

“Prospects of the Kyrgyz - OSCE partnership will become even more pertinent in the light of sweeping global security issues like climate change, resilient pandemics, devastating wars, terrorist threats, and cybersecurity,” expert Kanatbek Abdiev analyzes Kyrgyzstan's participation in the OSCE in an article just for CABAR.asia.

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This article aims to analyze a background of cooperation between the OSCE and the Kyrgyz Republic, whilst also assessing the effectiveness of the country's participation in the OSCE from 1998 to 2018. The rationale for choosing the OSCE to study the effectiveness of the state's participation in international organizations is due to several factors. First, the Organization's concept of security covers the politico-military, the economic, and the human dimensions, unlike many other associations whose work is limited to merely security or economic issues. Second, the relations between the Organization and Kyrgyzstan have been tested by a series of important events in the country's history, where both sides have played active parts in shaping and reforming each other. And third, the OSCE is one of the few international organizations, where Kyrgyzstan as a participating state has been self-driven and set policies, independent of the regional and global geopolitical forces.

### **Kyrgyzstan in global affairs**

Along with independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan gained the ability to become a fully-fledged international actor and be a part of various regional and international organizations. Askar Akayev's active foreign policy contributed to both the establishment of diplomatic relations with many countries and the signing of 2,650 and 8,899 international treaties and instruments in the bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks, respectively.

[1]Moreover, Kyrgyzstan had become a full member of international organizations like the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) ), The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Organization for Economic Cooperation (ECO) and the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (CCTS).[2]

This raises the question of how we can appraise the effectiveness of Kyrgyzstan's participation in these international organizations? How did the state benefit as a

participating state and whether it is deemed equal? To answer these questions, we first have to define the meaning of 'effectiveness'. The effectiveness of a state's participation in global affairs and international organizations is determined, above all, by the foreign policy strategies, i.e. the "raison d'état" or national interests, aimed to achieve political ends. The Kyrgyz Republic's foreign policy concept states that "while promoting an open multifaceted foreign policy, the Kyrgyz Republic develops cooperation with all Member States of the United Nations and international organizations on the basis of goodwill, understanding and respect"[\[3\]](#). According to the aforementioned concept, the national interests of the Kyrgyz Republic lay in safeguarding the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity; preserving peace, stability and unity; building a Rule of Law state, and strengthening national security.[\[4\]](#)

### **Kyrgyzstan and the OSCE**

Kyrgyzstan joined the OSCE in 1992, later signing the Helsinki Final Act (1992) and the Paris Charter for European Security (1994). The Permanent Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic to the OSCE and at the same time the Kyrgyz Embassy in Vienna was opened in March 1993. The OSCE Center in Bishkek was opened in 1999 by a decision of the OSCE Permanent Council, and in 2000 the OSCE established a Field Office in Osh to assist the work of the Center.[\[5\]](#)

The Kyrgyz Republic's relations with the OSCE can be deemed dynamic. In 1999, President Askar Akayev spoke for the first time in his term in office at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul. In his speech, Akayev mentioned the invasion of terrorist groups in the Batken region and said that Kyrgyzstan might soon be on the front line of confrontation with international terrorism. It was, therefore, expedient, according to Akayev, to enhance the role of the OSCE against the looming crises and use this platform for dialogue on these issues. His overriding message were the calls to extend the OSCE Charter not just to Europe but to all Eurasian region.[\[6\]](#)

In the following years, however, relations between Kyrgyzstan and the OSCE had ups and downs; the organization had been vocal in criticizing the country's authorities. The reason for this was the 2000 and 2005 elections in the country that did not meet the Organization's standards, as well as the violation of human rights and degrading legal environment.[\[7\]](#)

Growing tensions escalated into the 2004 Moscow Statement, when Kyrgyzstan joined the collective appeal of the CIS states on reforming the OSCE and abandoning the "practice of double standards and selective approaches." Long story short, Kyrgyzstan, along with other countries, called on the OSCE to be more even in geographical and thematic terms, to pay

more attention to security issues opposed to the issues of human rights and democracy, as well as to promote the representation of CIS citizens in the headquarters and field missions of the organization.[\[8\]](#)

Nonetheless, the 2005 “revolution” provided a fresh impetus to bilateral relations. In a difficult time for the country, the OSCE took an active stand, helping to stabilize the situation and support the institutions of power.

