



TWO DECADES OF
THE CICA SECRETARIAT

LOOKING
BACK,
MOVING
FORWARD

UDC
LBC

ISBN

CICA
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This commemorative volume, *Two Decades of the CICA Secretariat*, dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), covers a history of the Secretariat from CICA's early days to present. It brings together congratulatory addresses from current and former CICA Chairmanships, heads of International Organizations, and members of CICA advisory bodies as well as personal reflections from former Executive Directors, diplomats, and staff members who shaped the Secretariat's history. Together, these contributions offer a multifaceted account of two decades of multilateral diplomacy in Asia and a forward-looking vision for CICA's ongoing transformation into a full-fledged international organization.

ISBN

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CICA HEADQUARTERS
INAUGURATION
CEREMONY
2 July 2025, Astana

АЗИЯ КЕҢЕСІ
ШТАБ-ПӘТЕРІНІҢ
АШЫЛУ РӘСІМІ
2025 жылғы 2 шілде, Астана





ЦЕРЕМОНИЯ ОТКРЫТИЯ
ШТАБ-КВАРТИРЫ
СВМДА

на 2 июля 2025 года, Астана



**Ambassador
Kairat Sarybay**
CICA Secretary General



In 2026, the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) marks the 20th anniversary of its establishment. This landmark moment is rooted in the historic decision of the Second CICA Summit of 17 June 2006, when the participating Heads of State or Government decided to establish a dedicated executive body of still young, but promising and increasingly relevant multilateral structure in Asia. As CICA was initiated in 1992, adopted the Declaration on the Principles Guiding Relations between the Member States in 1999, adopted the Almaty Act outlining CICA's goals and objectives in 2002, adopted the Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures outlining CICA's agenda in 2004, this 2006 Summit decision came as a logical next step in CICA's continued strengthening and one of the initial steps in its institutionalization.

The task to establish a Secretariat "to provide follow-up and administrative support for regular meetings" and other CICA activities was first indicated in the 2002 Almaty Act and was fulfilled in 2006 by the adoption of the Statute of the CICA Secretariat. This

historic document outlined a clear mandate for the Secretariat: providing administrative, organizational and technical support to the governing bodies and activities of CICA; ensuring continuity of the CICA process through maintaining institutional memory and archives; and acting as a clearing house for information and documents received from Member States and partner organizations, essentially serving as a unifying focal point for coordination and communication among Member States.

Over the past two decades, the Secretariat has evolved from a modest administrative support unit into a dynamic, multi-functional institutional pillar of the CICA process, reflecting the growing maturity and ambition of our Member States' collective endeavor towards peace and sustainable development through building confidence and cooperation in a gradual, voluntary manner.

Over time, the Secretariat has become a trusted hub facilitating interaction among Member States across a wide spectrum of issues - spanning military

political, economic, environmental, human, and other emerging dimensions of cooperation. In doing so, it has contributed to shaping a uniquely inclusive and non-politicized space for dialogue.

Moreover, the Modalities of Implementation of CICA Confidence Building Measures (adopted by a Ministerial Council decision in December 2024) upgraded the Secretariat's mandate, specifying its expanded functions to provide Member States with expert assistance. This function reminds us of a growing range of duties assigned to the Secretariat, as we see more institutions being established by CICA Member States, including those initiated by Chairmanships, which require administrative, organizational and substantive support.

This commemorative volume – *Two Decades of the CICA Secretariat* – is more than a retrospective look capturing CICA's milestones and achievements. It is a living chronicle of an institution reflecting the spirit of cooperation, confidence-building and multilateral diplomacy that defines CICA.

The pages of this book reflect the Secretariat's journey as seen through multiple lenses. The voices of current and former Chairmanships and partner organizations recognize the Secretariat's role in facilitating CICA's institutional development and in supporting the Member States in their implementation of confidence building measures. At the same time, reflections of the Secretariat's former Executive Directors – my distinguished predecessors in my previous capacity as Executive Director, as well as experts, scholars and former staff of the Secretariat, many of whom are now high-level policy makers, provide invaluable insight into the day-to-day work that has sustained and strengthened the organization. After all, behind every meeting, initiative, and document lies the

dedication of bright individuals - diplomats, experts, and staff members – whose commitment has transformed vision into practice, yet whose contributions, often unseen, form the very fabric of the Secretariat's institutional memory and resilience.

It should also be noted that the contributions to this volume reflect the individual perspectives and experiences of their respective authors presented in their personal capacity. Taken together, they offer a diverse and multifaceted account of the evolution of the Secretariat and the broader CICA process.

As we reflect on the past twenty years, we are at a critical juncture in CICA's history. The organization continues the gradual and comprehensive process of its transformation, adapting to the evolving geopolitical landscape of Asia whose role in global affairs continues to grow and addressing increasingly complex challenges. This reminds us of another traditional function of the Secretariat: fulfilling particular tasks assigned by the CICA governing bodies, such as the one outlined in the Astana Statement for CICA Transformation (adopted by the Sixth CICA Summit in 2022): “to submit to the Member States, through the Chairmanship, proposals for amendments to the relevant CICA documents” and, in a broader context, to follow up this historic decision of the CICA Heads of State or Government.

Thus, the Secretariat remains an integral part of these joint efforts championed by consecutive Chairmanships, serving as the custodian of continuity and institutional memory of the CICA process.

Looking ahead, the task before us is both clear and demanding. Asia's diversity, dynamism, and strategic significance call for sustained efforts to build confidence, strengthen multilateralism, and enhance cooperative mechanisms even in the most challenging geopolitical environments. The Secretariat stands ready to play its role



in this process supporting the Chairmanship and Member States, fostering partnerships, and ensuring that CICA remains a relevant and effective platform for dialogue.

This book is, therefore, both a tribute and a forward-looking reflection. It honors the contributions of all those who have shaped the Secretariat over the past two decades, while also inviting readers to consider the path ahead. As noted in our outreach to contributors, this moment offers an opportunity not only to assess past achievements, but also to articulate a shared vision for the future of CICA and its Secretariat.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all contributors to this publication – high-level dignitaries

of Member States, partner organizations, former and current colleagues, and members of the broader CICA community, including the Secretariat's task force who has been coordinating the publication of this book. These valuable reflections definitely enrich this volume and ensure that it stands as a meaningful record of our collective journey.

As we turn the page to the next chapter, we do so with confidence that the Secretariat will continue to help advance the CICA process – guided by its founding principles, strengthened by experience, and inspired by the Member States' collective wisdom and aspiration for a peaceful, secure, and cooperative Asia.

PART I

Institutional Archive

Part I. Institutional Archive



Initial premises of the CICA Secretariat in Almaty, 2006-2016



The CICA Secretariat's premises following relocation to Astana, 2016-2021



The Secretariat at the EXPO area in Astana, 2021-2025



The CICA Headquarters, 2025 - present

HISTORY OF THE CICA SECRETARIAT: 20 YEARS OF COMMITMENT TO MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY

Sultan Amirkhanov

Legal Advisor of the CICA Secretariat

On 17 June 2026, the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia marks the 20th anniversary of its establishment.

The CICA history reflects the gradual institutional development of a political initiative into a sustainable international mechanism. The Secretariat was also established in stages, alongside the development of the Conference itself: as its agenda expanded, meetings of the Member States became more regular and forms of interaction evolved, the objective need arose for a permanent body to ensure continuity, institutional memory, coordination and practical support for the organization's activities. In this context, the Secretariat is an integral part of CICA's evolution.

The origins of the CICA Secretariat are traced back to an earlier stage in the development of the

Conference itself. The initiative to establish CICA was first put forward in 1992 at the United Nations by the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev. At its core was the idea of creating a mechanism for multilateral dialogue in Asia, designed to strengthen confidence building, security and cooperation in a region characterized by significant political, economic and cultural diversity, with the further development of interaction in the broader context of synergy between Asia and Europe.

Turning this initiative into reality required sustained and phased diplomatic efforts. Throughout the 1990s, interested states engaged in consultations, aligned their approaches to the objectives and principles of the future structure, and defined its conceptual framework. The UN platform was also used for these purposes. This often complex and painstaking process was incremental in nature and

reflected the participants' aspiration to create a common platform for interaction tailored to the region's specific characteristics.

The first significant outcome of this stage was the Meeting of CICA Ministers of Foreign Affairs, held in Almaty on 14 September 1999, which adopted the Declaration on the Principles Guiding Relations among the CICA Member States.

The adoption of the Declaration meant that CICA was acquiring not only political substance but also an initial legal framework upon which further interaction among Member States could be built. It already became clear at that stage that, as the Conference evolved and its activities became more systematized, there was a need for a mechanism capable of ensuring continuity, institutional memory, coordination and support for the implementation of the agreements reached.

It is precisely this logic that guided the subsequent development of CICA and its organizational structure.

The next milestone was reached on 4 June 2002, when the First CICA Summit was held in Almaty and the Almaty Act, the organization's founding document, was adopted. While the 1999 Declaration set out a system of principles, the Almaty Act gave the CICA process a political and institutional framework. It defined the Conference's objectives, the rationale for cooperation, and, most importantly, the modalities for its further operation: regular meetings of heads of state or government, foreign ministers, the Senior Officials Committee, special working groups, as well as specialized meetings and potential expert support. From that point on, CICA was clearly perceived not as one-off diplomatic initiative, but as a sustained multilateral process requiring a permanent institutional backbone.

Thus, Section IV of the Almaty Act supported the establishment of the CICA Secretariat: the Member States recognized that a permanent body was necessary to provide follow-up, administrative support for regular meetings and political consultations, and other activities, and the foreign ministers were tasked with finalizing the elaboration of all aspects related to its establishment. This decision signified acknowledgment that a multilateral process requires not only the political will of its participants, but also an institutional framework capable of maintaining a consistent pace of work, including during the intersessional period. In other words, the need to establish the Secretariat emerged as a natural response to the development of CICA itself.

This idea was given legal form at the Second CICA Summit in Almaty on 17 June 2006, when the Statute of the CICA Secretariat was signed. The document stipulated that the Secretariat was established as a permanent CICA body, which exercises its functions in accordance with the Almaty Act, the CICA Rules of Procedure (2004), the Statute itself and the Financial Rules, which constitute its integral part.





The Statute is important not only as a founding instrument, but also as a document that defined the Secretariat's role within the system of CICA bodies. It established the Secretariat as a permanent component ensuring the day-to-day functioning of the Conference, ranging from organizational support for meetings to facilitating information exchange, maintaining archives and ensuring overall coordination of activities. Thus, the Secretariat was originally conceived as a link between decisions taken at the political level and their practical implementation. This framework already reflects the Member States' original intention to make the Secretariat an integral institutional component of CICA.

Moreover, the Statute set out the staffing structure of the Secretariat. It included the Executive Director as the chief executive officer, the Deputy Executive Director, professional (diplomatic) personnel seconded by Member States and general/support personnel employed on a contractual basis. At the same time, it provided for principles characteristic of international institutional practice: high standards of efficiency, competence and integrity, as well as the broadest possible representation of the Member States.

The first Executive Director of the Secretariat was Zhandos Asanov, representing Kazakhstan. His Deputy was Turkish diplomat Kurtulus Aykan. In 2008, they were succeeded respectively by Dulat Bakishev and Korhan Karakoc.



Almaty was initially designated as the seat of the Secretariat. There was a certain symbolism to this decision. In Almaty, CICA adopted its foundational documents – the 1999 Declaration and the 2002 Almaty Act. This city was central to the Forum's early evolution, the creation of its political foundation and the outlining of its initial institutional contours. Consequently, the Secretariat's original seat in Almaty seemed not only practically justified but also historically natural: the administrative body was established in the very place where the political core of the Conference had been formed.

The Headquarters occupied two floors in a separate wing of the building of the Representative Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan in Almaty, on Aiteke Bi Street.

Shortly afterwards, in December 2006, its Financial Regulations were adopted, supplementing the previously approved Financial Rules, with the Staff Regulations of the Secretariat being approved in 2009.

An important step was to formalize the Secretariat's legal status in the host country. Like any permanent international executive body, it required

not only an internal founding document but also an agreement defining the terms of its location, its legal capacity and the conduct of its day-to-day operations. This possibility was explicitly provided for in Article 5 of the Statute of the Secretariat. In implementation of this provision, the Host Country Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the CICA Secretariat regarding the Terms and Conditions of the Secretariat's Location in the Territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan was signed in Astana on 26 June 2007.

The Host Country Agreement became the document that provided the Secretariat with the legal stability necessary for its operation in the host country. It set out the Secretariat's legal capacity, the inviolability of its premises, archives and official correspondence, tax and customs exemptions, as well as the host country's obligation to provide conditions no less favourable than those accorded to diplomatic missions operating in Kazakhstan. In a broader sense, this document meant that the Secretariat was acquiring the features of a mechanism with its own legal framework.

In 2008, the Protocol Amending the Statute of the Secretariat was adopted, under which it could be based not only in Almaty but also in Astana. The amendment was prompted by the relocation of Kazakhstan's capital to Astana in 1997, the growing presence of diplomatic missions and representative offices of international organization in this city, as well as the need to create more effective conditions for the Secretariat's operation.

In 2010, at the Third CICA Summit in Istanbul, the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the CICA Secretariat, its Personnel and Representatives of Members was adopted. Its significance lay in the

effort to extend the necessary legal status beyond the Secretariat's relations with the host country to a broader international context. However, this aspect of the institutional consolidation remains incomplete: the Convention has not yet entered into force due to an insufficient number of ratifications, although its adoption in itself demonstrated the Member States' commitment to providing the Secretariat and its personnel with a more comprehensive international legal status.

During the Turkish Chairmanship (2010-2014), the Secretariat was headed by Cinar Aldemir, with Kazakh diplomat Kanat Tumysh serving as his Deputy.

In the summer of 2014, the Chinese Chairmanship appointed Mr. Gong Jianwei as Executive Director, and under his supervision, the Secretariat began its relocation from Almaty to Astana. In September 2014, the Secretariat's leadership, including the new Deputy Executive Director Anel Bakytbekkyzy (Kazakhstan), and the professional personnel relocated to Astana, where they were temporarily based at 32/1 Aliya Moldagulova Street (now the Foreign Policy Research Institute under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan). Accordingly, in 2014-2016, the Secretariat operated in both Astana and Almaty.

In August 2016, the host country and the Chinese Chairmanship paved the way for the Secretariat's definitive relocation to Astana. The CICA Secretariat found a new home in a historic building at 26 Azerbaijan Mambetov Street. In October of the same year, an inauguration ceremony was held, attended by Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov and CICA senior officials. At the time, Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister noted that "Astana's cool climate will be amply compensated by the warm hospitality in the capital's offices". Ambassador Gong Jianwei, in turn,

suggested that “in the coming years, the Secretariat’s responsibilities and staff will grow and we will have to move again”.

The Chinese diplomat’s prediction did, in fact, come true, and, as history has proven, more than once. Nevertheless, the Headquarters of the Conference on the “right bank” of Kazakhstan’s capital also operated under Tajikistan’s Chairmanship in 2018-2020, when it was headed by Ambassador Khabibullo Mirzozoda.



