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Issue Brief: Reaching the OSCE Summit in Astana

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This issue brief was prepared by Walter Kemp, Director for Europe and Central Asia, IPI Vienna Office.

Sharpening its international profile and broadening its reach to Europe and beyond, the International Peace Institute (IPI) announced the establishment of its new Vienna office in September 2010.

IPI has had a forty-year partnership with Austria, manifested by the annual Vienna Seminar that brings together policymakers, academics, and military experts to discuss pressing issues of peace and security and to explore ways of improving the global system of conflict prevention and risk management.

Vienna, a traditional center for diplomacy and multilateral negotiations, is home to a number of regional and international agencies, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

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On December 1 and 2, 2010, Kazakhstan will host the heads of state or government of fifty-six countries for the first summit of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) since 1999. This is a major achievement for a country that was considered by some to be an inappropriate choice to lead the OSCE. Yet the Astana summit is not a test of Kazakhstan's leadership. It is about the future of Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security, and the viability of the OSCE. At a time when the European Union, Russia, and the United States are redefining their relationships and looking for common ground, the Astana summit provides an opportunity to focus on issues that unite all stakeholders—finding a sense of common purpose to deal with common threats and challenges on the basis of common principles. This brief looks at what it will take to reach the “summit” at Astana, examines the main issues at stake, and considers the relevance and future direction of the OSCE.

A Different World

The world has changed dramatically since the last OSCE summit in Istanbul in 1999. Terrorism, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as well as climate change and the financial crisis, have taken priority over debates about European security. With a few exceptions, transnational threats have replaced intrastate conflicts as the greatest challenges to security in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian areas.

The “colored” revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan; proposals for a missile shield in the Czech Republic and Poland; disputes over energy security; and the conflict in Georgia have strained relations between the EU and Russia, and between Russia and the United States.

Debates over Kosovo's independence, and Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have created a clash between two of the fundamental principles of the *Helsinki Final Act*: territorial integrity of states and self-determination.

Central Asia's stature has grown due to natural resources in some countries, and the geostrategic importance of others has also increased, particularly in relation to Afghanistan. It is telling that Kazakhstan, a country that did not even exist as an independent state when the *Charter of Paris* was signed in 1990, has the chairmanship of the OSCE twenty years later.

The United Nations, which was heavily engaged in the Balkans and Georgia in the 1990s and into the beginning of the twenty-first century, has all but left European security to European security organizations. But the OSCE has not filled the void.

The number of EU member states has nearly doubled from fifteen to twenty-seven since 1999, meaning that (in theory), because of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), half of the OSCE speaks with one voice. The EU has been instrumental in stabilizing the situation in the Balkans and giving states of southeastern Europe an EU perspective. The EU, through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), has become more operational, carrying out civilian missions and military operations in the OSCE area (including the Balkans, Georgia, and Moldova), and abroad (including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and East Africa).

NATO has enlarged to Russia's western border, and incorporates most states of the former *Warsaw Pact*. As a result, Russia feels that dividing lines in Europe have not disappeared; rather, they have moved eastwards. At the same time, despite its historic character as a North Atlantic defense organization, most of NATO's operations are out-of-area (as in the Balkans and Afghanistan).

New security actors have arrived on the scene, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (CSO), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The OSCE still has a niche in Central Asia, but is no longer the only game in town.

These developments have created *de facto* spheres of influence: EU, NATO, and Russian. The OSCE is the place where these spheres overlap, or collide like in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. At the same time, a greater number of actors and a more diverse set of issues have created a more complex geometry than a decade ago.

Therefore, on the road to Astana, a priority for participating states is to establish the position of the OSCE in relation to other organizations, its relevance in addressing contemporary threats, and its efficiency in doing so.

Renew and Reset

Some argue that a summit needs a grand vision. One idea is to define the OSCE area as a "security community." Others, like Russia, have even bigger (and vaguer) plans of a new European security architecture, inspired by, but not limited to, the OSCE. They call for the OSCE to become a fully fledged international organization, based on a legal charter, where states would act in their national capacities "stripped bare of any distorting ideological motivations."¹ Others, like the United States, prefer the OSCE to be more flexible.