This has enabled the “reboot” and brought the format of work to a new level, while taking into consideration the interests and needs of the Kyrgyz side. Initiatives to promote cooperation have been echoed and fully supported by the Secretariat.

Of note is the fact the OSCE Center in Bishkek has been given a broader mandate, unlike the OSCE centers in other Central Asian states. This enabled large-scale regional initiatives on the politico-military; the economic and environmental; and the human dimensions. Adherence to democratic values, principles of transparency and openness for dialogue, had made the Kyrgyz Republic a leading player in work with international partners. The cooperation between the OSCE and the Kyrgyz Republic in 2005 amounted to more than 3 million euros, becoming the highest budget among all OSCE missions in Central Asia[\[9\]](#).

In 2007, a delegation of Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Ministry attended a meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Madrid, where the Kyrgyz side not only actively contributed to the discussion on the Afghan issues, but also initiated training and mentoring Afghan students at the OSCE Academy in the Kyrgyz Republic. While delivering his speech, Acting Foreign Minister Ednan Karabaev said that Central Asia can play a crucial role in the OSCE's global and regional security agenda.[\[10\]](#) That attests once more not only to the international donors and the OSCE's strong cooperation interest, but also to the effective foreign policy of the Kyrgyz Republic since independence and the efficient drawing of funds to implement the social and security policies.

### **The role of the OSCE in conflict prevention and resolution**

Over the past twenty years, Kyrgyzstan has endured several internal fierce conflicts, which marked the history and left traces at the political configuration. The first ethnic clashes in Osh and Uzgen took place towards the collapse of the Soviet Union; in June 1990. It is these events and gagging efforts that have set stage for the future inter-ethnic tensions in independent Kyrgyzstan. The 2005 Tulip Revolution and the popular uprising in April 2010 were followed by inter-ethnic clashes in June 2010.

Suffering from an institutional crisis during the 2010 June events, Kyrgyzstan wasn't capable of handling the conflict management and mediation. Matters were exacerbated by the fact that international efforts had a limited effect; neither Western states, nor Russia and its allies were able to push peacekeeping mechanism during the crisis through the UN, or the EU, SCO, CIS and CSTO. Speaking at the SCO summit in Tashkent, Russian President Medvedev ruled out interference by the Collective Security Treaty Organization's forces, citing a reluctance to aggravate the situation.[\[11\]](#)

Perhaps this decision was prompted by the lack of reliable interlocutors in the form of a strong political figure at that time and fear of failure of the intervention, but the fact is, the CSTO has chosen to stay on the sideline when Kyrgyzstan needed them most.

Unlike other partners, in the area of conflict management in Kyrgyzstan, the OSCE to a certain extent has assumed substantial leadership in the international community, in particular through the Special Envoy of the OSCE Chairperson. Following the clashes, at the request of the Kyrgyz government, an initiative in the area of public security had been designed in November 2010. The key point of the initiative was "to enhance the respect for and protection of human rights by the police and building confidence between law enforcement agencies and communities, inter alia, through encouraging a multi-ethnic police force."[\[12\]](#)