In September 2020, by decision of the CICA Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Kazakhstan’s representative Kairat Sarybay was appointed Executive Director. The post of Deputy Executive Director had earlier been assumed by Chinese diplomat Ms. Chi Fang.

In August 2021, the Secretariat had the opportunity to move to a new office at the EXPO International Exhibition Centre, developed on the basis of the EXPO 2017 international exhibition infrastructure, in one of the capital’s most modern urban districts. The Secretariat’s new premises were located in a state-of-the-art building that met high security requirements and the latest technological standards.

In addition to improving everyday working conditions, the new premises also visually reinforced the Secretariat’s growing role and contribution, as it was increasingly viewed not simply as a supporting element but as a body destined to play a significant role in CICA’s development.





The particular significance of this entire evolution was revealed in the Astana Statement on CICA Transformation, adopted at the Sixth Summit on 13 October 2022. The Statement launched a structured, incremental and consensus-based transformation of CICA into a full-fledged regional international organization. One of the first steps in the transformation process was the establishment of the post of Secretary General in lieu of the Executive Director of the Secretariat. Such a step was significant not only in terms of terminology. It reflected a shift in institutional scale: the previous model focused on the administrative management of the Secretariat, while

the new one was geared towards the broader logic of an international organization, within which the Secretary General acts not only as the chief administrative officer but also as a figure of a relevant political nature, ensuring the organization's representation, coordination of its activities and implementation of decisions of the Member States. By decision of the same Summit, Kairat Sarybay was appointed CICA Secretary General for a four-year term.

Following up on this decision, on 14 December 2022, the Senior Officials Committee adopted decisions to rename the position of Deputy Executive Director as Deputy Secretary General, as well as to align the entire staff matrix of the Secretariat accordingly. In October 2023, Ms. Chi Fang was succeeded as Deputy Secretary General by another representative of China, Ms. Zhang Ling.

It is equally important that the transformation of CICA was designed not only to develop the organization's future statutory framework, but also to reinforce the institutional basis of interaction among Member States. In this sense, the Secretariat played a significant role in the transformation process. The Road Map for CICA Transformation, adopted by the CICA Ministerial Council in 2023, features specific clusters that directly address issues related to the work and development of the Secretariat. In particular, it includes provisions on defining the role and functions of the Secretary General and the Secretariat, improving budgetary mechanisms, developing the human resource management system and further internationalizing the Secretariat. Over the past 20 years, the CICA Headquarters has been staffed by representatives of Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, China, India, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Türkiye.

Since 2024, the CICA Chairmanship has been held by Azerbaijan, which has continued consistent work on implementing the Road Map for Transformation.

As part of the implementation of the second cluster of the Road Map for CICA Transformation, the Ministerial Council, at its December 2024 meeting, adopted the Modalities of Implementation of Confidence Building Measures. This document systematized the existing mechanisms for the implementation of confidence building measures, including coordination in priority areas, the preparation of concept papers and action plans, the regular review of their implementation and the exchange of information among Member States.

The document underscores the important role of the Secretariat, which, in addition to its administrative and coordination functions, provides analytical and expert support to the Member States. The Secretariat is also empowered to develop substantive proposals and suggest activities under the Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures, thereby contributing to a more practical implementation of agreed approaches.

In a broader context, the adoption of the Modalities reflects the gradual development of the Secretariat's functional scope, including its analytical and expert component, as well as its role in facilitating practical interaction among Member States in the implementation of confidence building measures.

In March 2025, the Secretariat's staffing structure was substantially expanded. Due to the significantly increased workload of CICA's executive body, a second Deputy Secretary General position was introduced, to which a representative of Azerbaijan, Farid Damirli, was appointed in April of the same year.

A key milestone in the development of the Secretariat's institutional and legal framework was the adoption, in May 2025, of amendments to the Agreement between the CICA Secretariat and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan regarding the Terms and Conditions of the Secretariat's Location in the Territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Host Country Agreement). These amendments, agreed by all Member States and ratified by the Republic of Kazakhstan, clarified and expanded the legal status of the Secretariat and its personnel. In accordance with the updated provisions, seconded personnel were granted the status of diplomatic agents, while contracted personnel were accorded the status of international civil servants, with a corresponding package of privileges and immunities in line with best international practice.



In a broader sense, these amendments are significant in ensuring the independence of the Secretariat's personnel, including host-country nationals, in the discharge of their duties on behalf of all Member States. They also help improve the effectiveness of its operation in the host country by providing an adequate legal framework for its activities. This also reflects

the consistent policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to create a conducive institutional environment for international organizations and confirms its practical ability to provide conditions in line with best international practice as a host country.

The gradual development of the Secretariat's institutional and infrastructural framework culminated in 2025 with the opening of its fully fledged Headquarters in Astana. The new building, constructed in just one year, was officially inaugurated

on 2 July 2025, the Diplomatic Service Day of the Republic of Kazakhstan, by President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. This is the first time that CICA and its Secretariat have been provided with a separate building designed specifically for its functions. The modern complex, meeting international standards, includes conference facilities as well as the technical and communication infrastructure necessary for the Secretariat's long-term operation and further development in the context of CICA's transformation.









A special place in the new complex was given to national works of art and architectural elements from Member States, embodying the cultural and historical diversity and richness of Asia.



Azerbaijan:
Visitors Room – Decorated And Furnished By The Republic Of Azerbaijan



China:
Solar power modules (DeepBlue, JA Solar company)

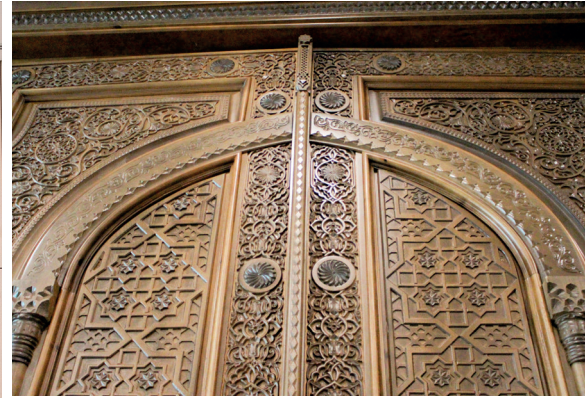
Part I. Institutional Archive



China:
"Strong Confidence, Sincere Feelings" Sculpture



India:
Nataraja. The bronze sculpture of Lord Shiva as the Cosmic Dance



Tajikistan:
Grand Gate with intricate wood carvings



Türkiye
Handcrafted İznik Ceramic Tile Panel
"The Timeless Memory of Istanbul"

Part I. Institutional Archive



Republic of Korea:
The Geumdong Ban-ga Sayusang
(Gilt-bronze Pensive Bodhisattva)



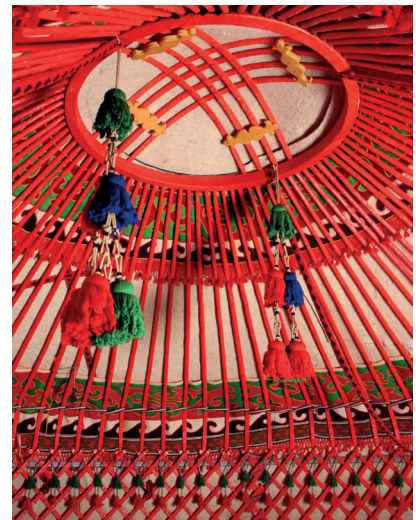
United Arab Emirates:
Sculpture "Power of words"



Thailand:
Replica of the Royal Barge Suphannahong



Kyrgyzstan:
Traditional Kyrgyz Yurt





Uzbekistan:
Hand-carved wooden Gazebo in the Uzbek national style

Here, one can see most clearly that the history of the Secretariat is not simply a succession of documents, relocations and organizational decisions. It is a history of growing institutional substance. At first, the Secretariat's role was to support meetings and maintain documentation. It then expanded to connecting Member States between sessions and facilitating the implementation of confidence building measures. Later, it included representing CICA externally, building international networks and partnerships, as well as strengthening its human and organizational capacity. Today, the Secretariat provides comprehensive support to the Member States in the transformation process.

If one were to characterize this trajectory in general terms, the Secretariat has evolved from an institutional necessity to institutional maturity. Its evolution began with the recognition that sustainable

dialogue requires a permanent institutional backbone; continued with the establishment of a permanent body, the creation of its legal framework and staffing structure; and took spatial form in its successive relocations – from Almaty to Astana, then to the EXPO infrastructure and ultimately to its own Headquarters.

This highlights the Secretariat's distinctive role in the history of the Conference: it not only accompanied the development of CICA, but also became one of the clearest manifestations of its institutional evolution. However, the level reached is not an end point. Amid the ongoing transformation process, the further strengthening of the Secretariat's role, improvement of its functions and regulatory framework remain tasks to be accomplished that will largely determine the future institutional development of CICA.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OF THE CICA SECRETARIAT



Zhandos ASANOV
2006 - 2008
Kazakhstan



Dulat BAKISHEV
2008 - 2010
Kazakhstan



Çınar ALDEMİR
2010 - 2014
Türkiye



Jianwei GONG
2014 - 2018
China



Habibullo MIRZOZODA
2018 - 2020
Tajikistan

PART II

High Level Commendations

MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CICA SECRETARIAT



Yermek Kosherbayev

Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), initiated by Kazakhstan in October 1992 from the high rostrum of the UN General Assembly, has, over more than three decades, developed into a recognized and reputable multilateral mechanism for regional diplomacy in Asia.

In 2026, the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia marks its 20th anniversary, an important milestone in the forum's history.

Over the past two decades, the Secretariat has become a reliable organizational and substantive pillar of CICA: the custodian of institutional memory, the coordinator of interaction among Member States and a consistent advocate for the implementation of agreed commitments.

The work of Member States across the five dimensions of confidence building measures has become increasingly practical in nature, reflecting the pressing challenges of our time. In 2021, the CICA Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures was significantly expanded and updated. Confidence building measures are implemented, among other things, through a substantive and comprehensive agenda of the existing and newly established bodies and mechanisms of CICA: the Youth Council, the Business Council and Business Forum, the Think Tank Forum, the CICA Fund and the Women Council. The first meeting of the Finance Summit is expected in September 2026. Work is underway to operationalize the Council of Eminent Persons. The Secretariat's contribution to the organizational and expert support of these activities is indisputable.

Part II. High Level Commendations

Amid growing turbulence in international relations, CICA is playing an increasingly important role as an inclusive forum for open and equal dialogue that reflects the political diversity of Asia.

CICA is becoming an ever more sought-after platform where middle powers – states with sufficient weight to influence the agenda and not involved in bipolar strategic rivalry – can play a key role in maintaining a balance of interests and strengthening the capacity for reaching agreements. We consistently pursue this mission, viewing CICA as one of the pillars of regional and global stability.

As the state that initiated CICA, Kazakhstan has consistently regarded strengthening the institutional foundations of the Conference as a priority – not merely in words, but through sustained action: financial support, personnel contributions and efforts to ensure an enabling environment for the Secretariat's work.

Today, CICA stands at an important stage in its development: pursuant to the Astana Statement on CICA Transformation of 13 October 2022, the Conference is being transformed into a full-fledged international organization.

At the initiative of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the CICA Headquarters found a permanent home in 2025 – a modern building befitting the scale and aspirations of the organization.

In 2025, Kazakhstan signed and ratified the Protocol on Amendments to the 2007 Host Country Agreement, opening new opportunities to enhance its institutional capacity and internationalize its staff.

Under these circumstances, the Secretariat is naturally playing a progressively more important role as the organizational backbone of the negotiation process and a link between Member States. I am convinced that this is largely due to the high level of professionalism demonstrated by Secretary General K.Sarybay and the staff of the Secretariat.

I am confident that the CICA Secretariat will continue to make a substantial contribution to strengthening trust and promoting cooperation in Asia.

I express my sincere appreciation to all staff members who have devoted their efforts to the establishment and development of the Secretariat. I wish the team continued success and new achievements in the pursuit of peace and security in Asia.



TWO DECADES IN PURSUIT OF PEACE IN ASIA THROUGH DIALOGUE AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING

Jeyhun Bayramov

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Azerbaijan



As we mark the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, I extend my sincere congratulations to the Secretary General and entire staff of the Secretariat. On this solemn occasion of the establishment of the CICA Secretariat, I pay tribute to all former Executive Directors and current Secretary General, as well as all those who served at the Secretariat over past 20 years for their hard work and dedication.

The decision adopted twenty years ago, on 17 June 2006, at the Second Summit Meeting of the Conference, to establish the Secretariat was timely and far-sighted, as it has been proven in practice.

Since its establishment, the Secretariat has clearly demonstrated its practical value acting as the facilitator of cooperation and initiatives across diverse areas and significantly contributing to building confidence in Asia through advancement of mutually beneficial interaction.

With gradual expansion of the scope of CICA's activities and membership, as well as deepening of interaction among the Member States, the importance of the Secretariat has also grown significantly. Today, the Secretariat is not a mere administrative body and a sign of institutional maturity of CICA, but it carries out essential coordinating function to maintain the coherence and synergy across all dimensions of

confidence building, as well as in activities of various CICA advisory bodies.

Proceeding from this understanding, the Azerbaijani CICA Chairmanship for the period of 2024-2026, being held under the theme of “Stronger CICA: connectivity, digitalization and sustainable growth in Asia”, has prioritized the strengthening of the Secretariat as a part of our broader objective of making CICA stronger, more effective and efficient.

A significant milestone in this respect is the inauguration of the new Headquarters of the Secretariat in Astana during the Azerbaijani CICA Chairmanship upon the visionary initiative of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the initiator of the CICA process. Azerbaijan proudly contributed to the operationalization of the new premises with visitor’s room decorated and furnished with examples of Azerbaijan’s rich history and culture.

The Chairmanship also supports the activities of the Secretariat through seconding qualified professional staff members, and the provision of financial contributions.

With full recognition of its important role and essential mandate, the Republic of Azerbaijan as the current CICA Chair considers strong, financially and professionally well-equipped Secretariat as an indispensable partner in implementation of ambitious chairmanship programme.

With active support of the Secretariat, the Chairmanship of the Republic of Azerbaijan has already registered remarkable progress in all key priority areas. Key achievements of Azerbaijan’s Chairmanship include the establishment of the CICA Finance Summit and the CICA Women Council, and operationalization of Partnership Network of Leading Universities (PNLU). Azerbaijan has also successfully

held the 8th annual meeting of CICA Youth Council and Business Council, as well the 13th meeting of CICA Think Tank Forum, and initiated series of events in specific confidence building measures. The Several events held in the margins of international events have served to demonstrating CICA’s relevance in multiple contexts, and increased its visibility. Ahead of Seventh CICA Summit to be held in Azerbaijan later this year, we have a tight schedule of other landmark events to be organized in Azerbaijan and other Member States, with close engagement of the Secretariat.

