

Medvedev Heads to Kazakhstan

By [Nikolaus von Twickel](#)

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President Dmitry Medvedev, left, and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill speaking in the Kremlin on Tuesday. Medvedev is slated to go to Kazakhstan on Wednesday. **Dmitry Astakhov**

President Dmitry Medvedev travels to Kazakhstan on Wednesday to attend a crucial summit of Europe's biggest security organization.

The two-day summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, in the Kazakh capital Astana is the first such meeting in 11 years.

Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev, who serves as the organization's chairman in office, said in a statement on the OSCE web site that he hoped [the summit](#) would strengthen the OSCE and consolidate trust among participants.

The 56-member organization includes all European and former Soviet states as well as the United States and Canada.

It will also be the first get-together of international leaders since the disclosure of secret U.S.

diplomatic cables by the WikiLeaks whistle-blowing web site.

The U.S. delegation is led by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who arrived in Astana on Tuesday, The Associated Press reported. Clinton has said she will make a particular effort to connect with foreign officials on her trip, which also takes her to Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Bahrain.

Critics have called the OSCE dead politically after it failed to prevent recent conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus, and the Kremlin has balked at what it calls the organization's political bias.

Then-President Vladimir Putin famously denounced it in 2007 as "a vulgar instrument designed to promote the foreign policy interests of one or a group of countries."

Much of Moscow's criticism arose after Ukraine's Orange Revolution, which started after election observers, including from the OSCE, said a November 2004 presidential election was rigged.

OSCE monitors refused to observe Russia's 2007 State Duma elections and the presidential election of 2008 after complaining over restrictions by the Central Election Commission.

Yet Sergei Prikhodko, Medvedev's top foreign policy adviser, said Moscow wants a stronger OSCE, including in nonsecurity spheres.

"The protection of the rule of law, human rights and basic freedoms are of persistent significance for the OSCE," Prikhodko said in e-mailed comments Monday.

He added that Russia would devote special attention to minority rights protection, the fight against right wing extremism, and strengthening ethnic and religious tolerance.

Prihodko said Medvedev would focus on Russia's earlier demands to reform the organization, including a new attempt to negotiate a successor to the Treaty of Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which Moscow suspended in 2007.

The summit is regarded as a foreign policy success for Kazakhstan, which became the first post-Soviet country to accede to the OSCE's annually rotating chairmanship.

The energy-rich nation has been run by President Nursultan Nazarbayev for two decades, and Human Rights Watch said Tuesday that there was a chilling environment for freedom of expression in the country, Reuters reported.

The summit has been a dominant topic in local media for days. On Monday, Kazakh Channel 7 television reported that an Astana family named their newborn son Sammit in honor of the event.

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