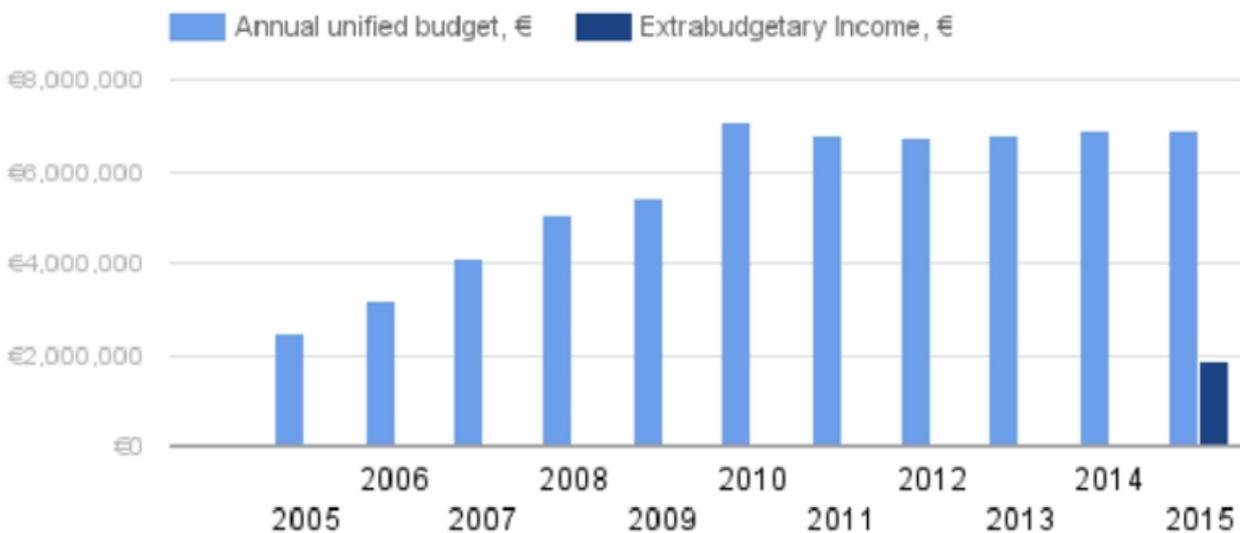
**The OSCE is one of the few international organizations, where Kyrgyzstan as a participating state has been self-driven and set policies, independent of the regional and global geopolitical forces.**

Throughout the conflict and stabilization stages, a prominent role was played by the OSCE Center in Bishkek, which, unlike other Organization field offices in the region, had a clear political mandate. It visibly underlined commitment to conflict resolution and prevention. Along with the Bishkek Center, the High Commissioner for National Minorities (HCNM), the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Academy in Bishkek have been instrumental in building peace and preventing conflict in a broader sense.[\[13\]](#) For the record, since its founding, the OSCE Academy has not only emerged a center for research and academic dialogue, but it also annually trains and develops a network of experts and researchers who had already contributed to national and regional security.[\[14\]](#)

**New period**

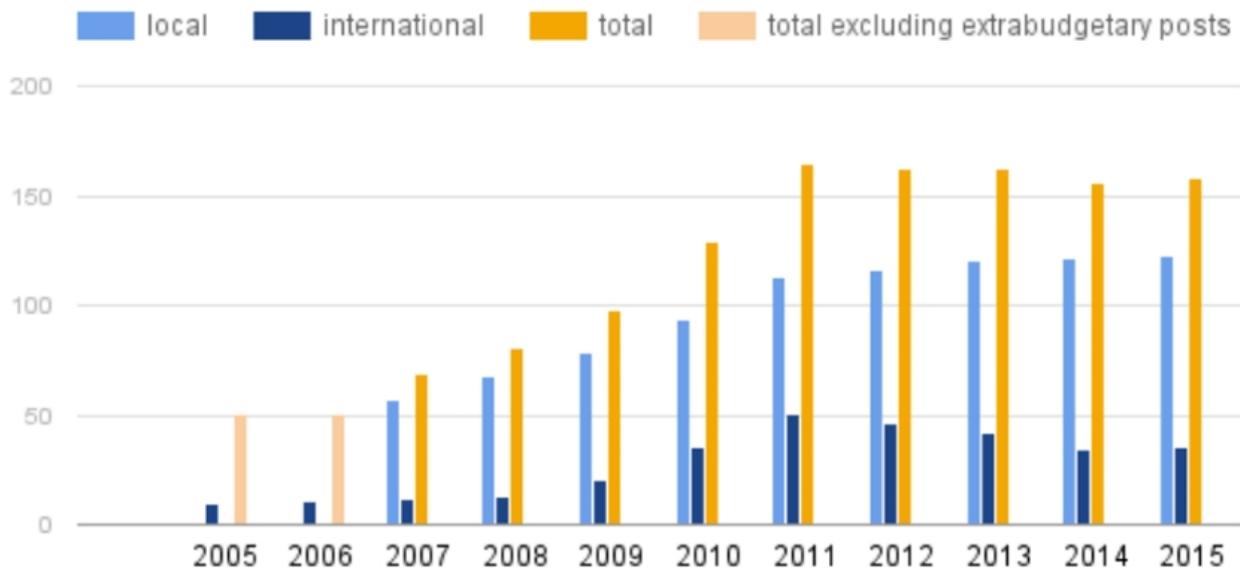
After the June 2010 events, relations cooled once more, which affected the cooperation between the OSCE and the Kyrgyz Republic. At the OSCE Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination on June 29-30, 2010 and at the OSCE Summit in early December, then the chairman Astana preferred not to consider the question of promoting stability and post-conflict development in Kyrgyzstan. Instead, Kazakhstan tended to promote its own “model” of interethnic tolerance.<sup>[15]</sup> In addition, the statement made at the ODIHR conference by Kadyrzhan Batyrov had been strongly criticized by the Kyrgyz government and led to a review of the status and mandate of the OSCE Office in Bishkek.<sup>[16]</sup> Contrary to expectations that this incident would adversely affect the success in cooperation, the budget has grown and, thanks to the new cooperation format, the Government and the Bishkek Center were able to attract additional extrabudgetary funding for projects.