At a time of growing demand for effective multilateralism in the face of multifaceted challenges, many of which know no border, regional frameworks like CICA, gain ever more relevance as facilitators of mutually respectful dialogue and beneficial cooperation. Interaction among CICA Member States within the five confidence building dimensions remains of vital importance as the core framework for building trust and promoting practical engagement across the CICA area.

For the CICA to deliver on these growing demands and remain a relevant platform for generation of collective responses to common challenges, we need a stronger Secretariat. Therefore, like the broader transformation process of CICA into a full-fledged international organization in line with the summit-level commitment of all CICA Member States reflected in the Astana Statement of 2022, further strengthening the CICA Secretariat as an integral part of the CICA process is not a preference, but a necessity in view of evolving international and regional dynamics.

With this in mind, I wish the Secretariat enduring success in fulfilling its increasingly important mandate under the leadership of CICA Secretary General, Ambassador Kairat Sarybay.

Part II. High Level Commendations



MESSAGE OF CONGRATULATIONS BY H.E. MR. HAKAN FIDAN, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CICA SECRETARIAT



Hakan Fidan

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Türkiye

I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of its establishment.

Since its inception by the timely and valuable initiative of Kazakhstan, CICA has emerged as a unique and inclusive platform fostering dialogue, mutual understanding and confidence-building in Asia. The CICA Secretariat, throughout its institutional evolution has consistently demonstrated dedication to develop a strategic vision in advancing CICA's fundamental objective to create an atmosphere of trust among CICA

Member States. With its 28 Member States, CICA covers almost 90% of Asia and represents more than half of the world's population, which makes CICA a prominent element of multilateral diplomacy in Asia.

From the very beginning, Türkiye has attached particular importance to CICA's mission of enhancing peace, stability and prosperity in Asia through dialogue and confidence-building measures. During her Chairpersonship of CICA between 2010 and 2014, Türkiye has given priority to the creation of a culture of confidence and trust in the CICA geography, taking into account the diverse needs and interests of CICA Member

States. Hosting the Third CICA Summit in İstanbul on 8 June 2010, Turkish Chairpersonship worked with eagerness on all dimensions of CICA, namely; economic, environmental, human, new threats and challenges, and military-political, initiating the implementation of CBMs in military-political dimension and taking further steps towards consolidating the institutional framework of CICA. The İstanbul Summit adopted the declaration titled “Constructing Cooperative Approach to Interaction and Security in Asia”. Furthermore, the “Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Secretariat, its Personnel and Representatives of Members of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia” was adopted in İstanbul as well. In addition, CICA has achieved broader visibility throughout the CICA region during Türkiye’s Chairpersonship.

As a founding member and former chair of CICA and in line with the Asia Anew Initiative, Türkiye continues to further develop her engagement with CICA. The CICA Secretariat has built the necessary organisational structure upon which the CICA Member States can deepen their collaboration to strengthen their ties in all these five dimensions of CICA. In this regard, Türkiye, as coordinator or co-coordinator in the “military-political”, “new challenges and threats” and “economic” dimensions, continues to contribute to CICA’s work through knowledge-sharing and capacity-building activities. As a long-lasting symbol of Türkiye’s enduring commitment to CICA, Türkiye presented a Turkish Tile Mural to the permanent art collection of the new Headquarters of the CICA Secretariat in Astana in 2025. I am confident that this artwork will not only serve as a cultural contribution to the Secretariat, but will also represent the spirit of trust and cooperation among CICA Member States in the years ahead.

At a time marked by geopolitical uncertainties, asymmetric security challenges, exponentially ground-breaking technological developments and profound transformations in international relations, the role of regional multilateral platforms such as CICA has become more relevant than ever. Today, CICA continues to provide an invaluable framework for addressing these common challenges in a vast and diverse geography, contributing to develop harmony and cooperation in Asia. In this setting, Türkiye fully supports the transformation of CICA into a full-fledged international organization and expresses her appreciation to the Azerbaijani Chairpersonship, as well as the previous Kazakh Chairpersonship for their invaluable contributions aiming at the advancement of the core ideas and principles of CICA.

In addition to the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the CICA Secretariat, the year 2026 will be historically remarkable for CICA’s institutional history, as the current Chair of CICA, Azerbaijan, will be hosting the 7th CICA Summit in Baku, on 15 October 2026. I am confident that the Summit will further reinforce CICA’s role as an essential platform for dialogue, confidence-building, regional cooperation and regional ownership in Asia.

On this meaningful occasion, I would also like to express our cordial appreciation to the Secretary General H.E. Ambassador Mr. Kairat Sarybay and the dedicated staff of the Secretariat for their outstanding efforts as well as their unwavering commitment to dialogue and cooperation with all CICA Member States, with a view to transforming visionary ideals into concrete results in the CICA geography.



STATEMENT FROM H.E. WANG YI ON THE OCCASION OF THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CICA SECRETARIAT



Wang Yi

Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China

Dear Mr. Secretary General,

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the CICA Secretariat, I extend my warm congratulations to you personally and to the Secretariat.

As a broadly representative multilateral mechanism for dialogue and cooperation in Asia, CICA has made unique contributions to exploring a security and development path that suits Asia and serves the common interests of all countries. Under your able leadership as a seasoned diplomat, the Secretariat has operated with great efficiency,

playing a key role in advancing the implementation of confidence-building measures (CBMs) and deepening exchanges and mutual trust among member states, providing strong support along the way.

A founding member of CICA, China has served two terms as Chair, acted as coordinator and co-coordinator for CBM dimensions such as finance and agriculture, initiated cooperation mechanisms such as the CICA Think Tank Forum and Finance Summit, actively contributed financially and in kind to the Secretariat, and sent senior diplomats



to work there, showing China's staunch support and commitment to advancing the CICA process.

In the face of a fluid and turbulent world, China stands ready to work with fellow member states to uphold true multilateralism, put into practice the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security and the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and continuously build consensus and synergy, so as to jointly foster a peaceful, safe and secure, prosperous, beautiful and amicable Asian home, and an even closer Asian community with a shared future.

I wish you and the Secretariat continued success in your work and new achievements in taking CICA to even greater heights.

Part II. High Level Commendations



20 YEARS OF THE CICA SECRETARIAT: TWO DECADES IN THE SERVICE OF DIALOGUE, TRUST AND SECURITY IN ASIA



Sirojiddin Muhridin

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Tajikistan

In 2026, the Member States of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) mark a significant milestone – the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the CICA Secretariat. The decision to establish the Secretariat was taken at the Second Summit in Almaty on 17 June 2006, representing an important step in the institutional development of the Conference and in strengthening its role in Asia.

Over the past two decades, the Secretariat has become an indispensable institutional pillar of the

Conference, ensuring continuity, coordination and the consistent development of multilateral interaction among the Member States. Its activity has helped CICA steadily consolidate its position as a pan-Asian platform for dialogue, the exchange of views and the development of coordinated approaches to military-political, economic and environmental issues, as well as in the areas of the human dimension, and new challenges and threats.

On the occasion of this anniversary, we extend our sincere congratulations to the leadership and staff of

the CICA Secretariat, as well as to all Member States that have contributed to enhancing this unique pan-Asian platform.

Over the course of its twenty years of operation, the Secretariat has proven its relevance and effectiveness as the Conference's permanent administrative and coordinating mechanism. The Secretariat's consistent and professional work has contributed to the steady development of CICA and to reinforcing its role as a pan-Asian platform uniting many states.

The Secretariat assists the Member States in preparing for summits and ministerial meetings, supports the working mechanisms, ensures the development of the legal and regulatory framework and promotes the implementation of confidence building measures across all areas of cooperation.

The Republic of Tajikistan recalls its Chairmanship of CICA in 2018-2020 with great fondness. This stage was an important chapter in the history of the Conference. The Fifth CICA Summit, held in Dushanbe in June 2019, confirmed the forum's value as a platform for open and constructive dialogue on key issues of regional and international security. During Tajikistan's Chairmanship, particular emphasis was placed on countering terrorism and extremism, combating illicit drug trafficking, strengthening intercultural dialogue, as well as promoting sustainable development and environmental security, fostering cooperation in tourism and enhancing interaction among countries in this area.

Tajikistan has consistently held that security in Asia is indivisible, and that an effective response to contemporary challenges is only possible based on mutual respect, trust and due consideration of the interests of all Member States. In fulfilling this task, the CICA Secretariat played an important unifying role, ensuring coordination of efforts and maintaining a constructive atmosphere of interaction.

For the people of Tajikistan, who endured a difficult period of civil strife in the early 1990s, the concepts of peace, stability, social harmony and security hold particular value. That is precisely why our country attaches great importance to initiatives aimed at conflict prevention, confidence building and the development of mechanisms for peaceful interaction among states.

It should be noted that these areas remain relevant today, as they are directly linked to the objectives of strengthening stability, trust and mutually beneficial interaction in Asia.

Today, cooperation among CICA Member States covers five key dimensions: military-political, economic, environmental, human, as well as new challenges and threats. Each of these directions is significant in its own right, but together they form a comprehensive approach to enhancing security and cooperation in Asia.

In the military-political dimension, CICA promotes confidence building measures, transparency and

dialogue on security. This area is of particular relevance, given the ongoing instability in certain regions of Asia.

The economic dimension demonstrates growing potential for deepening trade and economic ties, developing transport connectivity, energy cooperation and sustainable development. In today's world, it is becoming especially important to develop reliable logistics and infrastructure chains in Asia.

The environmental dimension is gaining strategic importance in the face of climate change, the degradation of natural resources and the rising number of natural disasters. Member States are increasingly collaborating on climate change adaptation, sustainable water management, environmental protection and environmental risk prevention.

The human dimension helps strengthen intercultural and intercivilizational dialogue, and expand educational, humanitarian and youth exchanges. It is the development of humanitarian ties that creates an atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust among the peoples of Asia.

Cooperation in the field of new challenges and threats remains one of the most relevant areas of CICA's work. Terrorism, extremism, cyber threats, transnational crime and epidemiological risks require collective and coordinated action by all states.

At the same time, CICA faces daunting challenges. The current international situation is marked by rising geopolitical tensions, a crisis of trust, an increased risk of conflict and the fragmentation of international relations. In this context, it is especially important to preserve CICA's unifying nature and its ability to remain an inclusive platform for equal dialogue and the search for mutually acceptable solutions.

In this anniversary year, we extend our sincere best wishes to the leadership and staff of the CICA Secretariat for continued success and new achievements in their important mission. We are confident that the Secretariat's professionalism, dedication and experience will continue to contribute to strengthening trust and cooperation across Asia.

May the CICA Secretariat continue to serve as a constructive platform for effective interaction in Asia.



MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SECRETARIAT OF THE CONFERENCE ON INTERACTION AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES IN ASIA (CICA)

António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United
Nations (UN)



On behalf of the United Nations, I extend my warm congratulations on the 20th anniversary of the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

Over the past two decades, CICA has grown into a distinctive platform that brings together a broad range of countries and partners in Asia and beyond in a spirit of dialogue, constructive engagement, and mutual respect.

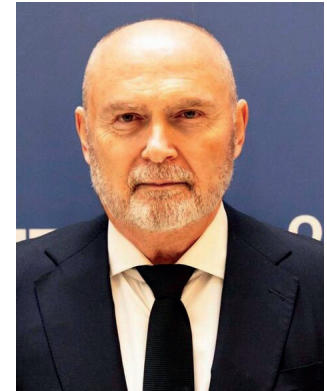
At a time of geopolitical fragmentation and division, this collaborative spirit is more important than ever. CICA's consensus-based approach and support for multilateralism are well-aligned with the priorities of the United Nations, as we work together to advance regional cooperation, preventive diplomacy, and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

The United Nations looks forward to the next chapter of our partnership, and to strengthening peace and security across Asia and around the world.

MESSAGE ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CICA SECRETARIAT

Feridun H. Sinirlioglu

Secretary-General of the Organization for
Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)



I congratulate the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) on its 20th anniversary.

Over the past two decades, the Secretariat has supported the institutional evolution of CICA, ensuring that it remains an essential platform for dialogue among its member States.

CICA and the OSCE share a number of priorities, including a commitment to working on counter-terrorism, illicit trafficking, regional connectivity, and climate-related risks.

Building on nearly five decades of experience, the OSCE has developed a comprehensive operational approach to security. Together with our established presence on the ground, this enables the OSCE to translate dialogue into practical co-operation across the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions of security.

As CICA marks this milestone, I reaffirm the OSCE's readiness to build results-oriented co-operation with CICA, drawing on our respective advantages, in support of security and stability across the OSCE region. I wish the CICA Secretariat every success in its future endeavours.

Ahmed Aboul Gheit
Secretary-General of the League
of Arab States (LAS)



Dear Mr. Secretary General!

I'm very pleased to extend my warmest congratulations on the 20th anniversary of establishing the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia. We applaud your organization's role in promoting dialogue and peaceful coexistence among its member states for two decades.

I would like to express my great pride in the close cooperation between the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States and your esteemed Conference that includes eight Arab countries. Our joint work aims to advance dialogue and promote peace, security and stability in Asia and the entire world.

Please accept assurance of my highest consideration.

*Yours faithfully,
Ahmed Aboul Gheit*



Asad Majeed Khan

Secretary-General of the Economic
Cooperation Organization (ECO)

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the Economic Cooperation Organization and on my own behalf, I am honored to extend my warmest congratulations on the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

The 20th Anniversary of CICA Secretariat represents two decades of meaningful work in a region that has never needed dialogue and trust more than it does today. Over the past two decades, the CICA Secretariat has played a vital role in advancing dialogue, fostering mutual trust, and strengthening cooperation across Asia region of immense diversity and strategic importance.

Over the years, CICA has evolved into a significant platform for promoting dialogue, trust, and cooperation advancing from a security-focused dialogue forum into a multi-dimensional platform that integrates security, economic development, and sustainability, with a stronger emphasis on practical cooperation and institutional capacity. Its expanding agenda and growing institutional maturity reflect the collective commitment of its Member States to advancing peace, stability, and development in the region.

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and CICA share a complementary vision, recognizing that sustainable economic development contributes to stability and prosperity across the

region. Operating across an overlapping geography, our member states encounter common challenges that are best addressed through enhanced regional connectivity, trade, and economic cooperation.

We particularly note with appreciation the full overlap of ECO membership within CICA, which provides a strong basis for synergy and cooperation. This unique convergence underscores our shared vision and common development priorities, where economic progress and confidence building measures remain closely interconnected.

ECO highly values the constructive and regular interactions between our two organizations. Our engagement through participation in each other's activities and platforms has contributed to

strengthening mutual understanding and advancing areas of common interest. We remain keen to continuing this coordination in a flexible and pragmatic manner, avoiding duplication while maximizing complementarities.