The OSCE already has a *Charter for European Security* that was adopted at the Istanbul summit in 1999. It maps out common challenges, common foundations, and common responses among OSCE participating states. Furthermore, the *Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century*, adopted at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Maastricht in December 2003, provides detailed analysis of the most salient challenges to participating states, and guidance on what the OSCE can do about them. Both documents are comprehensive and forward looking. Unfortunately, neither of them has been systematically implemented.

Therefore, if countries are looking to press the "reset" button, they should go back to the *Charter for European Security*, and build on that cooperative spirit to address the threats identified in the Maastricht Strategy—most of which have become more acute.

At Astana, participating states—taking advantage of a new spirit of multilateralism and recalling the thirty-fifth anniversary of the *Helsinki Final Act* and the twentieth anniversary of the *Charter of Paris*—should renew their vows, after going astray since Istanbul, by reiterating the importance of the Helsinki principles and the vision of a Europe whole and free (from the *Charter of Paris*), and agree on the need to work together to deal with challenges that no state can confront alone. This could be captured in a short and punchy political

1 See the speech of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Berlin on June 5, 2008, available at www.un.int/russia/new/MainRoot/docs/press/090608eprel.htm. For an analysis of the Medvedev proposal, see Bobo Lo, "Medvedev and the New European Security Architecture," London: Centre for European Reform, July 2009.

communiqué, which could become the Astana declaration.

But the OSCE will be judged on the basis of what it does, not what it says. So concretely, what can it do?

Transnational Threats

After years of acrimony, the Astana summit could be an occasion to demonstrate a convergence of strategic interests on a number of issues.

The spill-over of the Afghanistan crisis is a paramount example. Drugs, extremism, and terrorism coming from Afghanistan are among the greatest threats to the security of all OSCE countries. Most of the world's heroin is consumed in the OSCE area—around 180 tons a year. The Balkan route and the Northern route flow straight through the heart of the OSCE, yet only a small fraction of the drugs are being intercepted. Countries of Central Asia are seizing only 4 percent of the drugs crossing their territory, the Russian Federation 5 percent. Some countries in south-eastern Europe are seizing just 2 percent. This is a major windfall for extremists, antigovernment forces, and criminal groups, for example in Central Asia.² And it is causing the spread of HIV and drug addiction.

There is a clear need for increased capacity in border control, anticorruption, container security, and counternarcotics on Afghanistan's northern flank and along trafficking routes. While dealing with drugs and crime is the entry point, the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan (an OSCE Partner for Cooperation) should be put in a broader context of security-sector reform, capacity building, and strengthening the country's sovereignty. The OSCE is well-positioned to play a role. The challenge is to integrate these efforts into broader international initiatives like the *Paris Pact*, and to strengthen practical cooperation with relevant partners in the region (like the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the UNODC, the International Security Assistance Force, and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation). This is certainly an issue where participating states could find common

ground.

More generally, the OSCE could do more to combat transnational organized crime. As a regional arrangement of the United Nations under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, the OSCE has helped states implement the UN (Palermo) *Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime* (which marks its tenth anniversary this year), particularly the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons*. Since the OSCE area is the main source for illicit firearms that are trafficked around the world,³ the organization should do more to promote the implementation of the *Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, by building on the work that it has done on small arms and light weapons, stockpile security, and the smuggling of weapons by air.