**The budget of the OSCE Office in Bishkek from 2005 to 2015.<sup>[17]</sup>**



It is also interesting to observe that the demands of the Kyrgyz side were met; the staffing at the OSCE program office in Bishkek was revised, which led to an increase in the number of local experts and national consultants directly involved in the programs of the Office.

**The staff of the OSCE Office in Bishkek from 2005 to 2015. <sup>[18]</sup>**



A new period in the Kyrgyz – OSCE partnership was marked by the adoption of a cooperation agreement between the Kyrgyz Ministry of Defense and the OSCE Center in Bishkek in 2015[19]. The document maps capacity development of Kyrgyzstan’s armed forces and the provision of expert assistance from the Organization, in joint efforts in enhancing the country’s military capacity. The agreement draws upon the Organization’s activity in security cooperation to boost the close cooperation with the Kyrgyz government and the country’s military structures in ensuring an effective fight against terrorism and arms control[20].

Experts speculated that reformatting the OSCE Center in Bishkek to a program office could lead to curtailing projects and lowering the budget. Nonetheless, the prognoses did not come true and the OSCE offered to further support Kyrgyzstan by extending assistance where needed.[21] In 2018, the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, Muhammedkalyi Abylgaziev, met with the head of the OSCE Program Office in Bishkek, Ambassador Pierre von Arx. The Prime Minister prioritized the cooperation in the area to ensure transparency of the Open Government processes, saying that “an open government would facilitate a dialogue with civil society, whilst establishing transparency and accountability of state bodies and local governments.” [22]

Summarizing the OSCE’s 20-year presence in the country, it may be observed that Kyrgyzstan has participated effectively both in the domestic and regional decision-making processes, becoming an important member of the organization. The milestones were

abridged by Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Minister Chyngyz Aydarbekov, who at a conference dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the OSCE presence said the following: "All these years, we have observed the OSCE's support in Kyrgyzstan's development and its direct contribution to the democracy and stability in the country. For two decades, the OSCE stand ready in Kyrgyzstan's fulfillment of its three-dimensional commitments."[\[23\]](#)

## Conclusion

Since independence, Kyrgyzstan adheres to a multifaceted foreign policy with a strategic focus on its immediate neighbors. In the efforts to carefully navigate and circumvent the rough edges of ambition of the geopolitical powers, the country did not always have the opportunity to fully participate and implement its policy. The foregoing review of the Kyrgyz Republic's participation in the OSCE suggests the policy effectiveness and the positive impact of organization membership on the development of the young state.

The OSCE's integrity in ensuring the implementation of the security, democracy and human rights obligations has prompted the formation and development and of democracy and transparency institutions. The OSCE's persistent demand from the country's authorities to respect basic rights and freedoms of citizens keeps policymakers focused and encourages their improvement. The organization, as necessary, acts as an arbiter between the civil society and the state, helping to provide a platform for dialogue. Given the grim geopolitical situation in the region, where the Kyrgyz Republic defends its own interests with varying success and often has to make concessions, the OSCE participation is an unprecedented opportunity for the country to vigorously defend and efficiently advance its interests. Prospects of the Kyrgyz-OSCE partnership, therefore, will become even more pertinent in the light of sweeping global security issues like climate change, resilient pandemics, devastating wars, terrorist threats, and cybersecurity. That means the Kyrgyz Republic should seek to deepen and improve relations with the organization, which enacts a unique platform of communication with the world's developed countries.

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