Once again, on this milestone occasion, I wish the CICA Secretariat, its leadership, and all its member states every success. I also wish to reaffirm our readiness to further deepen our cooperation and to support CICA in its mission. I am confident that the Secretariat will continue to build upon its successes and make meaningful contributions to regional and global peace.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

TO THE LEADERSHIP AND OFFICIALS OF THE SECRETARIAT OF THE CONFERENCE ON INTERACTION AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES IN ASIA



Nurlan Yermekbayev

Secretary-General of the Shanghai
Cooperation Organization (SCO)

On behalf of the multinational staff of the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and on my own behalf, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the leadership and officials of the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of its establishment.

The CICA Secretariat plays an important role in ensuring coordination among Member States across the broad spectrum of its multifaceted agenda. Over the past two decades, the Secretariat has brought together many nationals from Member States who, through their expertise, have achieved notable professional accomplishments.

The SCO and CICA share similar goals, principles and objectives. Both organizations are committed to the equal and full observance of the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and other universally recognized norms and principles of international law. They consistently uphold the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of states, equality, mutual benefit and non-interference in internal affairs.

A solid foundation for cooperation was established through the Memorandum of Understanding signed in Shanghai on 20 May 2014. Over the years, a truly trusting and businesslike atmosphere of cooperation has developed between our structures, as evidenced by the successful implementation of joint initiatives,

regular contacts at the level of leadership and officials, as well as mutual participation in events and meetings.

At various stages of my professional career, I had the opportunity to work directly on issues related to the activities of CICA and to participate in its establishment and incremental development. Therefore, it is particularly gratifying to observe how, alongside the evolution of CICA itself, its Secretariat has also grown stronger, actively contributing to the development of the institutional framework, the implementation of practical initiatives and the expansion of the CICA agenda. I had another opportunity to witness this during my visit to the new, well-equipped CICA Headquarters in Astana in March 2026.

It is symbolic that the current anniversary of the CICA Secretariat coincides with an important milestone in the development of the SCO, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. I am confident that the experience of cooperation and mutual support accumulated over the years will continue to serve as a solid foundation for enhancing coordination, deepening practical synergy and developing effective responses to contemporary challenges and threats.

I wish the CICA Secretariat and its multinational team continued success, dynamic development and new achievements.

CONGRATULATORY ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CICA SECRETARIAT



Bakytzhan Sagintayev
Chairman of the EEC Board

On behalf of the Eurasian Economic Commission and on my own behalf, I would like to extend my congratulations to the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the CICA Secretariat.

Over the past two decades, CICA has undergone significant development and today rightfully occupies a special place within the system of multilateral cooperation in Asia. Established as a platform relevant for building confidence and mutual understanding among states, the Conference has steadily strengthened its role as a credible international mechanism promoting political dialogue, economic cooperation and interstate partnership.

The consistent efforts of CICA to foster an atmosphere of trust, good-neighbourliness and mutual respect for the interests of the states of the region deserve special recognition. Today, the Conference makes a substantial contribution to ensuring stability, advancing constructive cooperation and promoting the principles of multilateralism on the international stage.

The Eurasian Economic Commission highly values the established relations with CICA. The Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2022 created a solid foundation for the development of meaningful interaction between our organizations. In a relatively short period of time, we have succeeded in establishing a stable working dialogue and identifying promising areas for practical cooperation.

Among the priority areas of our joint work are trade, industrial cooperation, transport and logistics, digital transformation, the agro-industrial sector, finance and innovation. Particular importance is attached to the development of modern technologies, the strengthening of transport connectivity, the creation of sustainable supply chains and the expansion of contacts among the business communities of our states.

CICA and the Eurasian Economic Union share common approaches to developing open and mutually beneficial cooperation, strengthening integration ties and expanding interregional dialogue. Interaction between the EEC and CICA contributes to enhanced economic connectivity, increased mutual trade and additional opportunities for the sustainable development of the states of the region.

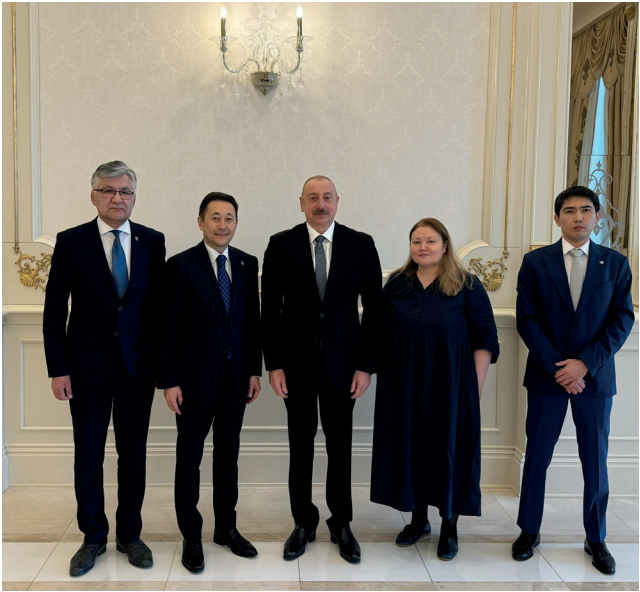
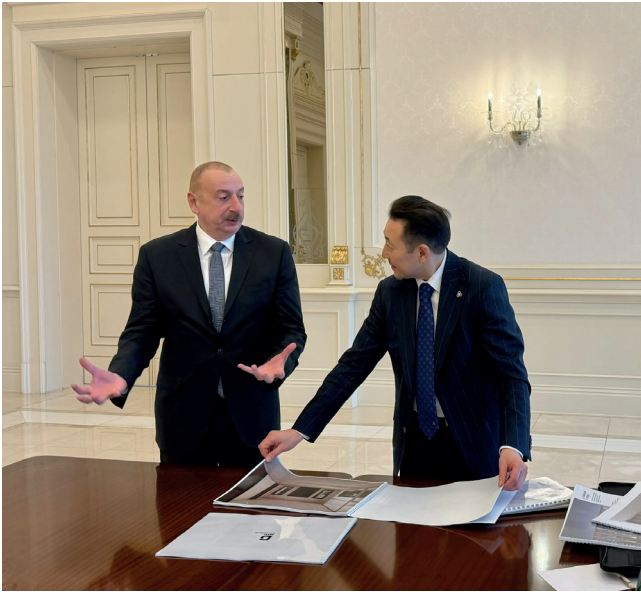
CICA brings together states that account for a significant share of the global economy, international trade and the world's population. This creates

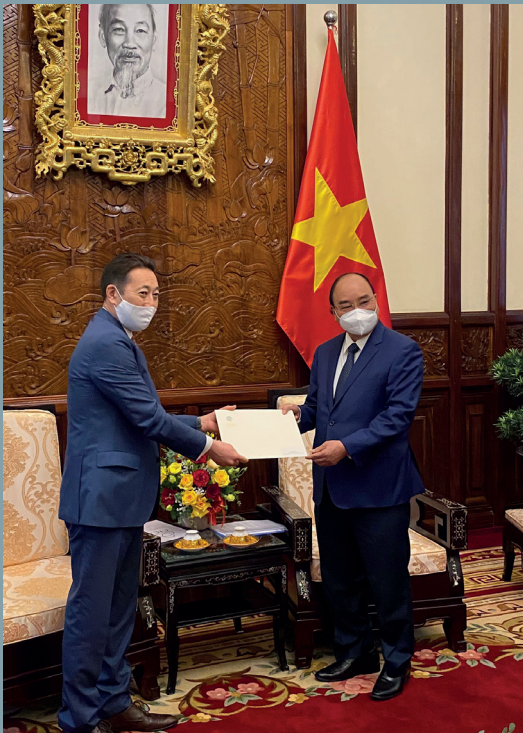
broad opportunities for strengthening mutual trust, expanding cooperation and implementing joint initiatives that serve the interests of sustainable development and the well-being of the peoples of the region.

I am confident that CICA will continue to play an important role in advancing international dialogue and strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation in Asia.

I wish the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia continued success in implementing its initiatives and further development, as well as peace, prosperity and well-being to all CICA Member States.

Part II. High Level Commendations





















PART III

The Leadership Legacy

«FIRSTBORN» – ТҰҢҒЫШБАЙ



Zhandos Asanov
First Executive Director
(2006-2008)

On 17 June 2006, following the Second Summit of the Heads of State or Government of the Member States of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the CICA Secretariat was established. Thus, for the first time in history, the headquarters of an international organization commenced operations in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Initially, the Secretariat was located in Almaty.

Work on the establishment of the CICA coordinating body began to intensify in the second half of 2005, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, headed at the time by Minister Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, leading this creative undertaking.

One of the challenges encountered was the lack of a clear understanding of the legal framework

applicable to the establishment of the international structure in question. The only basis available was the written approval of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, supporting the proposal of the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the establishment of the CICA Secretariat. For example, in my capacity as Acting Executive Director of the Secretariat, I had to consult with relevant state authorities of Kazakhstan regarding the applicability of national public procurement legislation to the CICA Secretariat's activities.

On the eve of the Second Summit, extensive technical preparations were also undertaken, including the preparation of the future headquarters building, its signage and other institutional attributes. Numerous meetings were held with expert delegations

from Azerbaijan, Russia, Türkiye, India, Pakistan, Iran and other countries, during which the provisions of the draft Statute of the CICA Secretariat were elaborated. Following the adoption of the Statute at the Second Summit, a Host Country Agreement between the CICA Secretariat and the Government of Kazakhstan was concluded in 2007.

I warmly recall the first generation of colleagues representing Member States in the Secretariat: A. Pandey (India), K. Aykan (Türkiye), Farmanullah Khan (Pakistan), A. Dymshits (Russia), M. Ashjazadeh (Iran), as well as Kazakh diplomats V. Temirbayev and A. Shabarbayeva.

From the very first days of its existence, one of the Secretariat's principal areas of activity has been the strengthening of confidence building measures across Asia. The CICA Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures, which has already undergone several updates, has played and continues to play an important role in deepening mutual understanding and easing problematic issues among states.

The idea of convening CICA, initiated by Kazakhstan in 1992, has travelled a long and constructive path in its evolution toward the creation of a pan-Asian security architecture. Based on the work within CICA, considerable expert capacity has

been accumulated in the five dimensions of confidence building measures: military-political, new challenges and threats, economic, environmental, and human.

CICA's activities have helped to unite the aspirations of the diverse regions of the vast Asian continent toward creating conditions for secure, sustainable and balanced development for all states. Thanks to the efforts of CICA and other regional associations, the long-term foundations of pan-Asian security continue to take shape.

The CICA Secretariat, currently headed by Kairat Sarybay, an outstanding diplomat and statesman, is successfully implementing the Road Map for CICA Transformation and carrying out extensive planned activities.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleagues at the CICA Secretariat, now located in Astana, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the CICA Headquarters, and to wish them good health and continued success in their work.

*Yours sincerely,
Zhandos Asanov, First Executive Director of the CICA
Secretariat*



MY TIME AT THE HELM OF THE CICA SECRETARIAT: MANAGING DIVERSITY AND BUILDING TRUST

Dulat Bakishev
Executive Director
(2008-2010)



I have the honor to express my sincerest congratulations on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the CICA Secretariat. Over the past two decades, the Secretariat has played a pivotal role in the implementation of CBMs and strengthening understanding, friendship, good neighborliness, security and stability across Asia.

The establishment of the Secretariat in Almaty in 2006 has provided an indispensable platform for fostering confidence and security in our vast, dynamic and evolving region. The dedication and hard work of the Secretariat's professional and technical personnel have been instrumental in transforming CICA into a cornerstone of multilateral diplomacy in the continent. I highly appreciate and commend the commitment of the Republic of Kazakhstan as the host country in supporting the Secretariat and fostering the spirit of dialogue among all CICA Member States.

As a Kazakh diplomat, I have been involved in the CICA process from the beginning of my diplomatic career. Issues related to the development of CICA were always high on the agenda of every institution I have served, and I took part in many CICA meetings and events prior to joining the Secretariat.

A memorable moment was when CICA held SWG and SOC meetings in Seoul in June 2008 at the initiative of the Government of the Republic of Korea. This was the second time a Member State other than Kazakhstan hosted SWG and SOC meetings. It happened right before my departure from the Republic of Korea upon completing my first tenure as the Head of the Kazakh Mission. I was requested by Astana to serve as the Chair of the SOC meeting. At the time, I was not aware about Astana's intention to appoint me as Executive Director of CICA Secretariat to Almaty, Kazakhstan. I recall that we had very fruitful meetings on

Korean soil thanks to the generosity and warm hospitality of the host country. Following the meetings, I was appointed by CICA foreign ministers as the new Head of the CICA Secretariat at the Third Ministerial Meeting in Almaty on 25 August 2008.

I could say I “hit the ground running”. On my first day of service, I signed MOUs with IOM and ECO. These were the first two formal institutional level relations of the CICA Secretariat. We had agreed to cooperate through the exchange of information, best practices, and experience in the areas of mutual interest. During my tenure, I also visited the UN Headquarters in New York, where I had meetings with several high-level UN officials. It was during this visit that the first contact with the Alliance of Civilizations was established, when I met with its Secretary General. The CICA Secretariat was represented at the UN General Assembly for the first time during the 63rd session in September 2008. It was my distinct honor to have represented CICA.

I would like to avail myself of this great opportunity to formally express my deepest gratitude to several CICA stakeholders.

First, I am grateful to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan for giving me the opportunity to serve as the Executive Director of the CICA Secretariat.

I must emphasize the role and valuable support provided to the Secretariat by all Member States. I express my deepest gratitude to Mr. Korhan Karakoç (Türkiye), who served as the Deputy Executive Director, for his hard work and dedication. My sincere thanks go to all my colleagues at the Secretariat, who served the CICA Member States during my tenure as the Head of the Secretariat from 2008 to 2010, for their invaluable support and assistance provided to me. I would like to specifically mention the valuable intellectual contribution of Mr. Avinash Pandey (India), who was a member of the professional personnel back then.

Reflecting on that period, I am immensely proud of how CICA has matured into an effective forum of multilateral diplomacy over the past two decades. The dedication of the Secretariat was crucial to my work, and I still carry with me the positive experience of our joint work and collaboration.

I am very grateful to the Republic of Korea, where I spent most of my career working as a Kazakh diplomat, for being an exemplary CICA Member State.

As a former Head of the CICA Secretariat, and as a university professor now, I have been closely observing how CICA is evolving nowadays. I am confident that the CICA Member States and the Chairmanship of Azerbaijan, together with the CICA Secretariat under the leadership of the Secretary General Ambassador Kairat Sarybay, will be able to transform the forum into a full-fledged and efficient international regional organization. CICA is a unique platform, and it has an important role to play in ever-changing geopolitics of the region and the world.

I wish the CICA Secretariat continued success in its noble mission.



Çinar Aldemir
Executive Director
(2010-2014)



We are celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the establishment of the CICA Secretariat on 17 June 2006, on which the first Executive Director also assumed his duties.

CICA was initiated by H.E. Nursultan Nazarbayev, the founding President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in 1992, as a complex and comprehensive system of mutual relations of States of the Asian continent that provides a framework to make collective and coordinated decisions on cooperation in the areas of security, economy, humanitarianism, and others. My country, Türkiye, has supported the CICA process from its very inception and has contributed to its development.

