

CICA: Indivisible Security, Increased Confidence

Over the years of independence, Kazakhstan has sponsored many initiatives and projects aimed at strengthening security, stability and sustainable development at the regional and global levels. The "peacekeeping portfolio" of our country starts, inter alia, with the proposal of Elbasy¹ Nursultan Nazarbayev to convene the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Almost three decades have passed since that moment. Now, once CICA started its practical work, the relevance and potential of this international structure have become evident. In an interview with the Executive Director of the CICA Secretariat, Ambassador Kairat Sarybay, we found out about the current state of the Conference and the development priorities during Kazakhstan's Chairmanship in CICA.

The idea to convene CICA was one of the first international initiatives of the independent Kazakhstan. The forum has existed for almost 20 years: what is CICA today?

Indeed, the institutionalization of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia began 20 years ago – in fact, from its First Summit in 2002. But this First Summit was preceded by a lot of painstaking work that started on October 5, 1992, when the First President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, then a still rising politician of a newly founded post-Soviet nation, proclaimed this idea, standing behind the rostrum of the UN General Assembly for the first time. Almost 30 years have passed since that day.

I remember how at that time Nursultan Nazarbayev shared his thoughts on CICA with the world's leading politicians and how enthusiastic they were about it. Of course, the ideas of creating a security architecture on the Asian continent had been put forward long before that, including by the former Soviet Union. But we must pay tribute to the meticulous approach and consistency of Nursultan Nazarbayev that helped this

¹ Elbasy - Leader of the Nation, the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan

forum to grow from a concept to a fully functioning platform of dialogue with great potential ahead.

One of the unique political qualities of the First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev is the ability to envision the future. Proposing this initiative, he said that the role of Asia would increase – and he was absolutely right. Along with the role of Asia, the role of CICA has also increased.

Initially, in 1992, when the process of the Conference had just kicked off, the initiative was very much welcomed, but at the same time there was a certain degree of scepticism in some countries. The first negotiations on CICA in the '90s were attended by representatives of 12 states. By the way, the negotiation process was personally led by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, then the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.

Today, the Conference unites 27 Member States, including permanent members of the UN Security Council. This is a significant area of responsibility in terms of territory and population. That is to say, CICA today is a recognizable and reputable forum, whose activities arouse keen interest. Moreover, this interest is not only seen in Asia itself, but also beyond its borders.

I have met with many representatives of Europe, Latin America, and other regions and everyone asks – what's next? What will CICA be developed into?

This means CICA has taken its place in the continental and global security architecture.

You noted that the interest in CICA is growing; does it mean that we can expect an increase in the number of its members?

This item is, of course, on the agenda. We are conducting substantive consultations, explaining what instruments a candidate country would be required to join in case of accession.

This includes, first of all, the Almaty Act – de-facto the charter of the Conference, clearly stipulating the principles of CICA, as well as the Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures – a unique document, by the way. For the first time in the history of international diplomacy, Asian

countries were able to develop joint approaches on how to cooperate to build confidence.

The principle is very simple. First, you need to interact, communicate in order to establish confidence. Confidence, in turn, is the main prerequisite and foundation for establishing full-fledged cooperation. And then, this close and mutually beneficial cooperation will ensure a high level of security, which is an essential condition for further sustainable development.

CICA operates on this very principle – from simple to complex. That is why, we start with some basic, elementary steps, but which create the basis for trust. This approach appeals to many countries, and enabled CICA to gather at one table including the countries with disagreements.

The Conference became for them a multilateral platform for dialogue, which they needed to clear up their position, discuss the current situation, find solutions, and lay the foundation of trust, which is not always easy in a bilateral format.

Therefore, yes, interest in CICA is growing. It would be premature to name any specific countries that may join the Conference as full members in the near future, because consultations are still underway. But I can say that clearly these would be the Asian countries that already have an observer status in CICA and may well move to a new level.

There are other countries that are showing interest in our forum, so the ranks of observers may increase as well. Work on enlargement is a continuous process.

However, I want to emphasize that the task is not to increase the number of participants – the task is to maintain the quality of interaction. While our main quality is the ability to find a consensus.

This is an extremely complex principle of multilateral diplomacy to bring the interests of all to one common denominator. The uniqueness of CICA is in the fact that so far, we have always succeeded to do so. And we will continue to work to ensure that, in the stormy sea of international relations, the Conference remains a "safe haven" where all countries can find a calm and trusting environment for mutual understanding.

In 2020, Kazakhstan assumed the Chairmanship in the Conference. What priorities have been defined by our country for this post?

The responsible body of the Kazakh Chairmanship, which defines the priorities, is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While the CICA Secretariat is working on specific measures to implement these priorities – the other day we signed a corresponding road map.

