



**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2013  
Warsaw, Poland  
September 27, 2013**

**Working Session 8  
Deepening Restrictions on Freedom of Association in Kazakhstan**

Being able to enjoy freedom of association is fundamental to a participatory democracy. Freedom House appreciates the OSCE's strong commitment to protecting this right and to retaining HDIM as a space where NGOs can participate fully.

My statement will focus in detail on Kazakhstan. However, I wanted to begin by noting that the reckless shredding of accepted commitments by Russia in the realm of freedom of association is casting a wider shadow throughout the OSCE region. By enacting the foreign agent law, the treason law, and the so-called "homosexual propaganda" law, Russia's government is demonstrating that it considers organizations that promote human rights and pluralism to be an enemy. The international community's response to these actions must be firm. The OSCE community needs to stand against the attempts by Russia and others to deny freedom of association. I will now turn to the situation in Kazakhstan.

Freedom of association is enshrined in Article 23 of Kazakhstan's constitution. The right to establish political parties is also protected by the same Constitutional Article 23. However, the realization of this right depends on government officials who have established legislation that makes registration of a political party highly difficult, and a bureaucracy instructed to obstruct the establishment of an opposition at every turn. Not only does an opposition party have to find 40,000 members while experiencing severe administrative pressure, they also have to observe complicated procedures for holding the meetings required to formally establish their party.

For every step, government officials find innumerable reasons to withhold registration for unspecified periods of time. In order to reject an application for registration, it is sufficient to find a few persons who are willing to withdraw their signature, or who have died, or left the country. This practice was used against the opposition party Alga!, whose party members wandered the offices of government officials for seven years, trying every conceivable way to get registered without success.

After the events in Zhanaozen in December 2011, when government forces shot and killed 16 protesters, the government went even farther in its attacks on Alga!. On December 21, 2012 a court ruled ‘Alga!’ “*extremist,*” and its activities were banned throughout the territory of Kazakhstan.

Such practices in relation to the freedom of association, in particular as regards the right to establish political parties, look more like an outright ban on political activity.

In enumerating these severe and increasing restrictions on freedom of association in Kazakhstan, Freedom House also reminds the hall that such restrictions have placed Kazakhstan on a par with its fellow members in the Customs Union, Belarus and Russia. With Russia pressing for expansion of the Customs Union to Armenia and Kyrgyzstan and beyond, we ask that the hall question whether such restrictions on freedom of association for such a large population and across such a broad stretch of territory are compatible with the OSCE human dimension commitments that we have come to discuss this week. Thank you.