

Event Report



TOWARDS A WORLD FREE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS: THE KAZAKH AMBITION

EIAS Roundtable Discussion
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Abstract

The panel discussion "Towards a World Free of Nuclear Weapons: The Kazakh Ambition" moderated by EIAS Senior Associate Serge Stroobants, saw a range of high-profile representatives from Kazakhstan, the European Union and the United Nations come together to discuss the potential for a world free of nuclear weapons. All speakers noted the unpredictable nature of the current world order, while emphasising the importance of multilateralism and active dialogue to ensure global security. The panelists commended the work that Kazakhstan has done in this regard, in the year that marks the 25th anniversary of their accession to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). An overall consensus was also reached on the need to engage and encourage the eight states across the world who are yet to ratify or sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), agreeing that these efforts were of vital urgency to ensure a world free of nuclear weapons.

The discussion was launched with the introductory statement by Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium, H.E. Mrs Aigul Kuspan. She addressed the devastating impact that nuclear tests have had on the environment, economic development and health - regardless of national boundaries. Remarking that the 29 August signaled the International Day Against Nuclear Tests, she called on states who had yet to ratify to the CTBT, to do so. H.E. Mrs Kuspan also discussed the role Kazakhstan has played in strengthening the non-proliferation regime as well as creating nuclear free zones in Central Asia. She made clear that Kazakhstan would continue to support the Comprehensive and Joint Action Plan on the Iranian Nuclear Program and continue to engage globally in anti-nuclear dialogue at all levels.

This sentiment was echoed by the Deputy Chief of Mission from the Kazakhstan Embassy the Kingdom of Belgium, Mr Yerbolat Sembayev. Drawing on Kazakhstan's nuclear history, he suggested that disarmament is possible, and Kazakhstan can be an example to the world on how to lead on this issue. Kazakhstan went from holding the fourth largest arsenal of nuclear weapons in the world, to being nuclear free in 1991. He argued that mutually effective compromise through diplomatic means is the top tool for Kazakhstan to persuade other nations to follow suit. Whether it be through building a new nuclear arms system or enforcing existing legally binding agreements, consistent confidence building dialogue is needed to encourage states to sign treaties and strengthen the NPT and CTBT. In this regard, Mr Sembayev expressed his hope for nuclear free zones - as in Central Asia- to be translated elsewhere, with Kazakhstan as one of the driving forces in the process.

Ms Narcisa Vladulescu, Chairperson of the Council's Working Group on Non-Proliferation (CONOP), praised Kazakhstan's ambition and leadership before moving on to highlight the EU's approach to non-proliferation. A world free of nuclear weapons is in the EU's DNA, with the 2003 'strategy against proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction'. Now the new commission has made clear that the EU will be guardians of multilateralism which, Ms Vladulescu emphasises, is the best way to ensure global security. She also reiterated the EU's commitment to the three pillars of the NPT, nuclear free zones, and an active dialogue with the US and Russia to encourage confidence building transparency and risk reduction. CONOP also places heavy emphasis on the CDBT, to which the EU has contributed over 23 million euros. She expressed hope and encouragement that non-signatories will eventually come on board but acknowledged that there is substantial work to be done. Ms Vladulescu concluded that all stakeholders must improve strategic partnerships for security and create an inclusive atmosphere for development.

The final speaker, Ms Annick Hiensch, the Deputy Head of Office from the United Nations Liaison Office for Peace and Security (UNLOPS), moved the discussion on to the impact of

terrorism on the nuclear debate - with specific reference to the International Convention for Acts of International Terrorism. Ms Hiensch highlighted the real risk of terrorists getting hold of nuclear weapons. She pointed to the shutdown of nuclear facilities in Belgium in 2016 and the seizure of 40kg of uranium by ISIL forces in 2018 as examples of the threat. The expansion of the dark web continues to facilitate the exchange of these materials. While the International Convention for Acts of International Terrorism has 116 members, Ms Hiensch and UNLOPS, want to work with legislative bodies and commission studies to increase understanding of why more states are not adhering to the convention. However, she pointed to Kazakhstan as a leader in this regard. Working heavily with the Security Council they have made strides in dealing with ISIL and Al-Qaeda fighters in the region. Aligning herself with the other members, Ms Hiensch made clear that dialogue, partnerships and multilateralism are the key processes for moving forward.

The discussion concluded with a Questions and Answers session with the audience. Questions on the role of civilians in moving towards a world free of nuclear weapons were put to the panel. Ms Vladulescu emphasised the need for education at all levels of society and that the EU, along with other institutions such as the UN, bear a major responsibility in this project. Ms Hiensch supported this statement and added the crucial role for civil society to play. In particular in terms of the pressure that it can put onto governments and institutions. All panelists agreed that cooperation is what will drive nuclear disarmament at all levels of global society.

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