

United States Mission to the OSCE



Response to the Report of the Head of the Program Office in Nur-Sultan, Dr. Volker Frobarth

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., James E. Donegan
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 24, 2021

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dr. Frobarth, welcome to the Permanent Council for the first time in your new role and thank you for this detailed report. As it is my first in the Permanent Council in my role as Chargé, I'm glad my first intervention is such a positive one.

As you know, the United States supports the Program Office's work across the first, second, and third dimensions, to support Kazakhstan in fulfilling its OSCE commitments and enhancing regional security.

The United States appreciates the Office's endeavors in combating violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism. We consider Kazakhstan a valuable ally in the field of counterterrorism and note, in particular, Kazakhstan's remarkable success in repatriating ISIS-affiliated nationals from northeast Syria. Further, we commend the Program Office's collaboration with other Central Asian Field Missions on border management—especially, the innovative cooperation with the OSCE Center in Ashgabat to offer an underwater security course for border guards. We also welcome the Office's facilitation of Kazakhstan's participation at regional Border Security and Management conferences.

We note with interest the Office's various youth-focused events, including engagement of youth in good governance and environmental security activities. The *Central Asian Youth Network* alumni reunion, held in collaboration with the OSCE Program Office in Bishkek, provided an opportunity for continued dialogue and networking among young leaders. The inclusion of the perspectives of young people will ensure the OSCE develops sustainable and inclusive solutions to today's complex security challenges. We hope to see more of these collaborative efforts.

We commend the Office's assistance to Kazakhstan's *Anti-Corruption Agency* and welcome steps to combat the financing of terrorism, specifically the online training focused on complying with *Financial Action Task Force* recommendations. We note the cooperation among the Office, the U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and law enforcement agencies in facilitating training to combat money laundering.

We strongly encourage your Office's continued assistance to the government of Kazakhstan to foster implementation of its commitments in the human dimension. We commend the Office's efforts on criminal justice reform, including on ending torture, which remains a problem in Kazakhstan. This work is especially timely in light of the December 2020 OSCE Ministerial Decision on eradication of

torture. Please continue to monitor the harsh and sometimes life-threatening conditions endured by prisoners.

We also support your work on women's political empowerment. We would appreciate additional information about your Office's efforts to contribute to *Women, Peace and Security* objectives. We also welcome your cross-dimensional efforts to combat trafficking in human beings.

We note the challenges for media freedom in Kazakhstan. Dr. Frobarth, we thank you for conducting training for journalists on freedom of expression. We are pleased by the discussion of media legislation among the government, civil society, and the media community. Your efforts on media freedom are crucial as the government continues to exert undue pressure on media, including through harassment, criminal charges, imprisonment, legal provisions, licensing regulations, and internet restrictions. We appreciate the Representative on Freedom of the Media's (RFoM) organization of regional conferences that bring together journalists from all five Central Asian countries. Certainly, significant progress needs to be made towards media freedom. We would appreciate your sharing with us your plans for future work with the host nation and RFoM to further freedom of expression in Kazakhstan and the region.

Dr. Frobarth, thank you and your team for your dedicated work at the Program Office in Nur-Sultan. We value your contributions to the government and people of Kazakhstan and we wish you success.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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