At the Third CICA Summit on 8 June 2010 in Istanbul, the CICA Chairmanship was passed to the Republic of Türkiye from the founding country

of Kazakhstan. On that date, I took over as the Executive Director of the CICA Secretariat. In fact, Kazakhstan was a familiar country to me, since I had served there before as the Turkish Ambassador between 1999 and 2004.

During my four-year tenure as the Executive Director, the CICA process witnessed a number of important developments: the four dimensions of CICA, namely new challenges and threats, economic, environmental, and human dimensions, witnessed considerable progress. The initiation of confidence building measures in the military-political dimension also took place. In addition to regular meetings of CICA, informal meetings of CICA foreign ministers were held every two years at the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York. The Memorandum of Understanding between

CICA and Shanghai Cooperation Organization was signed in Shanghai.

In that period, CICA blossomed into a very important forum for dialogue and seeking mutually acceptable measures for resolving problems and conflicts in the region. The objectives and activities of CICA have received wide acceptance from the world community.

During my tenure, I received full support from the Turkish Chair, host country Kazakhstan, and all

CICA countries. I was also very lucky for inheriting a fully functional and efficient Secretariat.

At the Fourth CICA Summit in Shanghai in May 2014, China assumed the Chairmanship of CICA, and my Chinese successor, Ambassador Gong Jianwei, was nominated as the next Executive Director of the CICA Secretariat. Although it was the end of my mission, I never forgot CICA.



Khabibullo Mirzozoda

Executive Director
(2018-2020)



His Excellency Honorable Ambassador Kairat Sarybay- Secretary General of CICA , Distinguished participants, Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, please allow me to express my deep appreciation to the leadership of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia and to the CICA Secretariat for the high honor extended to me to participate in this significant event marking the 20th anniversary of the Secretariat, as well as for the opportunity to address this distinguished audience and share my recollections of serving as Executive Director of the Secretariat in 2018–2020.

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia rightfully occupies a special and important place in the evolving architecture of regional security and cooperation. As a unique multilateral platform, CICA consistently upholds the principles of equal dialogue, consensus, and mutual trust, steadily contributing to the strengthening of stability, prevention of conflicts, and expansion of mutually beneficial cooperation across the Asian continent.

A particularly notable chapter in the recent history of CICA was the chairmanship of the Republic of

Tajikistan in 2018–2020, which was marked by the progressive development of the Conference and the further strengthening of its international standing. The culmination of this period was the Fifth CICA Summit, held on 15 June 2019 in Dushanbe, which took place at a high representative level with the participation of heads of more than 15 states and governments, as well as leaders of prominent international organizations.

Under the wise and forward-looking leadership of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Leader of the Nation, His Excellency Emomali Rahmon, extensive and comprehensive organizational work was carried out, ensuring an impeccable level of preparation for the Summit, proper security, and the creation of favorable conditions for substantive and constructive dialogue.

In his keynote address, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan highlighted the key challenges and threats of our time, including terrorism, extremism, illicit drug trafficking, and cybercrime, and put forward a number of important initiatives aimed at strengthening collective security and deepening practical cooperation within CICA.

During the discussions, key issues on the regional and global agenda, strengthening confidence-building measures, and advancing multilateral cooperation were comprehensively addressed. The outcome documents of the Summit reaffirmed the unwavering commitment of member states to the goals of strengthening dialogue, mutual understanding, and joint development.

During Tajikistan's chairmanship, the activities of CICA's statutory bodies and working mechanisms were significantly intensified. Meetings, expert consultations, and thematic events covering a wide range of areas of cooperation were held on a regular basis.

Particular attention was paid to the practical implementation of confidence-building measures in the military-political, economic, environmental, and humanitarian dimensions, which contributed to further strengthening the institutional resilience of the Conference and enhancing the effectiveness of its work.

The Republic of Tajikistan consistently promoted a strategic vision of Asia as a space of peace, stability, mutual respect, and sustainable development, while emphasizing the importance of consolidating the efforts of member states in addressing contemporary transnational challenges and threats.

For me personally, my service at the CICA Secretariat became a crucial stage in my professional development and my first international diplomatic assignment. Work within a multilateral framework requires a high degree of responsibility, sound judgment, and a continuous search for a balance of interests aimed at achieving mutually acceptable solutions.

At times, the negotiation process was marked by heightened sensitivity and extended beyond the formal agenda. Yet it is precisely under such circumstances that the true essence of diplomacy is revealed—as the art of dialogue, patience, and consensus-building.



I would also like to particularly highlight the process of agreeing on the Secretariat's Plan of Action in 2019, when, through sustained and substantive consultations between member states, a consensus-based decision was reached, paving the way for its practical implementation.

My work at the Secretariat also became an important school of diplomatic service, providing valuable experience in participating in international forums, bilateral and multilateral consultations, as well as delivering statements at high-level international platforms.

In conclusion, allow me to emphasize that my service as Executive Director of the CICA Secretariat was not only a significant milestone in my professional career, but also a great honor to contribute personally to strengthening trust, dialogue, and cooperation among member states.

Allow me to conclude with the following words: trust does not emerge on its own — it is built through consistent dialogue, shared responsibility, and firm political will.

*Thank you for your attention.
Respectfully, Khabibullo Mirzozoda*

PART IV

Academic & Strategic Outlook

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CICA SECRETARIAT: CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES IN THE HUMAN DIMENSION

Aida Balayeva

Deputy Prime Minister –
Minister of Culture and Information of the
Republic of Kazakhstan



Two decades ago, the office of the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) made its home in Kazakhstan's capital. This marked the launch of a new format for the largest international forum uniting Asian nations.

Over the years, the organization has evolved from a declarative union into an effective instrument of economic and humanitarian cooperation.

The idea of CICA constituted a key stage in shaping a reliable security framework on the continent, based on the principles of equality, mutual respect and trust.

Promoting confidence building measures, discussing all security dimensions, addressing transport connectivity, promoting sustainable economic growth

and implementing academic and humanitarian projects in Asia. All these areas of work, and many more, form part of the broad portfolio of CICA. Established more than 30 years ago, CICA currently brings together 28 Member States and 10 observers, contributing to the harmonization of relations among countries across the vast and highly diverse Asian region.

A strong foundation for CICA was established with the adoption of the 1999 Declaration on the Principles and the 2002 Almaty Act.

2006 marked a turning point in the development of CICA following the establishment of its Secretariat. It was this body that enabled the transition from a political initiative to a steadily operating multilateral mechanism. As a well-known quote puts it: "Trust

is not only a category of security. It is a category of culture, mindset and human interaction”.

As CICA evolves into a full-fledged international organization, the importance of its Secretariat increases manifold. It acts not only as an implementing body, but also as a visionary, shaping institutional reforms and defining their substance and strategic direction. Therefore, the CICA Secretariat is not merely a coordinating link, but a driving force propelling the entire organization forward.

Over the course of two decades, the CICA Secretariat has demonstrated impressive results. It has strengthened CICA's institutional structure, ensured continuity in decision-making and developed a comprehensive Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures covering 18 key areas of cooperation. It has actively developed partnerships with global and regional organizations, including the United Nations system. Today, the Secretariat is driving CICA's transformation into a full-fledged international organization, guiding and advancing its reform process. Kazakhstan firmly supports enhancing the human dimension of CICA, viewing culture as an integral element in building trust among peoples and states.

In the context of CICA's development, the role of the Youth Council is of particular importance, as it acts as a catalyst for new ideas and approaches.

As young people make up the overwhelming majority of Asia's population in percentage terms (statistically, more than 60 per cent of the region's population is aged between 18 and 35), their role in shaping the region's future is undeniable. Active cooperation within the Youth Council is already cultivating future leaders and experts, developing educational and exchange programmes, as well as

fostering initiatives in key areas such as digitalization, climate and sustainable development through the use of modern digital platforms.

The value of this approach lies in building trust over the long term: “By investing in youth, we invest in sustainable trust for decades to come”. Young professionals are actively engaged in setting CICA's agenda by contributing to the development of global thinking and international cooperation.

One of the most notable examples of such engagement is the growing volunteer movement, which serves as an effective instrument for building trust and strengthening solidarity and humanitarian ties among Member States.

A landmark event was the first Rally of Volunteer Movement Leaders held under the auspices of the CICA Youth Council in October 2024 and initiated by President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. The meeting provided a platform for bringing together volunteers from across Asia, exchanging experiences and developing joint projects.

The alignment of this initiative with the United Nations' declaration of 2026 as the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development highlights the importance of volunteering in achieving CICA's objectives. In 2026, Kazakhstan plans to hold a series of events focused on the institutional development of volunteer cooperation and the implementation of joint projects that contribute to the region's sustainable development.

Creative industries, including culture, media, design and digital technologies, represent a particularly valuable resource for strengthening cooperation within CICA. Not only do they stimulate the economy, but they also promote mutual understanding among people, creating a platform for the exchange of ideas.



Young people, as the main source of creativity, play a key role in this regard. Integrating creative industries into CICA's agenda will help implement international projects, support startups and form professional communities, turning cooperation into a dynamic ecosystem.

CICA's prospects are inextricably linked to strengthening its institutional foundation, expanding practical mechanisms of cooperation, enhancing its humanitarian and youth aspects, and developing a strong culture of trust.

Today, as we mark the 20th anniversary of the Secretariat, we reflect on the journey behind us and open a new chapter. CICA is not just a platform for interstate dialogue; it is a space for trust among peoples, the importance of which will only grow in the face of global challenges. Kazakhstan, as the initiator of CICA and the host country of its Secretariat, will continue to actively contribute to strengthening its institutional capacity, developing



humanitarian cooperation and supporting youth initiatives.

On this momentous anniversary, I extend my deep appreciation to the leadership and staff of the Secretariat for their high level of professionalism and invaluable contribution to the development of multilateral cooperation.

I wish the organization continued success in achieving its strategic objectives, launching new, fruitful initiatives and delivering significant accomplishments. May the next stage of CICA's development mark a period of new opportunities, sound decisions and greater unity among the peoples of Asia.

CICA YOUTH COUNCIL: ADVANCING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR A COOPERATIVE ASIA

Farid Gayibov

Minister of Youth and Sport
of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Chair of the CICA Youth
Council



On behalf of the Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan, I extend my sincere congratulations to the Secretary General, Ambassador Kairat Sarybay and the entire staff of the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), on the occasion of the Secretariat's 20th anniversary.

As global dynamics evolve and Asia plays a significant role in international affairs, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) is steadily enhancing its cooperation mechanism. In this context, the establishment of the Youth Council has been a particularly forward-looking step, contributing to the structural development of the Conference. In such a vast and diverse region

as Asia, youth have opportunities to build bridges across cultures, disciplines, languages and political diversity. The Youth Council, by providing a formal platform, enables young leaders to actively contribute to confidence-building and security cooperation that underpin CICA's mission. It thus contributes to the empowerment of youth as active participants in advancing peace and stability in Asia.

Azerbaijan has been actively involved in the work of the Youth Council since its inception. I have been privileged to witness how these interactions have positively impacted and broadened perspectives of young participants.

In line with Azerbaijan's CICA Chairmanship Vision Paper for 2024–2026 and the motto "Stronger

CICA: Connectivity, Digitalization and Sustainable Growth in Asia,” the Azerbaijani Chairmanship places particular importance on strengthening cooperation with the Youth Council.

In this regard, the 8th Youth Council, held under the Azerbaijani chairmanship, provided an excellent opportunity to engage with diverse youth communities across the CICA region. I would like to express my appreciation to the CICA Secretariat for its valuable support in successfully organizing this Youth Council meeting. Through the exchange of perspectives, joint initiatives and a shared sense of purpose, the session enabled young participants to contribute to shaping a more cooperative and inclusive future for Asia.

It is also noteworthy that Azerbaijan will have the honor of hosting the 9th CICA Youth Council meeting in 2026 and we firmly believe that this meeting will also make a valuable contribution to further strengthening youth cooperation, fostering dialogue and advancing CICA’s goals in the region.

Azerbaijan remains a proud and committed member of the CICA family. We look forward to further deepening our cooperation with member states to promote meaningful youth engagement and advance a more connected, prosperous and peaceful Asia. In this regard, the dedication and valuable support of the CICA Secretariat remain essential to strengthening the role of the Youth Council and advancing our shared vision for the region.

On this meaningful occasion, I convey my heartfelt congratulations to the Secretary General and the entire Secretariat, whose efforts continue to bring the nations and youth of Asia closer together in a spirit of trust, dialogue and mutual understanding.



20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CICA SECRETARIAT: BUILDING TRUST

Bahar Muradova

Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women
and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Chair of the CICA Women Council



The 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) stands as a significant milestone in Conference's developmental journey and a testament to the cooperative environment it has fostered and the institutional achievements it has secured.

These two decades have demonstrated that sustained institutional activity and support are indispensable for building trust within the CICA region.

In this context, the CICA Secretariat plays a vital role in deepening dialogue, expanding cooperation, and strengthening multilateral relations among Member States. It also provides continuous support

to Azerbaijani Chairmanship of CICA, which operates with these objectives. With a view to contribute to the sustainability of this invaluable support, Azerbaijan in its turn has also identified the strengthening of the CICA Secretariat as one of its priority areas, contributing to.

Unity of Political Will and Institutional Development

During our Chairmanship, a number of initiatives have been put forward that have brought new momentum to the Conference's development. At the core of these initiatives lies the strong political will demonstrated by H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The importance

attached by the head of state to international cooperation, dialogue, and inclusive development model forms the foundation of the initiatives advanced under Azerbaijani Chairmanship and plays a crucial role in securing support from other Member States.

This political will is followed by concrete actions, with systematic implementation of initiatives aimed at strengthening CICA's institutional framework during Azerbaijan's tenure.

The initiative to establish Women Council: From Idea to Reality

From the earliest days of Azerbaijan's Chairmanship, the idea of establishing a new platform within CICA - the Women's Council - was proposed. The aim was to support, on institutional level, the strengthening of women's roles in peace, security, and development processes within CICA. This initiative was grounded in strategic vision and innovative approach.

Its realization however required multifaceted diplomatic efforts. While the Secretariat provided consistent support within its mandate, Azerbaijan actively promoted the initiative both within CICA and across international platforms, working to engage partners and broaden support among Member States.

In this process, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the country's diplomatic missions abroad demonstrated exceptional activity, conducting intensive dialogue with Member States and playing a key role in building support for the proposal.

Shared Support and Collective Achievement

The successful implementation of this initiative owes much to the constructive positions and support demonstrated by CICA Member States. The ideas

and proposals voiced by representatives of various countries contributed to refining the initiative and shaping it in an inclusive and balanced manner.

Each Member State's contribution played an essential role in transforming this initiative into a shared success. In this context, the establishment of the CICA Women Council should be regarded as a joint achievement of the CICA family, realized under Azerbaijan's principled and effective Chairmanship.