Preventing and Managing Crises

Over the past three decades, the OSCE's mechanisms, instruments, tools, missions, and institutions have contributed to preventing conflict. However, the OSCE has been less successful at crisis management and conflict resolution, most notably in Georgia in August 2008 (to the point that it no longer has a presence in South Ossetia, or in Georgia for that matter). It now faces a complex challenge in Kyrgyzstan where it is trying to dispatch a Police Advisory Group to the troubled south of the country. As the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Kazakhstan's Secretary of State and Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev has said, the way the organization deals with the Kyrgyz crisis will be "a test of the OSCE's vitality."⁴

There are a number of reasons why the OSCE is losing its edge in dealing with conflict situations in its own area. The first is an unresolved clash of principles: territorial integrity versus self-determination, for example in Abkhazia, Kosovo, South Ossetia, and Transdniestria. The OSCE does not have to rule on these cases, but it has to live with the consequences. In that sense, the OSCE's main added value is to keep conflicts frozen. But this is

² UNODC, *Addiction, Crime, and Insurgency: The Transnational Threat of Afghan Opium* (Vienna, 2009).

³ See UNODC, *The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment* (Vienna, 2010), Chapter 6.

⁴ OSCE, "OSCE Chairperson Announces Agreement on Summit, Calls Kyrgyzstan Crisis a 'Vitality Test' for Organization," press release, July 17, 2010.

no long-term solution, as the crisis in Georgia demonstrated.

The second reason is increased competition. There are other actors, like the EU, that are becoming more engaged in crisis management. The OSCE is no longer the primary organization for the peaceful settlement of disputes within its region. On the one hand, this dilutes resources and attention. On the other, it enables states to play one organization off another (as Russia did with the EU, OSCE, and UN in Georgia), or for organizations to compete for the most tractable situations.

The third is a lack of means. Whereas the OSCE has strong conflict-prevention tools, like the High Commissioner on National Minorities and field missions, it is less well-equipped to deal with crisis situations. At the Istanbul summit in 1999, heads of state agreed to develop the OSCE's role in peacekeeping (building on a decision taken at the 1992 Helsinki summit). However, attempts to operationalize this concept have come to naught. As a result, in crises like those in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan the OSCE has not been able to deploy peacekeepers. This is more a reflection of the inability (or unwillingness) of states to create conditions for deployment rather than a failing of the OSCE secretariat's organizational capacities. To overcome this problem, the United States has proposed the creation of a Conflict-Prevention Mechanism that harks back to the days of missions of short duration (launched by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, as the OSCE was originally known, in the early 1990s), and seeks to modify the Berlin Mechanism (of 1991) for Consultation and Cooperation with Regard to Emergency Situations. This should generate an interesting debate.

The fourth reason is a lack of clarity. Both the Secretary General and the Chairmanship have mandates to make early warning and to take early action. But that is precisely the problem: who takes the lead? Who should make the early warning? Who should be the trouble shooter? Who is in charge of OSCE field operations? In order to improve its efficiency and relevance in crisis management, the OSCE needs to work out this division of labour—ideally before a new Secretary

General is appointed in the spring of 2011. Furthermore, the OSCE (learning from the UN) should consider the creation of a Mediation Support Team that could assist the OSCE leadership during crisis situations. For the sake of the OSCE's relevance, the Astana summit should reinforce the organization's conflict-prevention tools, and strengthen its crisis-management capacity.

Arms Control

There has been little progress on arms control in the OSCE since the Istanbul summit. The *Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe* (CFE) broke down, and there has been little follow-up to the 1999 *Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures* (CSBMs). NATO countries have not ratified the adapted CFE treaty because of Russia's nonimplementation of the so-called Istanbul commitments, which called for the withdrawal of Russian armed forces from Georgia and Moldova. Russia, in turn, does not accept any link between the legally binding adapted CFE treaty and the politically binding Istanbul commitments.⁵ This stand-off has derailed many OSCE high-level meetings since Istanbul.

Since the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia or Moldova does not look likely in the near future, is the treaty doomed to stalemate?

In summer 2010, proposals were made in the Joint Consultative Group (involving the CFE signatories) on a possible way ahead. While negotiations on the CFE are not part of the OSCE per se, the Astana summit could give a strong signal that it is time for states to look with fresh eyes and a more cooperative spirit at modernizing conventional arms control in the OSCE area. Progress on arms control before Astana could create momentum for making progress in other areas at the summit.