It identifies several main clusters and, first of all, the institutional development of CICA, which implies the implementation of a number of initiatives.

For example, there is an initiative to establish a Council of Eminent Persons, and we hope that this year we will be able to invite the Member States to approve the Statute on the Council. In addition, the Chairmanship initiated the creation of the CICA Fund to finance joint projects, including, for example, to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic.

There is another initiative that has been practically implemented, but has not yet reached its logical conclusion – creation of a permanent platform for the Forum of Think Tanks within CICA. At its meeting last December, the Senior Officials Committee had already taken this decision and the Secretariat is working to institutionalize this Forum.

There is an intention of the Chair to boost the potential of the CICA Secretariat. Today our Secretariat is an international body with diplomats seconded by Kazakhstan, China, Russia and India. The last year has seriously slowed down our work, due to the pandemic, many events had to be held online or postponed, but we intend to catch up and intensify our activity as much as possible.

The Member States agreed to implement more than 50 actions in 2021 – this is a great deal of work, that is why we are building the capacity of our Secretariat and, in close coordination with the Chairmanship, will implement the tasks set before us.

Another important priority is to revive activity on the confidence-building measures. CICA has an agreement to work on five main clusters included into the Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures – military-political dimension, fight against new threats and challenges, as well as

interaction in the economic, environmental and humanitarian dimensions. There is also an agreement on vesting coordination in some countries for specific confidence-building measures, which would develop conceptual approaches and, after their approval by the entire CICA membership, implement an appropriate action plan.

The task of the Secretariat is to systematize and assist the Member States in this work.

The issue of CICA's institutionalization has been raised by Kazakhstan for several years now; President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev stated that work in the said direction would be prioritized during the Kazakh Chairmanship. Why is the transformation of CICA into a full-fledged organization necessary?

In 2012, Kazakhstan initiated the anniversary meeting of the CICA Ministers of Foreign Affairs, timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of CICA. At that meeting, the First President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, for the first time addressed the Member States with an appeal to create a full-fledged regional organization on the basis of the Conference, and this initiative was very much welcomed. So yes, the question has been raised for a long time.

At the same time, institutionalization is a process. Now, CICA has its own permanent institutions, which develop general approaches, take specific decisions and implement practical measures. Summits are convened regularly; there have already been five of them to date.

The Sixth Summit is planned to be held under the Chairmanship of the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in the anniversary year of 2022. Ministerial Meetings are held systematically. CICA has its own working bodies. There is a functioning Secretariat. Thus, as a result of the consistent evolutionary development, CICA has acquired the main features of a full-fledged organization.

I would not like to foretell events, but I think that by the 30th anniversary of our forum under the Kazakh Chairmanship, the CICA Member States may come to a decision on the next important stage in the development of the Conference.

What would this bring? Of course, having a structure that enables states to interact systematically gives a much greater effect than spontaneous events that do not have any serious conceptual framework. The auspices of an international organization will provide the Member States with a more structured dialogue, a systematic and coordinated approach in the main areas of their activity. This is very important for the efficient performance, because when the approach is "tuned up", we hear a symphony, and when it is not, it can result in a cacophony.

CICA aims to create a synergy of efforts among the countries that stretch from the Pacific to the Mediterranean, from the Urals to the Indian Ocean. This is a huge geography with colossal cultural diversity, various economic and political structures, making it a great skill to find in all this a thread that would connect us all. This is exactly what the CICA states are striving for. And I see that the interest of the Member States is increasing more and more.

Elbasy Nursultan Nazarbayev has repeatedly raised the issue of joining the capacities of CICA and the OSCE, this idea even became an integral part of his initiative called "New Geopolitical Reality: 3D". Is this issue still on the table?

The CICA initiative was born, in fact, from the understanding of the need to fill a certain vacuum in Asia in the field of regional security. In Europe, this niche is occupied by the OSCE.

Nursultan Nazarbayev very consistently proposes and promotes the partnership of these two structures. Besides, from the point of view of Kazakhstan, this is quite logical, given that our country is located in the heart of Eurasia, on two continents at once – in Asia and in Europe.

Elbasy's idea is that the synergy between the OSCE and CICA would create a powerful and wide belt of security and cooperation, covering the vast Eurasian continent, practically most of the Northern Hemisphere. It is not hard to imagine what a huge contribution this would make to strengthening the global security architecture.

It is clear that within the CICA and OSCE there are different approaches to this idea, despite all its attractiveness – this is completely normal. Given the scope of the initiative, it will take time to implement it. But

most importantly, today both structures are interacting, having a dialogue on the issues of mutual interest.

Moreover, the OSCE is not the only partner.