The Baku Phase and New Opportunities

Shortly after the establishment of the CICA Women Council, the conference on "Amplifying women's voices across CICA for sustainable growth" along with the Council inaugural meeting held in Baku on April 14, 2026, marked a significant milestone in turning this initiative into reality.

During the preparatory phase of the Baku Conference, ideas expressed and decisions adopted across both international and national platforms opened new opportunities for strengthening women's roles. In this regard, the side event on "Women's empowerment across CICA countries" held in New York on the sidelines of the 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, played a special role in building support for the Baku Conference.

Panel discussions at the Conference, with the high-level representatives from CICA Member States, once again demonstrated the significant opportunities for expanding cooperation for women's participation and leadership in the region. The ideas and proposals presented are expected to contribute meaningfully to future joint activities within CICA. Likewise, discussions taken place and recommendations adopted at the session of the Women Council showcased Member States' readiness to engage in fruitful cooperation in this area.

The Baku Conference reaffirmed that a cooperation model based on mutual respect and dialogue is a fundamental pillar of stability and development in the CICA region. The newly established Women Council offers broad prospects as a much-needed platform to promote concrete, result-oriented actions aimed at realizing women's potential in advancing peace, cooperation, and sustainable development across Asia.

Looking Ahead: Sustainable Development

Today, the CICA Secretariat continues to play a key role in the Conference's development. The challenges ahead — security concerns, socio-economic inequalities, climate change, and humanitarian issues — require more coordinated and inclusive approaches, as well as closer cooperation across all dimensions of CICA.

Women's active participation in these processes is not only a social necessity but also a critical component of strategic development.

The 20th anniversary of the CICA Secretariat is not merely a reflection on the past but also a message for the future grounded in the principles of cooperation, trust, and shared responsibility.

We believe that the established political and institutional foundation, the initiatives undertaken, and the joint programmes will ensure continuity in CICA's future development, further strengthening its position as an effective, dynamic, and inclusive international platform.

The establishment and operationalization of the CICA Women Council once again demonstrate that when strong political will, effective diplomacy, and a shared purpose come together, even the most ambitious initiatives can evolve into sustainable successes within a systematic framework. In this context, the CICA Secretariat remains an essential and irreplaceable partner in coordinating interaction among Member States and ensuring synergy across this platform's expanding areas of activity.



THE SECRETARIAT OF THE CONFERENCE ON INTERACTION AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES IN ASIA MARKS THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS ESTABLISHMENT: CONTINUITY, TRUST AND PRACTICAL COOPERATION WITHIN THE BUSINESS COUNCIL

Kanat Sharlapayev

Chairman of the Presidium – Chairman of the Board of
the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of
Kazakhstan “Atameken



On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), on behalf of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Kazakhstan “Atameken” (the Chamber) and as a member of the Board of the CICA Business Council, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to the Secretary General, the staff of the Secretariat and all those who have contributed to its work over the past two decades.

During these 20 years, the Secretariat has played a crucial role in ensuring continuity, coordination and confidence within CICA. Its contribution has been instrumental in supporting dialogue among Member States and translating shared commitments into practical cooperation.

Today, this role remains particularly important as CICA’s activities continue to expand into new areas.

As part of the Kazakh CICA Chairmanship, the Chamber had the honour of chairing the Business Council for four years and contributing to the

advancement of practical cooperation among Member States.

On 24-25 June 2021, the Fourth Plenary Session of the Business Council and the Sixth Business Forum were held on the topic “Prospects of Business in the Context of the Pandemic” (online format). We discussed such issues as the current security situation in the CICA area, economic development in the post-pandemic period, enhancement of international cooperation in combating traditional and new challenges and threats, implementation of confidence building measures in different areas of CICA activities.

The events also focused on food production and cooperation in the deep processing of grain, oilseeds, meat and dairy products, as well as cooperation in the production of construction materials.

More than 100 companies (116 business representatives) and government agencies from 19 CICA Member States regulating the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) took part in the gatherings.

At the Business Forum, investment opportunities were presented by Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, China, India, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Palestine, Russia and Uzbekistan.

On 27 June 2022, the Fifth Plenary Session of the Business Council and the Seventh Business Forum were held under the theme “Digitalization of Business Processes in SMEs and Food Security.” The event brought together more than 150 participants from Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Palestine, Qatar, Russia and Türkiye, including 91 representatives of the business community. Participants also included representatives of government bodies responsible for the implementation of SME-related economic policies

in Member States, heads of diplomatic missions, experts from international organizations, and professionals specializing in the digitalization of business processes in tourism, agriculture, transport and logistics.

As a result, proposals were considered and accepted to deepen cooperation among the CICA Member States: promote the use of efficient and sustainable technologies, invest in infrastructure: roads, warehouses and processing equipment, so that manufacturers can effectively deliver their products to consumers, facilitate financing for small and medium producers.

On 13 November 2023, the Sixth Plenary Session of the Business Council and the Eighth Business Forum were held under the theme “Food Security, Renewable Energy and Green Finance.” The event brought together approximately 140 participants (51 businesses) from 25 CICA Member States, as well as representatives of international financial institutions, such as the Eurasian Development Bank, as well as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), and the Islamic Organization for Food Security.

Within the framework of these events, proposals were discussed and adopted on the development of mechanisms and strategies aimed at ensuring stable access of CICA Member States to appropriate resources in the context of food security, to enhance the exchange of experience and transfer of advanced technologies in the field of agriculture and the food industry to increase the economic efficiency of production and strengthen food security in the region, as well as ensure a gradual transition to renewable energy sources.

Investment projects of CICA Member States aimed at strengthening food security and promoting

the use of renewable energy in agriculture, water management, tourism, mining and other sectors were also presented.

On 20 November 2024, the Seventh Plenary Session of the Business Council and the Ninth Business Forum were held, focusing on the themes: “Leveraging artificial intelligence for SME development”, “Enhancing cross-border trade through e-commerce advancements”, “Navigating new challenges in logistics and infrastructure”, “Empowering women in small and medium enterprises across the CICA region”, “Prioritizing sustainable development in SMEs”. The event brought together 152 participants (98 businesses) from 15 CICA Member States, as well as representatives of the Asian Development Bank.

During these events, comprehensive proposals were developed and adopted to promote the introduction of artificial intelligence in SMEs with a view to enhancing their efficiency and competitiveness; expand cross-border trade through digital platforms and e-commerce by simplifying procedures and integrating markets; address pressing logistics challenges and modernize infrastructure through smart transportation solutions; empower women entrepreneurs through access to finance, training and mentoring; and advance the sustainable development of SMEs, including through energy efficiency measures and the transition to renewable energy sources. Participants also agreed to strengthen the exchange of experience and the transfer of advanced technologies, support digital and green transformation programmes, and present investment projects in sectors such as agriculture, water, tourism, mining, information technology and other industries.

Close cooperation with the Secretariat was further demonstrated during the Eighth Plenary Session of the CICA Business Council and the Tenth

Business Forum, held in May 2025 in Baku under the themes: “SME development, focusing on digitalization, green economy and cross-border trade”, “Enhancing industrial cooperation, facilitating SME participation in global value chains”, “Regional economic collaboration”. The event was attended by over 200 participants from 11 CICA Member States.

These events brought together institutions, business representatives and experts from across the region to discuss SME development, market access, investment opportunities and other practical areas of cooperation.

Kazakhstan also actively contributed to the development of the electronic publication “SME Landscape in Asia: Interactive Guidebook”, presented at the Business Forum. The guidebook covers key economic indicators, trade and investment climates, business environments and legal frameworks in eight CICA Member States (Azerbaijan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Thailand and Türkiye).

An important component of this work has been the organization of thematic webinars on SME development, including access to investment capital, e-commerce, green economy practices and other relevant issues. These efforts have helped maintain intersessional continuity and expand practical exchange among Member States.

We look forward to the next session of the CICA Business Council, to be chaired by the Small and Medium Business Development Agency (KOBİA) of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and trust that it will be held in a constructive and productive spirit.

We highly appreciate the support of the CICA Secretariat and are confident that it will play an important role in the successful organization of this session and in further strengthening regional cooperation.



THE SECRETARIAT AT 20: CONTINUITY, TRUST AND PRACTICAL COOPERATION IN A TRANSFORMING CICA

Orkhan Mammadov

Chair of the Board of the Small and Medium Business
Development Agency (KOBİA)
Chair of the CICA Business Council Board



As the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of its Secretariat, on behalf of the Small and Medium Business Development Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan (KOBİA), I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to the Secretary General, staff of the Secretariat, and to all those who have contributed to its work over the past two decades.

Over the last 20 years, the Secretariat has played an essential role in ensuring continuity, coordination and trust within CICA. Its contribution has been instrumental in supporting dialogue among Member States and in translating shared commitments into practical cooperation.

Today, this role remains especially important as CICA's activities continue to grow and expand into new areas.

During Azerbaijan's Chairmanship of CICA, KOBİA has had the honor of chairing the CICA Business Council Board and contributing to the practical economic dimension of cooperation among Member States.

Our close cooperation with the Secretariat was clearly reflected during the Eighth Plenary Session of the CICA Business Council and the Tenth CICA Business Forum held in Baku in May 2025. These meetings brought together institutions, business representatives and experts from across the region to discuss SME development, market access,



investment opportunities and other practical areas of cooperation.

An important part of this work has also been the organization of thematic webinars devoted to SME development, including access to investment capital, e-commerce, green economy practices and other emerging issues. These efforts helped maintain continuity between major meetings and broaden practical exchanges among Member States.

We remain hopeful that the next meeting of the CICA Business Council under KOBİA's chairmanship will be held in the same constructive and productive spirit. We highly value the support of the CICA Secretariat and are confident that it will

continue to play an important role in the successful organization of this meeting and in CICA's further development.

On this important occasion, I would like to express appreciation to all current and former members of the Secretariat for their professionalism and dedication, and wish them continued success in further strengthening CICA in the years ahead.

Hafiz Pashayev
Rector of ADA University
Chair of the Coordination Council of the CICA
Partnership Network of Leading Universities (PNLU)



In a time shaped by complex global and regional changes and a gradual erosion of multilateralism, the 20th anniversary of the CICA Secretariat marks an important moment in the development of this regional framework. This anniversary is a chance to look back at how far CICA has come and the progress made. Over the years, CICA has shown that lasting peace, security and stability in Asia depend on dialogue, trust and sustained cooperation.

CICA's experience shows that trust doesn't appear overnight, it has to be built over time. It develops gradually through open communication and active engagement between governments, universities and expert communities. In this process, the Secretariat has played a central role in facilitating dialogue and moving it forward.

Education and science hold a special place in these efforts. Universities are not only centers of knowledge, but also spaces where future leaders learn how to think critically, act responsibly, and engage in a global context. They help shape individuals who are prepared to address shared regional and global challenges with both expertise and integrity.

This vision closely aligns with the mission of ADA University. Established in 2014 by decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, ADA aims to educate highly capable individuals who communicate effectively, collaborate across borders, and uphold strong ethical values and civic responsibility.

We strive to develop a world-class academic environment in Azerbaijan, guided by principle of “müəllim and alim” (“teacher and scholar”). Our goal is to foster innovation and critical thinking, while maintaining academic integrity. With students, faculty and staff from 53 countries, diversity is one of our defining strengths. This international environment creates a dynamic space where learning extends well beyond the classroom.

As the current Chair of the CICA Partnership Network of Leading Universities (PNLU) Coordination Council, we continue to be guided by this vision.

In 2025, we assumed the leadership of the PNLU Coordination Council with a clear objective: to turn the Network into a practical and effective platform for cooperation. During our first meeting with the CICA Secretary General, Ambassador Kairat Sarybay, in January 2025, we discussed ways to strengthen the

PNLU and increase its impact, particularly in supporting academic and scientific exchange across the region. His lecture to ADA students, which emphasized the importance of trust and collaboration in addressing today's challenges, generated strong interest in CICA within our academic community.

Under the theme “Stronger CICA: Connectivity, Digitalization and Sustainable Growth in Asia,” Azerbaijan’s CICA Chairmanship has placed particular emphasis on education and science, providing the strong support for advancing the goals of the PNLU.

It is especially symbolic that the first event following Azerbaijan’s assumption of the Chairmanship was the inaugural meeting of the PNLU Coordination Council, held in February 2025 under the ADA University’s leadership. At that meeting, we made a clear commitment to fully operationalize the Network so it can deliver tangible outcomes across the CICA region.

We are proud that, since then, the PNLU has begun to develop into a more active and collaborative platform, reflecting the shared values and aspirations of CICA. It brings together universities and experts who are committed to academic excellence, diversity and open exchange of ideas.

A key milestone was the first PNLU conference, “The Role of Universities in Green Energy and

Sustainability,” held on 2–3 December 2025 in Baku. The Secretariat played an important role in shaping the thematic focus of the event, ensuring its relevance and alignment with CICA’s broader priorities. The conference gathered more than 50 participants from 21 member countries and focused on practical topics such as energy efficiency, green technologies, and regional cooperation. Importantly, it created new opportunities for partnerships and future joint projects.

The PNLU has already demonstrated strong potential to expand cooperation among academic institutions across Member States. The Secretariat’s support has been essential throughout this process. Its guidance and engagement have helped connect institutions and ensure that the Network continues to move forward effectively and consistently.

As we mark this anniversary, it is clear that the future of CICA will depend on deeper cooperation, stronger institutions and a more connected intellectual community. Education, innovation and ethical leadership will be key in shaping that future.

We look forward to continuing this work together and to further strengthen the role of the PNLU in building trust, understanding and cooperation across the region.



BUILDING ASIA'S SECURITY ARCHITECTURE FROM WITHIN: THE CICA SECRETARIAT AT TWENTY AND CHINA'S INTELLECTUAL CONTRIBUTION



Prof. Chen Dongxiao

President, Shanghai Institutes
for International Studies (SIIS)

Kazakhstan first proposed the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia in 1992. Over the following two decades, it gradually evolved from a regional dialogue forum into a multilateral security cooperation platform with real institutional features. The signing of the CICA Secretariat Agreement in 2006 and the establishment of a permanent Secretariat marked a critical turning point—the shift from an ad hoc conference mechanism to a permanent governance entity. As CICA's only standing executive body, the evolution of the Secretariat's functions and capabilities over the past twenty years has directly shaped the vitality of the CICA mechanism and its influence within the broader international security architecture.

As a founding member and key participant in CICA, China has long and consistently supported the organization's development. In 2014, China proposed and established the CICA Think Tank Forum. Over more than a decade, this track-two platform has provided sustained intellectual support and policy ideas to CICA, creating a distinctive model in which official mechanisms and think tank networks reinforce each other in a productive feedback loop.

I. The Secretariat as CICA's Central Hub

Under the CICA Secretariat Agreement of 2006 and two decades of operational experience, the Secretariat performs at least four distinct “hub” functions.

