

Roundtable Report
Enhancing Asia's Security Dialogue: The Role of CICA
Thursday, June 17, 2010

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Institute for New Democracies (IND) hosted a roundtable on the role of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in enhancing Asia's security dialogue. The two main speakers were Turkish Ambassador Namik Tan and Kazakh Ambassador Erlan Idrissov.

Bulent Aliriza (*Director, Turkey Program, CSIS*) introduced the two speakers and the event was moderated by **Margarita Assenova** (*Executive Director, IND*).

Ambassador Namik Tan focused on Turkey's role in CICA and the results of the Third CICA Summit that took place in Istanbul in early June. At the Summit Turkey took over the CICA chairmanship from Kazakhstan. Ambassador Tan said that the rotating chairmanship will strengthen the CICA initiative and emphasized the importance of cooperation in tackling common security threats in Asia. CICA is special in that it is not an exclusive entity: all countries are equal members and participants in the forum. According to Ambassador Tan Turkey's goal during its chairmanship is to develop strong relations between CICA and other organizations such as NATO, OSCE, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the EU. He explained that CICA is a multilateral forum for political dialogue which is target oriented through its confidence building measures (CBM) ranging from security to environmental protection. The goal of CICA is for countries to join and share their perspectives on issues that affect Asian security. He concluded by saying, "if CICA did not exist, we would have to invent it."

When asked about the advantages of having Turkey as chair of CICA, Ambassador Tan reiterated Ankara's objectives in its foreign policy. He spoke about Turkey's strategic geographic position, nestled between the West and East, its role in international organizations, and its active engagement in the Middle East. Turkey is intent on adding energy and dynamism to CICA.

Kazakh Ambassador Erlan Idrissov stated that this CSIS-IND roundtable marked the first time that CICA was highlighted with such prominence in the United States. He highlighted the origins of CICA: after the fall of the Soviet Union there was a political vacuum in security and political arrangements in the former Soviet bloc and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev sought to create an Asian organization that mirrored the OSCE, in fact a pan-Asian organization where states could address their security concerns. Initially he confronted skepticism from other countries and CICA still faces skepticism in the West. Ambassador Idrissov explained that the twenty CICA members, including China, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Israel, represent over 90 percent of the Asian territory and over half of the world's population. As a result, CICA has significant potential even though it is not yet a fully developed international organization. According to Idrissov, the strength of CICA lies in the fact that there are more areas that unite the member nations than ones that divide them.

Ambassador Idrissov also explained the functions of the CICA working groups of which there are many: environmental, economic, security, transport and transit, unconventional threats, and military security. Different member states of CICA lead the various groups; Iran for example leads the travel and tourism working group while India hosts the transport and transit group. Debates and ideas from the working groups are brought to the CICA floor where countries come together and discuss the confidence building measures (CBM) necessary to promote security in the region.

Ambassador Idrissov spoke about Kazakhstan's work in developing CICA and Turkey's current chairmanship. He explained Kazakhstan's commitment to preserving CICA by hosting two summits and numerous meetings in the past few years, as Astana is committed to inter-state dialogue. CICA has the capacity to enhance dialogue but it is too early for the forum to settle disputes as it is not yet an organization, but rather a process. Turkey takes over CICA as an important nation in the region because of its links with both East and the West, its good relationships with various states, and its strong market economy. These factors created a consensus among member states to pass the chairmanship to Turkey.

With regard to American involvement and interest in CICA, Ambassador Idrissov said that the U.S. and the developed states should dedicate more time and attention to exploring what opportunities CICA can offer as the multi-national initiative can help the U.S. play a more meaningful security role in Asia in the future.

Margarita Assenova concluded the conference by stating that CICA can be instrumental in conflict resolution in Asia because of its ability to engage directly with many diverse political leaders.