To date, CICA has developed a wide range of partnerships with various international organizations. For example, CICA is an observer at the United Nations. We are invited to important fora of many large UN institutions and agencies, with many of which we have memoranda of cooperation. The Conference has established partnerships with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Economic Cooperation Organisation, League of Arab States; and there is an interest in establishing cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union and Association of South East Asia Nations and other organizations.

There are many international organizations whose areas of interest include, among other things, security and cooperation. What is unique about the Kazakh initiative to convene CICA?

CICA is unique for its broad agenda and its own understanding of security.

Today, I think, everyone would agree that it is impossible to consider security of each specific country separately, just as it is impossible to separately consider security in each specific dimension. So, the uniqueness of CICA is that it promotes the concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative, sustainable, indivisible and equal security.

Today, the world is highly interconnected. What happens in one country inevitably affects the whole world – this concerns both security and cooperation. This understanding, I believe, significantly distinguishes CICA from other regional structures, whose agenda is often focused on narrower areas or has a smaller geographic coverage.

But at the same time, I want to strongly emphasize that CICA does not compete with anyone in any way – this is our main message. CICA is a spacious platform; it has its own niche, and will never pretend to occupy the niche of any other organization or association. We are focused not on rivalry, but on cooperation and development of synergy.

In recent years, the world has experienced serious changes, including new challenges and threats emerging in the field of security. What place does this issue take on the CICA agenda?

"New threats" is a term that came to CICA from international diplomacy, but most of these threats, unfortunately, are as old as the world – organized crime, terrorism, extremism, illegal migration, drug trafficking and so on. These threats were made new in terms of understanding that they have a cross-border nature, and they must be combated by making joint efforts, cooperating in an international format.

Certainly, there are some truly new challenges high on the current agenda, such as ensuring biological safety or combating climate change. Again, even here, the approaches are the same – these problems simply cannot be solved in one specific country. To cope with these challenges effectively, the corresponding measures should be taken in a coordinated manner by all states. The coronavirus has very clearly demonstrated this principle: you cannot cure one country from the virus, while leaving neighbours behind. As long as there is at least one country vulnerable to the virus, the whole world is vulnerable, because sooner or later the virus will begin to spread again.

As I have already said, CICA has a separate cluster devoted to new challenges and threats, where special attention is paid to actions and initiatives that help countries to establish productive cooperation through the exchange of information as well as to develop common understanding and joint approaches to solving problems. This is essential, since with no trust and compatibility, for example, in actions between the special services involved in countering certain threats, with no common methodology and shared vision of the situation, there will be no meaningful international cooperation. It will be the "telephone game" that will nullify the effectiveness of unilateral efforts.

Many challenges and threats are taking on new dimensions in the context of globalization, and international cooperation is necessary in order to eliminate the risks associated with the increased connectivity.

You noted that before CICA, there were attempts to create a structure in Asia that would deal with security issues. But in practice, it was not possible up until now, until the creation of the

Conference. How, in your opinion, did the fact that Kazakhstan was the author of this initiative influenced CICA's success?

The idea of creating a security system for Asia was demanded by life itself. It was important to take that window of opportunity, offer it and consistently promote it.

The First President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, did exactly that. Besides, Kazakhstan turned out to be the country that managed to make people believe in this idea, without considering it a geopolitical trick.

Of course, this was based on a set of factors. First of all, by 1992 Kazakhstan had actually confirmed its commitment to peacebuilding, since the country closed the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site and abandoned the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal – a unique case in the human history. A security initiative from a country that has proven itself as willing to take decisive, non-military action for the sake of security has certainly attracted attention and given confidence.

An equally important factor is the personal charisma and credibility of Nursultan Nazarbayev, built and strengthened thanks to his concrete and successful peacekeeping efforts. At various times, Elbasy was involved in both the Karabakh settlement and the inter-Tajik dialogue. A very recent example is his role in de-escalation and normalization of relations between Russia and Turkey.

Earlier, Nursultan Nazarbayev made efforts to unblock the negotiations of P5+1 with Iran on the nuclear deal, without which it would hardly have been possible to reach agreements in Vienna in 2015 and adopt the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Thus, CICA is an initiative coming from the Leader, who has shown himself to be a true peacemaker, and from the country whose main geopolitical ambition is peacebuilding. As a result, from year to year, confidence in the Conference grew and interaction within its framework developed.

Moreover, it is fair to the highest degree that the heads of the CICA Member States, in the Declaration adopted at the Fifth Summit in Dushanbe, recognized Elbasy as the founder of the Conference.

Summing up, I would like to say that the people of Kazakhstan can be proud of their country, which over the 30 years of its independence has done a lot for peace and cooperation at the international level. Believe me, these are not just words – they are reality. All the while Kazakh citizens have all the reasons to be proud of their diplomats who make their valuable contribution to the achievements and successes of Kazakhstan in general.