1. An administrative hub that keeps the machinery running. The Secretariat provides comprehensive administrative, organizational, and technical support for the full range of CICA deliberative and decision-making bodies and their associated activities. This covers the preparation and execution of summits, ministerial meetings, senior officials' committees, and various working group sessions. It forms the institutional foundation for CICA's day-to-day operations. The Secretariat's administrative capacity directly determines how efficiently and effectively CICA's decision-making processes function.

2. An information hub that serves as the main channel for knowledge management. The Secretariat builds and maintains CICA's dedicated database, systematically collecting, organizing, and distributing documents and information submitted by member states and international organizations. This knowledge management function provides the data backbone for member state decision-making and cooperation. It also serves as the central channel through which information flows within CICA, ensuring that member states share a common picture of security threat assessments and progress on confidence-building measures.

3. A coordination hub that drives confidence-building measures forward. The Secretariat leads the implementation of confidence-building measures (CBMs) across five domains—military-political, economic, environmental, new threats and challenges, and humanitarian—coordinating cooperation among member states, lead coordinators, and affiliated mechanisms. Through this function, the Secretariat has turned CICA into a bridge connecting different regional cooperation platforms, facilitating cross-domain and cross-regional collaborative governance.

4. A communications hub that builds organizational legitimacy. The Secretariat is responsible for spreading CICA's core ideas, shaping the organization's public image, and raising its global visibility and influence through official communications and external engagement. This function is critically important for establishing CICA's international legitimacy as Asia's multilateral security cooperation platform.

II. The Secretariat's Central Role in CICA's Development and Transformation

1. Laying solid institutional foundations. The establishment of the Secretariat fundamentally addressed a structural weakness that had long hampered CICA—the absence of a permanent executive body. Before the Secretariat existed, CICA lacked continuous institutional support. Its creation enabled the shift from ad hoc dialogue to regularized cooperation, giving the organization a firm institutional base on which to build.

2. Turning confidence-building measures into reality. CICA's core purpose is to promote Asian peace and stability through CBMs across five domains. As the key implementing body responsible for moving these measures from aspiration to practice, the Secretariat bears the important task of translating member states' political commitments into concrete action plans. Its monitoring, assessment, and coordination functions during CBM implementation have a direct bearing on how effective CICA's security governance actually is.

3. Supporting the transformation to an international organization. In 2021, CICA formally launched its institutional transformation process, evolving from a "forum" to an "international organization." The Secretariat has played an

indispensable supporting role in drafting the Road Map for CICA Transformation, revising the Charter, optimizing organizational structures, and building institutional capacity.

4. Building consensus among member states.

Faced with the considerable diversity of its membership—twenty-eight states spanning different institutional cultures, development stages, and security interests—the Secretariat has worked through inclusive decision-making procedures and the principle of consensus to coordinate member state interests, forge agreement, and preserve CICA's inclusiveness and representativeness. This demonstrates the distinctive value of CICA as a pan-regional cooperation platform.

III. China's Practice and Contributions Through the Think Tank Forum

The CICA Think Tank Forum is the only permanent track-two dialogue platform within the CICA framework. Proposed by China in 2014 and operated under the leadership of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), it was formally institutionalized in 2021. SIIS served as the inaugural Chair from 2021 to 2025.

1. Building and Sustaining the Forum Mechanism

The founding phase, 2014–2020. Following the CICA Shanghai Summit, SIIS launched a series of think tank roundtables, organizing eight consecutive annual sessions. These produced annual reports and Chair's Statements, laying the foundations of a track-two intellectual support system for CICA.

The institutionalization breakthrough, 2021–2025. China led the effort to secure unanimous member state agreement to incorporate the Forum into CICA's formal architecture, establishing its role

as an advisory body for CICA's transformation and decision-making processes. This marked the transition from informal dialogue to a recognized consultative mechanism.

Going international, 2025. The Forum adopted a model of joint multi-country hosting on a rotating basis. The 13th Forum, held in Baku, Azerbaijan in 2025, was the first ever convened outside China, bringing together nearly fifty scholars from sixteen countries—a clear demonstration of the shift from unilateral coordination to genuine multilateral co-ownership.

Building an organizational network. With SIIS as the central node, the Forum has connected think tank institutions from twenty-three member states, forming a stable research and exchange network that constitutes the intellectual infrastructure of CICA's track-two diplomacy.

2. Shaping Ideas and Setting the Agenda

Providing core conceptual content. The Forum has systematically articulated the vision of “common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable” Asian security, secured its incorporation into CICA's official documents, and established it as a guiding principle for CICA's security governance. This process exemplifies how a norm entrepreneur can use an international organization platform to promote the diffusion of new ideas and principles.

Linking development and security. The Forum has advanced the analytical framework that “development is the foundation of security, and security is the condition for development,” pushing CICA's agenda from purely security-focused dialogue toward a comprehensive approach that gives equal weight to economic and social governance. This has materially expanded CICA's functional scope.

Connecting global initiatives. The Forum has worked to align the Global Security Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative with CICA's agenda, providing Asian security governance with Chinese proposals and demonstrating what scholars of international organizations would recognize as an "issue-linkage" strategy in multilateral engagement.

3. Research and Policy Support

Supporting the transformation process. SIIS has conducted dedicated research on the drafting of the Road Map for CICA Transformation and the Charter, organizational restructuring, and capacity-building, putting forward policy recommendations including a phased transformation approach, stronger Secretariat functions, and improved CBM implementation mechanisms—providing intellectual support for CICA's senior-level decision-making.

Cooperative research on priority areas. The Forum has focused on CICA's priority areas—connectivity, non-traditional security, and economic cooperation—producing research outputs with direct policy applicability.

Sustained annual knowledge production. The Forum has produced several Chair's Statements and numerous thematic reports to date, which have become important reference materials for CICA and its member states, establishing a continuous knowledge production mechanism.

4. Strengthening CICA's Social Foundations

Through the Think Tank Forum—and especially through sessions focused on young scholars—the Forum has supported capacity-building for think tanks from smaller member states. By using humanitarian themes to promote understanding and

tolerance across different civilizations, religions, and political systems, the Forum has broadened CICA's societal base. The Forum has also worked to translate think tank recommendations into official CICA agendas: the CICA Secretary-General's consecutive attendance at Forum sessions has institutionalized the feedback loop between track-two and track-one, creating a healthy, closed-loop interaction between the two levels.

In sum, China has been the creator of the CICA Think Tank Forum, the driver of its institutionalization, and its primary intellectual contributor—achieving a transition from nothing to something, from an ad hoc arrangement to a permanent mechanism, and from unilateral coordination to multilateral co-ownership. This practice embodies the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefit; accommodates the interests of small and medium-sized states; and strengthens CICA's inclusiveness and representativeness. It offers a replicable model of "knowledge diplomacy" for emerging powers seeking to participate meaningfully in international organization governance.

IV. Structural Challenges Ahead

1. The coordination difficulties posed by member state diversity. CICA's twenty-eight member states span the full breadth of Asia, encompassing vastly different development stages, political systems, cultural traditions, and security interests. This diversity is a reflection of CICA's inclusiveness, but it also creates significant coordination challenges. Under the consensus-based decision-making rule, reaching agreement on major issues is slow and difficult—a structural constraint on deepening cooperation.

2. The lingering effects of geopolitical conflict spillover. The Ukraine crisis, turmoil in the Middle East, security risks in South and Central Asia, and intensifying great-power competition have sharpened divisions among member states and squeezed the space for regional cooperation. The spillover effects of geopolitical rivalry have weakened CICA's cohesion as a neutral dialogue platform and made it harder to implement confidence-building measures in practice.

3. The dilution of CICA's role amid a crowded regional architecture. Asia hosts multiple overlapping regional multilateral mechanisms—the SCO, ASEAN, the Eurasian Economic Union, SAARC, and APEC, among others—with overlapping functions, insufficient coordination, and dispersed resources. CICA's positioning and comparative advantage within the regional security architecture still need to be sharpened, to avoid the effectiveness losses that come with what scholars call “regime complexity.”

From 2006 to 2026, the CICA Secretariat has grown from nothing into a capable institution, becoming the central pillar of CICA's institutionalization, organizational development, and operational effectiveness, and guiding CICA's evolution from a dialogue forum into a multilateral international organization for security and governance with distinctive Asian characteristics. China, as a steadfast supporter and active builder of CICA, has made irreplaceable contributions to CICA's conceptual innovation, institutional development, practical cooperation, and organizational transformation—contributions channeled primarily through the Think Tank Forum.



Looking ahead, CICA can strengthen its capacities in several directions. It should reinforce the Secretariat's administrative and coordination capabilities and upgrade the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for CBM implementation. It should find ways to improve decision-making efficiency within the consensus framework, potentially by exploring more flexible modalities such as smaller consultative groups on specific issues. It should clarify CICA's differentiated positioning within the regional security architecture to avoid functional overlap with other mechanisms. And it should deepen the integration of track-two diplomacy with track-one mechanisms, giving the Think Tank Forum a fuller role in policy innovation and consensus-building. China will continue to work alongside CICA's member states to support the Secretariat's development, advance CICA's high-quality transformation, and contribute more meaningfully to building a community of shared future for Asia and for humanity as a whole.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT AND ITS ROLE IN THE EVOLUTION OF CICA

Kirill Babaev

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This year, the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) marks its 20th anniversary. Over the years, both the Secretariat and the forum itself have undergone significant development. As the Secretariat has evolved, so too has CICA, emerging as a unique platform for interaction that currently brings together 28 states across the Eurasian continent.

The establishment of the Secretariat in June 2006 marked a key milestone in the institutional development of CICA. The Secretariat assumed responsibility for providing administrative, organizational, technical and informational support for all CICA activities, as well as assisting the chairing

country in the discharge of its functions. Its creation enabled the systematization and smooth functioning of CICA processes, while enhancing coordination of CICA activities and implementation of the tasks set. Kazakhstan was designated as the host country of the Secretariat, and the corresponding Agreement between the Government of Kazakhstan and the Secretariat was signed in June 2007.

Another important milestone in the development of the Secretariat was the adoption and opening for signature of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Secretariat, its Personnel and Representatives of the Member States at the Third Summit of the organization held in Istanbul in June 2010. This step also contributed to strengthening

both the legal capacity and institutional framework of CICA. To date, the Convention has been ratified by 13 Member States, and only one additional ratification is required for its entry into force.

At the Sixth Summit in 2022, Member States decided to launch the transformation of CICA into a full-fledged regional international organization. This process also had an effect on the Secretariat: the status of the Head of the Secretariat was elevated from Executive Director to Secretary General. In 2025, Kazakhstan ratified a protocol granting Secretariat staff, including nationals of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the status of international civil servants, along with the corresponding privileges and immunities in line with United Nations practice. The elevation of the status of CICA Secretariat staff to that of international civil servants will contribute to strengthening the Secretariat's human resources and financial sustainability, ensuring the independent and effective discharge of its mandates in accordance with international standards, and advancing the transformation of CICA into an international organization. Aligning the status of the Secretariat with international standards has thus reinforced the institutional and legal foundations of the organization.

The Secretariat plays a central role as a driving force in the development and transformation of CICA into a full-fledged international organization. It has actively supported Member States' initiatives to expand the organization's mandate, including through the establishment of advisory bodies: Business Council, Youth Council, Think Tank Forum, Council of Eminent Persons, CICA Fund, Partnership Network of Leading Universities. In addition, the Secretariat contributes to the implementation

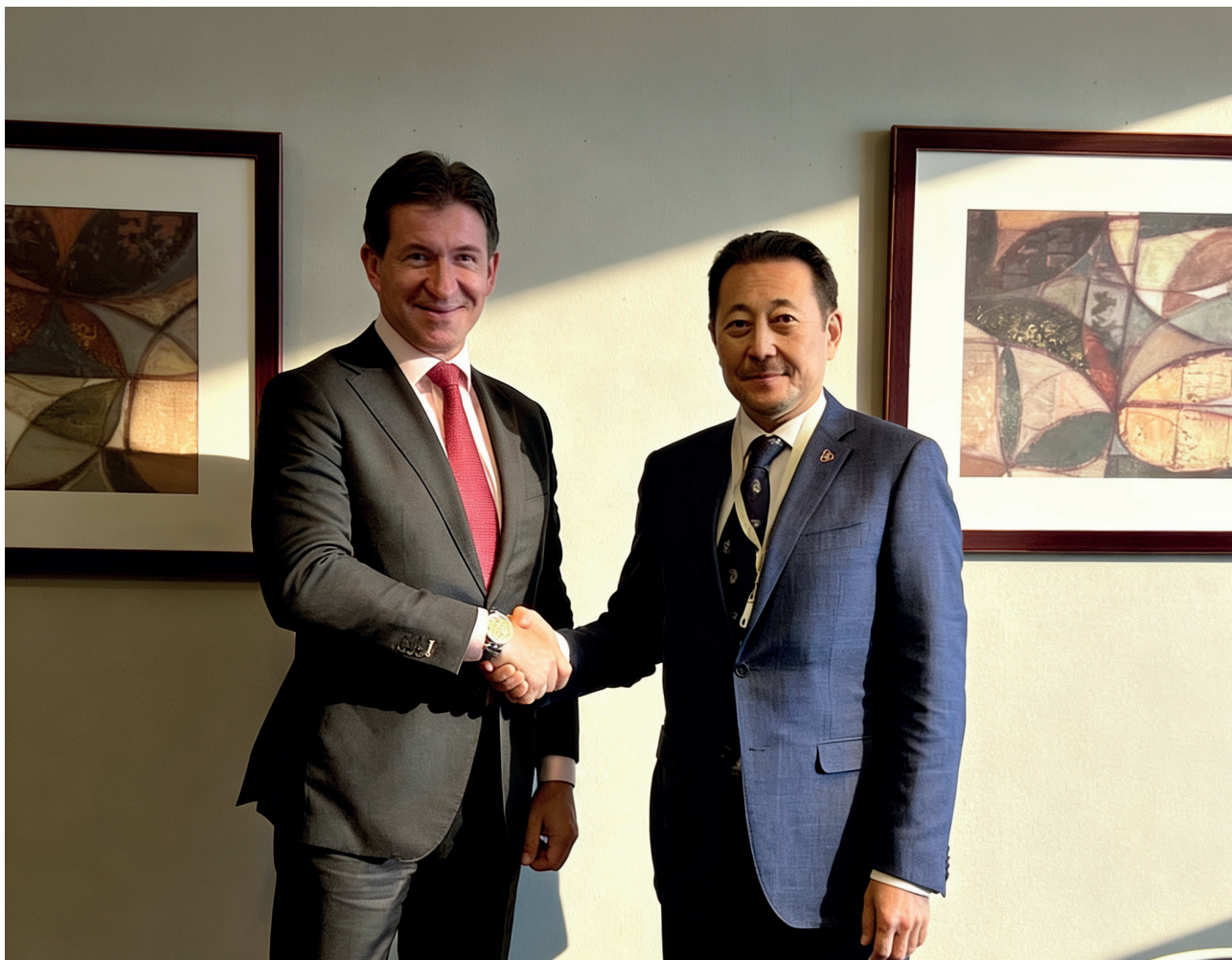
of decisions and agreements and facilitates coordination among Member States.

