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Session on Security and Human rights

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I Overview

While the Summit reaffirmed the basic principles of the OSCE regarding Human Rights, the shared affirmation did little to advance a new approach to close the gaps between the differing understandings by member states of their obligations in this critical area of OSCE responsibilities.

II Kazakhstan's Chairmanship and the Human Security Basket

When Kazakhstan took on the role of Chairman in Office there was concern shown by some member states about the appropriateness of Kazakhstan's assuming this role given the country's own short-falls in this area. Critics feared that as Chairman in Office Kazakhstan would weaken the OSCE commitment in this area, while advocates of a Kazakh chairmanship expressed hope that this would spur improved Kazakh performance..

Both proved wrong. Kazakhstan's own human rights record did not improve significantly, but as Chairman in Office Kazakhstan did nothing to weaken the OSCE's commitment to the defense of human rights.

III The Challenge Lithuania Confronts

Lithuania's foreign ministry has promised to use its chairmanship to increase the attention shown by the OSCE to the concerns of representatives of civil society, especially with regard to human rights violations in their countries. In doing this, though, the Lithuanian leadership of the OSCE will need to be very mindful of the need to not create a schism within the OSCE between states, largely found in the former Soviet Union, and the rest of the membership of the OSCE. Such a schism would further reduce the effectiveness of the OSCE to address the security challenges found within and just beyond the OSCE region.

IV Finding New Ways to Address the Security Challenges Posed by Shortfalls in Human Rights Observance by Member States

One of the challenges that the OSCE faces is to try and handle a multitude of different kinds of human rights violations. While every type of human rights violation merits efforts at redress, some human rights violations create greater and more immediate security threats than do others. So while the arrest or legal abuse of human rights and other civil society activists for political reasons merits criticism and response, the OSCE cannot so cripple itself in responding to such incidents that it impacts upon the ability of the organization to effectively respond to gross human rights violations such as those that occurred in Kyrgyzstan in June.