

The Summit is over, what's next?

Evgeniy Zhovtis*

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*Evgeniy A. Zhovtis is Director of the NGO Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law. He is currently serving a four years sentence in Kazakh penal colony OV156/13.

To analyze the results of the OSCE Summit, which was held in Astana on 1-2 December 2010, one must also consider the outcomes of Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship and the views of OSCE countries on this chairmanship. All of these issues are interrelated.

I believe that few people doubt that the decision to grant the chairmanship to Kazakhstan was made mainly on geopolitical and geostrategic grounds. It was an attempt to shift the centre of gravity in addressing regional security issues to the East, closer to the hotbeds of instability, Afghanistan and Iraq; also to strengthen European policy on Central Asia, which is located in Russia's traditional area of influence and borders another world power, China; furthermore, mindful of the region's natural resources, it was intended to deal with concerns of European states about commodity markets and energy security; and finally, it was an attempt to overcome the disagreements between the countries to the west of the former Soviet Union (including the Baltic States, Georgia, Moldova and, to some extent, Ukraine), and Russia, Central Asia and the Caucasus about fundamental principles and the OSCE's institutional role and function.

The third 'basket' of the Helsinki Accords, the human dimension, inevitably became a victim of this decision. Before adopting the decision on Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship, it was apparent that a number of post-Soviet countries do not comply with most of the OSCE commitments on democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, especially civil and political rights, particularly countries such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which are experiencing a strengthening of rigidly authoritarian or even dictatorial regimes. In this regard, neither the soft criticism occasionally voiced by Western governments and intergovernmental organizations, including the OSCE structures, nor the condemnation by international and local non governmental human rights organizations due to violations of human rights and civil liberties have brought about any practical positive changes. In some instances, the situation has even worsened.

Members of the OSCE, mainly in the former Soviet Union, are seeing an increase in the number of journalists, human rights defenders and representatives of the political opposition being murdered; newspapers being banned, rallies and demonstrations being dispersed, political prisoners, religious communities being persecuted and citizens who simply dissent. Much of the post-Soviet region has become an enclave where fundamental international human rights principles are suppressed, misinterpreted, distorted or not recognized at all; where in the early 21st century, speeches that were mothballed in the chests of history can be heard once again, referring to the incompatibility of certain national practices and cultural traditions with the concept of democratic development and human rights, as if there are people who are allergic to truth, freedom and justice.

Under these circumstances, the decision on Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship merely confirmed this trend of sacrificing the third basket of the Helsinki Accords to the interest of geopolitics, security, anti-terrorism, etc. True, this sacrifice is made against the backdrop of the declaration that the recognition of human rights and freedoms is the very foundation of security.

In this respect, the year of Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship has not changed anything, aside from the fact that the OSCE, for the first time in its history, is being led by the country where basic political and civil rights are generally violated. This year ended with an ambitious foreign policy project by Kazakhstan — the OSCE Summit. Despite the fact that almost half of the heads of the OSCE member

states did not come to Astana, and the final Astana Declaration contains no breakthrough provisions on the settlement of regional conflicts or a reform of the OSCE, the execution of this event can be considered a major foreign policy success for Kazakhstan's government. Kazakhstan has recorded its presence in the arena of international politics, although the Summit looked more like a PR campaign by its President.

Nevertheless, the adoption of the Astana Declaration, which reaffirms the fundamental principles and values that are shared, albeit on paper, by all OSCE member states, to my mind should be viewed as a positive step. This is reminiscent of the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, when the Soviet Union and Socialist countries endorsed commitments relating to the fundamental principles of human rights and freedoms, in addition to commitments in the areas of security and economic and cultural cooperation.


Despite the fact that, due to the nature of the regimes in these countries, the specified principles were not observed, the adoption of this international document — and, on its basis, the creation of first the CSCE and later the OSCE — provided an opportunity for democratically-minded citizens to refer to it as a politically binding agreement, and even to create the first human rights organizations, such as the Moscow Helsinki Group.

The adoption of the Astana Declaration allows civil society in most of the former Soviet Union countries to rely on it when claiming the principle of the extraterritoriality of human rights, namely that any violation of human rights is not an internal affair of one country, but may be the subject of concern for other states and their citizens; that one can criticize the human rights situation in one's own country and in other OSCE member states, both domestically and internationally; that the commitments undertaken by OSCE member states include ensuring the free functioning of independent media, free and fair elections, and the development of independent non-governmental organizations; that civil societies in OSCE countries are not objects but subjects of internal and external policies.

And what is especially important is that these principles and commitments are not confirmed in a document adopted in Washington, Brussels or Vienna, but in Astana, the capital of a new independent state which has, however, retained many features of the Soviet political system.

These features cannot fail to be noticed against the background of many disappointments, setbacks and losses.

It remains only to recommend the next OSCE chairmen — Lithuania in 2011, Ireland in 2012 and Ukraine in 2013 — to implement a less ambitious but no less important foreign policy project: to achieve the renaming of the organization as the Organization for Security, Cooperation and Human Rights in Eurasia. Maybe that could somehow help to ensure the practical implementation of the commitments contained in the third 'basket' of the Helsinki — and now the Astana — Accords.



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Netherlands Helsinki Committee
Het Nutshuis
Riviermarkt 4
2513 AM The Hague
The Netherlands

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