Human Dimension

At its founding in 1975, the CSCE (now OSCE) made a clear link between hard and soft security, and demonstrated that human rights and security

5 Wolfgang Zellner, "Can This Treaty Be Saved? Breaking the Stalemate on the Conventional Forces in Europe," *Arms Control Today*, September 2009.

are indivisible. In the past thirty-five years, the organization's human rights principles and institutions have played an important role in strengthening the foundations of democracy and accountability in the OSCE area.

The approach, for the most part, has been cooperative and constructive: states are working with each other and with OSCE institutions like the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to live up to the promises that they have made.

Increasingly, the challenge of integrating diversity—like religious minorities and Roma—is affecting security and human rights. Building on its work on national minorities and nondiscrimination, the OSCE should do more to promote social integration. Not least, this would demonstrate its relevance in dealing with human dimension issues both east and west of Vienna.

The OSCE is an ideal forum to strike a balance between protecting security and human rights. All states are grappling with this dilemma—especially when dealing with terrorism. No state can claim moral superiority, nor can they avoid external scrutiny when it comes to human rights protection. After all, in 1991, long before the idea of the responsibility to protect was endorsed by UN member states, OSCE participating states “categorically and irrevocably” declared in the *Moscow Document* that “commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension of the CSCE are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.”⁶

The blueprint for such “constructive intrusiveness” is laid out in the *Copenhagen Document* (1990) that celebrates its twentieth anniversary this year. A more effective, and even-handed, way needs to be found to monitor, and promote, its implementation.

The OSCE also needs to update its election-monitoring guidelines and procedures, and ensure that its election reporting is free from bias and political interference. Parliamentarians parachuted

in to read out headline-grabbing statements undercut the credibility of long-term and constructive election monitoring.

Conclusion: Historic Summit or Missed Opportunity?

The Astana summit comes at a time when states are seeking multilateral solutions to common problems, focusing greater attention on Eurasia, and trying to make Europe's security structures more efficient and relevant. There is little time to prepare for the summit, although a number of review meetings (in Vienna, Astana, and Warsaw), and the NATO summit in Lisbon (November 19-20, 2010), as well as the EU-US summit will create momentum. Furthermore, plenty of preparatory work has been done in the Corfu process, launched under the Greek chairmanship in 2009.

While it will be a challenge to reach the summit in Astana, what counts—over the long term—is what happens afterward. It would be a shame if this historic opportunity was wasted by simply agreeing on a checklist of issues (dressed up as a plan of action) that need to be discussed in the future. OSCE member states have a rare opportunity to

- **define** a sense of common purpose;
- **renew** the OSCE acquis;
- **increase** security and cooperation in Central Asia;
- **restart** talks on arms control;
- **strengthen** the OSCE's engagement with, and around, Afghanistan;
- **improve** the OSCE's conflict-prevention and crisis-management capabilities; and
- **enhance** the OSCE's capacity to combat transnational threats.

Working together on these issues could build confidence and cooperation in other areas of mutual interest, like energy security and the human dimension. It could also set a good example for regional cooperation in other parts of the world.

Astana will also be the first chance to test out NATO's new strategic concept (after the NATO

6 CSCE, "Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE," Vienna, October 3, 1991.

Lisbon summit), it can set a strategic perspective for Central Asia, and it will oblige European, American, and Russian policymakers to more clearly define their priorities and partnerships.

It is not solely up to the Kazakhs to deliver, although they will have to ensure that the situation in Kyrgyzstan and relations with Uzbekistan do not derail their chairmanship. They are sherpas to help reach the summit—and they have devoted considerable energy and resources to get there. But it is not their expedition alone. Whatever is agreed at Astana will not be implemented under Kazakhstan's

chairmanship. Rather, it will become the shared responsibility of all participating states, starting with Lithuania's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2011.

After having neglected the OSCE over the past decade, participating states have the opportunity at Astana to rediscover the organization's positive attributes, strengthen its capabilities, and make better use of it as a forum for identifying and resolving security challenges. The OSCE's relevance is at stake. The degree of preparation and the level of participation will demonstrate how seriously states take the OSCE.

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