming OSCE Summit also faces the challenge of implementing this historical consensus through concrete action on the ground in Central Asia where the OSCE participating states still need to work on tightly linking the different levels of their policies to be more effective than they were in Southern Kyrgyzstan. The OSCE as an Organisation has not yet won the struggle for greater ownership in the Central Asian region.

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