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OSCE Astana summit

On 1-2 December, Astana hosted the OSCE summit. As was made clear at the beginning of Kazakhstan's chairmanship in January 2010, holding such a gathering was a priority for the country's leadership. Major efforts were made to secure the agreement of member states to participate in the summit and ensure attendance by highest officials. All resources were mobilized to provide the high level of organization and security of the summit.

While OSCE chairmanship is generally important for any member state appointed to hold it, Kazakhstan's enthusiasm has been extraordinary. Becoming the first chairman of the organization among post-Soviet states and being able to convene the first OSCE summit in a decade were to show that Kazakhstan has successfully come of age and acquired a respectable place in the world community. In the wake of the summit, President Nazarbayev referred to it as a "triumph of the Kazakhstani people", while the official media presented it as the triumph of the wise policies of the President himself.¹

There is no doubt that the summit raised the profile of Kazakhstan and that the Astana declaration has put the capital in one group with Helsinki, Paris and Istanbul. Prestige aside, however, the overall benefits of the chairmanship are questionable. It was hoped that Kazakhstan's visibility as chair would stimulate political liberalization in the country, but by the end of the year it was clear that this had proved to be wishful thinking. While Astana was ready to give promises, it did not have the will to act on them.

There were expectations that Kazakhstan's chairmanship would help reconcile the two camps ("West" and "East") and their interests, promote the peace process in the frozen conflict zones (starting

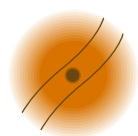
with Nagorny Karabakh), and thus lead the organization out of crisis. Unfortunately, the Astana summit did not mark a breakthrough. The two-day summit was filled with verbal attacks and counterattacks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russia and Georgia, and diverse opinions of various members on the changes required in the organization, showing the lack of readiness of the member states to reach a new consensus. It was with great difficulty that the hosts of the summit were able to push through the signing of the Astana declaration, which did not go further than confirming the Helsinki principles.

Thus, while the OSCE Astana summit was a "triumph" of Kazakhstani leadership, it was not so successful in terms of the organization itself. Astana could perhaps have been less self-congratulatory, but it should not be blamed for the failure. Big players in the organization have failed to reach a common understanding on how to organize broader European/Eurasian security, and without it, the OSCE cannot be revived.

Referendum to extend President Nazarbayev's term until 2020

On 23 December, a group of citizens in the city of Ust Kamenogorsk including deputies from all the regions of Kazakhstan proposed a referendum to extend Nazarbayev's presidential term until December 2020². This measure was justified on the grounds that it is necessary to save energy and resources that would otherwise be spent on presidential elections scheduled for 2012, and ensure the stability and further modernization of the country³. The idea immediately received the support of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, headed by President Nazarbayev, and the ruling Nur Otan Party, also headed by President Nazarbayev.

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The aforementioned group launched a campaign to gather signatures. According to the Law on National Referendum, the president, parliament, the government or a group of no less than 200,000 citizens representing all regions of the country can initiate a referendum in Kazakhstan. The decision to hold a referendum is made by the president⁴. An extension of the presidential term would require changes in the constitution. The group proposed amending the article regulating presidential elections and introducing a clause allowing the term of the first president and leader of the nation to be prolonged by a referendum. The change can be pushed through by a four-fifths majority of parliament⁵.

A forceful and well-organized campaign in support of the referendum shows that the decision has been made at the very top. The question remains as to what extent President Nazarbayev himself supported the idea and whether people in his entourage took the initiative in order to spare him the pressures of the election and avoid any changes in the political system (this way ensuring their own security and wellbeing).

Multi-vector military policy

After her visit to Astana in early December, U.S. State Secretary Hillary Clinton announced that Kazakhstan had decided to send military instructors and engineers to support the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF)⁶. This means that Astana finally chose to meet NATO's request for help and deepen relations with the alliance.

In the second week of December, Kazakhstani defence minister Adilbekov Dzhakysbekov visited his Russian counterpart Anatoly Serdyukov in Moscow, where it was decided that the two countries would create a single air defence system. As a first step, Russia provided Kazakhstan with free units of anti-aircraft complex S-300. Russia also proposed that Kazakhstan join the rocket launch warning and space control systems⁷.

These two simultaneous developments indicate that Kazakhstan continues to conduct a multi-vector policy in the military sphere and tries to benefit from cooperation both with Russia and the West. Moscow has no choice but to tolerate such lack of loyalty and will continue to make efforts to strengthen military cooperation and integration. This approach is driven both by geopolitical considerations and concerns about the security of its southern borders.

Single Economic Space ready for launch in 2012

On 9 December during the Moscow CIS summit, the presidents of Russia, Belorussia and Kazakhstan signed a package of normative documents of the Single Economic Space. Fourteen documents were agreed on earlier and a decision was taken to iron out the differences in the remaining three documents (on coordinated macroeconomic policy, the creation of conditions in the financial markets for free movement of capital, and on coordinated principles of monetary policy). With the signing of these documents the normative base of the Single Economic Space has been completed and it can be launched in January 2012⁸. This would mark a major breakthrough in terms of Russia's plan for the re-integration of the post-Soviet space.

¹ Izbestiya Kazakhstan, 7 December 2010.

² This would not be the first time President Nazarbayev's term is extended this way. A national referendum held in April 1995 prolonged Nursultan Nazarbayev's term until 2000.

³ Radio Azattyq, 23 December 2010 (http://rus.azattyq.org/content/nursultan_nazarbayev_election/2257162.html)

⁴ Constitutional Law on National Referendum, 2 November 1995 (amended in 1999).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 15 December 2010.

⁷ "Liter", 10 December 2010.

⁸ Rossiyskaya gazeta, 12 December 2010.

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