



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of the Program Office in Astana, Ambassador György Szabó

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 16, 2016

The United States welcomes Ambassador Szabó to the Permanent Council in his new capacity, and thanks him for his report.

We welcome your assessment that the Program Office has continued to work effectively with the Kazakhstani government since the adoption of the new mandate. As we said when the new mandate was adopted, it is important that the Program Office be able to respond flexibly to new challenges, and engage in meaningful activities that address the full range of OSCE commitments.

The United States supports the Office's work in all three dimensions, including assisting with countering violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism while respecting and promoting human rights and the rule of law, countering terrorist financing, combating corruption, promoting democratic policing, supporting penal and criminal justice reform, combating human trafficking, promoting gender equality, and addressing domestic violence.

We urge the Program Office to continue to strengthen its involvement with members of civil society, and particularly to work with both the government of Kazakhstan and members of civil society to ensure that implementation of the new law on non-governmental organizations does not have a negative impact on the activities of independent civil society members.

We urge the government of Kazakhstan to take full advantage of the Program Office, as well as other relevant OSCE structures, to assist with implementation of commitments concerning freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, particularly in light of recent protests on land reform. As we said in the Permanent Council last month, laws requiring government approval of demonstrations should not be misused to prevent peaceful protesters from expressing views that are critical of the government. Neither should overly-restrictive laws be used to preemptively detain activists and journalists in advance of a planned demonstration, as was the case in Kazakhstan last month in anticipation of the land reform protests.

The United States also supports the continued work of the Program Office – along with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights – to assist Kazakhstan in implementing reforms to strengthen its capacity to hold free, fair, and democratic elections in keeping with its international obligations and commitments. The OSCE observation of the March 20 parliamentary elections concluded that, while the elections were efficiently

organized and showed some progress in certain areas, there was an absence of genuine political choice and a variety of serious procedural irregularities during voting, ballot counting, and tabulation similar to problems noted in previous elections.

Ambassador Szabó, thank you for your report today, and – as you highlighted your plan to go forward to both deepen and – as you said – make more efficient the work of the Office – in future presentations, one thing that would be interesting would be to understand, at one level deeper of specificity, how you see particular projects of the Program Office as connected to both OSCE commitments as well as priorities and needs within Kazakhstan, just so that we have a sense of exactly how the Office is making a difference on the ground, what it's delivering in terms of outcomes. I think that would be very helpful.

We thank you again for your work, and for the work of your staff, as you assist the Government of Kazakhstan in implementing its OSCE commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.