



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Natalia Zarudna, Head of the OSCE Center in Astana

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 12, 2014

The United States is pleased to welcome Ambassador Zarudna back to the Permanent Council. Ambassador, thank you for your informative report.

Your ongoing multi-year projects on human rights education as well as your focus on countering violent extremism and radicalization give law enforcement officials the tools they need to address pressing challenges while respecting and upholding Kazakhstan's OSCE commitments. Bringing together experts from Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, and Sweden to a conference on democratic governance highlights the usefulness of the OSCE as a platform for dialogue and sharing best practices among participating States. We also support your ongoing efforts to promote good governance in line with the 2012 Dublin Declaration, and we welcome your support of the Aarhus Centers in Kazakhstan.

We particularly applaud your facilitation of ODIHR's event for government and civil society representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to discuss best practices related to respect for religious freedom and the members of religious or belief communities. We encourage you to promote Kazakhstan's full implementation of OSCE commitments related to the other fundamental freedoms – namely, the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. We also applaud your partnerships with domestic groups, including various government agencies, the parliament, and civil society organizations.

We are concerned, Ambassador Zarudna, that your office is being forced to do its work without all the necessary resources. The reallocation of resources away from Almaty has made it more difficult for you to work with civil society. Undue delays in filling key positions have also not helped your efforts.

Earlier this week, we received a food for thought paper from the Delegation of Kazakhstan on the future of your office. We will certainly give this paper all due consideration. A robust OSCE presence is a clear and strong message of the importance the host country places on upholding its commitments and respecting OSCE norms and principles. We believe that the process of readjusting the mandate of any OSCE field mission should be transparent and include the views of all relevant stakeholders, both within the host country and across the OSCE space. Discussions should go well beyond the host government's agencies involved in implementing OSCE commitments, and should include local civil society actors and organizations with whom the Mission partners in fulfilling its mandate. We suggest that consultations should include, for example, human rights defenders, environmental activists,

security experts, economists and other scholars, those who benefit from programs of the mission, as well as those whose work focuses on government accountability in fulfilling OSCE commitments.

In fact, Ambassador, we think there is an opportunity for your office to form a more formalized partnership between various government agencies and Kazakh civil society. The OSCE Office in Tajikistan offers a good example in this regard. It works to bring together government offices and Kazakh civil society organizations with interest in the implementation of OSCE commitments. Together, they identify priorities, determine how to address those needs, and jointly implement agreed-upon projects. Throughout this process, the OSCE office serves as a facilitator and key partner. We urge you and the Government of Kazakhstan to study this model and consider how it may apply to future OSCE activities in Kazakhstan.

Thank you once again, Ambassador, for coming to the Permanent Council today. Your office is doing good work, and we foresee an active and important role for your Office on the road ahead. There is much more work to be done before your mandate “to promote implementation of OSCE principles and commitments” is fully realized. We have every confidence that you and your team are up to the challenge.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.