In recent years, owing to the efforts of the Secretariat and particularly the Secretary General, CICA's external engagement has expanded and its international visibility has grown, thereby strengthening its standing and creating opportunities for effective cooperation and promotion of peace and stability across Eurasia.

As Chairman of the Russian National Center for CICA Studies, which is a member of the Think Tank Forum, I would like to note the high level of professionalism and engagement demonstrated by the Secretariat staff in the Forum's work, as well as their support for intersessional activities among Track II participants with a view to advancing ideas for developing and strengthening cooperation within CICA. The CICA Think Tank Forum is of unconditional value, as it provides an informal and flexible platform for dialogue and exchange of views across the full range of issues on the CICA agenda, thereby contributing to a better understanding of Member States' positions on regional cooperation and facilitating the identification of common ground and mutually acceptable solutions.

The key challenges facing CICA today stem from a range of such destabilizing factors as heightened military and political tensions globally and the deterioration of relations among a number of Eurasian countries; the proliferation of unilateral approaches and the imposition of artificial barriers, including illegitimate sanctions; as well as volatility in global prices for energy, food, fertilizers and commodities.

At the same time, these challenges present opportunities for advancing a more just and inclusive international order and for reforming global



governance. CICA has the potential to become one of the drivers of building a unified Eurasian space in cooperation with other international organizations, in particular the SCO, ASEAN, EAEU and “D-9”. We all have a shared interest in mutually beneficial cooperation, as it can contribute to a new system of global governance, helping to prevent the emergence

of new military blocs and reduce the risk of further conflicts. While much work remains to be done in this regard, the existence of a common strategy and shared directions will certainly facilitate our progress. In this context, the CICA Secretariat will undoubtedly provide great support in advancing these efforts.

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD: CICA'S TRANSFORMATION AND AZERBAIJAN'S CONTRIBUTION



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Introduction

The current international system is experiencing a significant transformation characterized by escalating geopolitical competition, the weakening of multilateral norms, and the growing fragmentation of global governance. Selective enforcement, rival power centers, and the increasing marginalization of significant portions of the Global South pose a growing threat to the post-Cold War order, which was once based on the concepts of international law and institutional cooperation. Building trust between states has become more challenging and important in this context, especially across politically, economically, and culturally diverse regions.

Regional mechanisms have gained new significance in this context. Regional platforms provide a more practical framework for encouraging communication, reducing tensions, and advancing cooperative approaches to common challenges, even though global consensus is still elusive. One of the most extensive attempts to institutionalize such a framework throughout Asia is the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), a continent that is simultaneously becoming a global powerhouse and still has some of the most complicated security dynamics.

The evolution of CICA's Secretariat, which is celebrating its twentieth anniversary, is a reflection

of broader changes in international relations. It is gradually evolving from a primarily dialogue-based platform to a more institutionalized and structured organization that can handle both conventional and unconventional security issues. This crucial stage coincides with Azerbaijan's current chairmanship (2024–2026), which presents an opportunity to influence the course of CICA's transformation.

CICA's Transformation and the Role of the Secretariat

The main idea behind CICA is that security in Asia cannot be achieved through confrontation or bloc-based approaches; it has to be built through dialogue, mutual respect, and small steps toward building trust. Over time, this idea has turned into a set of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) that cover military-political, economic, environmental, and humanitarian areas.

However, CICA has had to change from its original format due to the shifting global environment. The need for more structured mechanisms and increased institutional capacity has been highlighted by the increasing complexity of security challenges, such as supply chain disruptions, cyber threats, climate change, and economic fragmentation.

The CICA Secretariat has been a key player in this process. In addition to serving as an administrative body, it has increasingly taken on the roles of initiative coordinator, dialogue facilitator, and institutional continuity driver. The Astana Statement (2022) started the ongoing transformation process, which aims to turn CICA into a fully-fledged international organization with better operational capacity and strategic importance over time.

This change is not just technical; it is a part of a bigger change in how people in Asia think about regional governance. Platforms like CICA are expected to offer more inclusive, adaptable, and regionally grounded approaches to cooperation in a setting where global institutions are frequently thought to be insufficiently representative or effective.

Azerbaijan's Contribution: Chairmanship in a Time of Transition

As the organization works to strengthen its institutional underpinnings while broadening its functional scope, Azerbaijan's chairmanship of CICA comes at a critical juncture. Baku has based its leadership on the idea of improving connectivity, digitalization, and sustainable growth, which are all areas that connect development and security.

Azerbaijan's strategy is consistent with its overarching foreign policy approach, which prioritizes regional cooperation, strategic balance, and multilateralism. Azerbaijan has grown into a vital logistical and energy hub that connects Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and Europe due to its location at the intersection of important transportation corridors. Its vision for CICA as a platform that combines connectivity with confidence-building has been influenced by its geographical and economic role.

Importantly, Azerbaijan's chairmanship has been marked by real institutional advancement and active diplomatic engagement. A key milestone was the informal meeting of the CICA Council of Foreign Ministers, held on 25 September 2025 on the sidelines of the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. The meeting offered a chance to discuss urgent regional and global issues and evaluate the progress made under Azerbaijan's chairmanship.

The meeting resulted in important decisions being taken, such as the creation of two new advisory bodies, the CICA Women Council and the CICA Finance Summit, which are anticipated to greatly improve institutional depth and thematic cooperation within the organization. Azerbaijan's role in encouraging a more organized and goal-oriented approach within CICA was highlighted by the favorable evaluations made by member states during the meeting.

Through focused thematic initiatives, Azerbaijan has actively contributed to broadening CICA's functional agenda in addition to high-level diplomacy. The international conference on enhancing the role of women in the CICA space, which took place in Baku in April 2026 and signaled the beginning of the Women Council, is a noteworthy example. In addition to CICA's traditional emphasis on political and economic security, this initiative is part of a larger effort to incorporate inclusivity and social dimensions into the organization's developing framework.

By hosting significant gatherings like the Thirteenth Meeting of the CICA Think Tank Forum in September 2025, Azerbaijan has simultaneously strengthened its position as a forum for regional discussion and agenda-setting. These initiatives support the organization's shift to a more successful institutional model by bridging the gap between political discourse and policy-oriented expertise.

The CICA Summit, which is scheduled to take place in Baku in October 2026, is a significant turning point in this process of change. In addition to consolidating current reforms, the summit is anticipated to offer a forum for furthering conversations about CICA's future institutional structure. The summit will concentrate on resolving pending issues and advancing the organization's long-term strategic direction.

When combined, these efforts show that Azerbaijan's chairmanship is actively influencing CICA's development through institutional innovation, diplomatic engagement, and real-world implementation rather than by just setting agendas. By doing this, Azerbaijan is helping CICA become a more cohesive, inclusive, and functionally relevant platform that can address the issues of a multipolar and increasingly complex global environment.

The Baku Experience at the CICA Think Tank Forum: Connecting Policy and Discussion

The Think Tank Forum (TTF), an advisory and intellectual platform that connects academic expertise with policy processes, is one of the most important tools assisting CICA's institutional development. Such Track 1.5 and Track II mechanisms have become crucial elements of successful regional governance in a time when traditional diplomacy is unable to handle complicated, multifaceted issues.

In this sense, the CICA Think Tank Forum's Thirteenth Meeting, which took place in Baku on September 9–10, 2025, was a significant turning point. Under the theme "Resonance of Development and Security: Regional Cooperation and Governance in the Institutional Transformation of CICA," representatives from 21 member states attended the forum, which was organized by the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) in collaboration with the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS).

Notably, the forum was held outside of China for the first time since its establishment, highlighting both the platform's maturity and Azerbaijan's expanding role within CICA. A number of significant trends pertinent to the organization's transformation were brought to light during the discussions.

First, there was a significant convergence around the idea of “security through development,” which was indicative of a larger movement away from military-centric strategies and toward more all-encompassing security paradigms. In order to lower the likelihood of conflict and promote long-term stability, participants stressed the importance of economic interdependence, infrastructure connectivity, and technological cooperation.

Second, the forum emphasized the value of connectivity as a means of boosting national resilience. Initiatives like the Middle Corridor, the Belt and Road Initiative, and other regional transportation projects were presented as tools for fostering interdependence and trust between states rather than just as commercial endeavors.

Third, the talks emphasized how Asia and the Global South are increasingly influencing the development of the future world order. CICA members’ concerns about current structural imbalances were reflected in calls for more inclusive global governance and increased representation of developing nations.

Lastly, the Baku forum reaffirmed the significance of the Think Tank Forum as a source of strategic insight, policy-relevant research, and intellectual exchange. Contributions like collaborative research initiatives, policy suggestions, and thematic studies were recognized as crucial inputs for CICA’s decision-making procedures.

In this way, the Think Tank Forum is becoming a more integrated part of CICA’s institutional architecture, supporting evidence-based policy-making and strengthening the organization’s ability to adapt.

Challenges Facing CICA

Despite its advancements, CICA still has a number of structural and operational issues that could limit how quickly and thoroughly it transforms.

One major problem is the diversity of its membership, which despite being a source of strength can actually make the reaching of consensus more difficult. Political systems, strategic priorities, and economic development levels vary greatly among member states.

Many CBMs are non-binding, which can restrict implementation and lessen the organization’s operational impact. This presents another challenge. Although flexibility is a benefit, it must be counterbalanced with systems that guarantee accountability and continuity.

Alongside groups like the SCO, ASEAN, and others, CICA works in a congested institutional environment. It is still necessary to ensure complementarity rather than duplication.

Lastly, the organization needs to keep enhancing its Secretariat’s ability to oversee a growing agenda and plan more intricate projects.

Conclusion

It is impossible to overestimate the significance of confidence-building as a basis for stability in an increasingly fragmented global environment. Regional platforms like CICA are in a unique position to provide more adaptable, inclusive, and context-sensitive approaches to cooperation as global governance mechanisms encounter increasing limitations and geopolitical divisions widen.

CICA has developed over the last 20 years from a forum that was mainly focused on dialogue to an emerging institutional actor that has the power to influence regional norms and practices. Its gradual

transformation, which is based on inclusivity, consensus, and multifaceted cooperation, reflects a distinctly Asian approach to security, where development, connectivity, and communication are seen as components that reinforce one another.

This crucial stage has coincided with Azerbaijan's chairmanship, which has advanced the organization's institutional and functional aspects. Azerbaijan has shown how political vision can be translated into useful initiatives that enhance regional cooperation through active diplomatic engagement, the promotion of new advisory mechanisms, and the hosting of important platforms like the Think Tank Forum.

However, CICA's ability to transition from incremental dialogue to more structured and outcome-oriented cooperation will determine its

future effectiveness. In addition to institutional strengthening, this calls for a deeper integration of policy innovation, analytical expertise, and inclusive participation across various societal sectors.

If CICA's ongoing transformation is carried out successfully, it may become a key component of a more representative and balanced regional order that can handle both established and new security issues. In this sense, CICA's experience provides more general lessons for 21st-century international cooperation: that trust is developed gradually, that diversity can be a source of strength, and that communication, shared responsibility, and a dedication to collective advancement are ultimately necessary for sustainable security.



FROM CORRIDOR TO CONFIDENCE: REFLECTIONS ON CICA'S EVOLUTION, THE SECRETARIAT'S ROLE, AND THE PROMISE OF THINK TANK–PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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Think Tank engagement)



Introduction: IAS at the time when confidence matters more than ever

The Institute of Asian Studies (IAS), Chulalongkorn University, is Thailand's long-established area studies institute with a mission that brings together rigorous scholarship, policy engagement, and public diplomacy. IAS has long served as a bridge between academia and practice—convening high-level dialogues, producing policy-relevant knowledge, nurturing new generations of regional specialists, and translating complex international dynamics into public understanding.

In recent years, IAS has devoted sustained attention to parts of Asia that have too often been overlooked in mainstream agendas—while, at the same time,

deepening our engagement with CICA for a different but equally compelling reason: its growing strategic significance as a platform for dialogue and confidence-building across an increasingly complex Asia. Guided by a clear conviction, we believe confidence cannot be cultivated through official diplomacy alone; it must also be strengthened through knowledge institutions and people-to-people connectivity that build understanding, reduce misperceptions, and sustain cooperation over time. We have pursued this through concrete, visible initiatives: the Asia Forward Series (developed as a bridge between diplomacy, academia, and society) and—most memorably—Asia Forward Series Episode 7, where we welcomed H.E. Ambassador Kairat Sarybay for the keynote

“From Corridors to Confidence” at Chulalongkorn University. Alongside this, IAS—serving as Thailand’s representative in the CICA Think Tank—co-organised the “CICA Alley @Chula” - a tree-planting activity at Chulalongkorn University’s Centenary Park with the CICA Secretariat, turning the idea of confidence-building into something our students, staff, and diplomatic community could see and feel in a shared public space. These experiences did not merely mark an event; they strengthened institutional bonds and created momentum toward longer-term capacity—now carried forward through IAS’s continuing Central Asia engagements and the establishment of more permanent academic platforms at Chulalongkorn University.

CICA’s active and outreach participation at Chulalongkorn University has sharpened our appreciation of what makes CICA endure: not only the vision of its Member States, but the steady institutional work that turns vision into continuity. For an organization built on inclusiveness, strict consensus, and voluntariness, progress depends on an enabling centre—one that can hold collective memory, keep cooperation moving across political cycles, and continuously connect big strategic narratives to practical mechanisms. This is why any reflection on CICA’s future must place the Secretariat at the heart of the story, and why the Secretary General’s leadership becomes especially consequential at this stage of transformation.

The Secretariat’s role in CICA’s evolution and transformation

What became especially clear during H.E. Ambassador Kairat Sarybay’s keynote at the Asia Forward Series was the central role of leadership in

shaping Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia’s evolution. Ambassador Sarybay positioned CICA not only as a platform for dialogue, but as a mechanism that makes regional connectivity politically sustainable through trust and confidence-building. Rather than presenting transformation as an abstract ambition, he linked it to a concrete institutional trajectory—from CICA’s development of governing and advisory bodies to the draft Charter expected at the Seventh CICA Summit in Baku in October 2026, which would formalize CICA’s status as a full-fledged intergovernmental organization following the transformation process launched at the Astana Summit in 2022.

Equally important was how the keynote highlighted the Secretariat’s role in balancing ambition with practicality. Ambassador Sarybay reaffirmed CICA’s principles of inclusiveness, consensus, and voluntariness while emphasizing modernization through stronger coordination, implementation mechanisms, and synergy with other organizations. He also underscored the importance of knowledge institutions, youth, and university networks—particularly the Think Tank Forum and Partnership Network of Leading Universities—as integral parts of the confidence-building architecture. In this sense, the Secretariat has become more than an administrative body; it serves as the institutional anchor that sustains continuity, deepens trust among Member States, and shapes CICA’s long-term transformation.

Recollections of participation in CICA activities: from dialogue to lived experience

Institute of Asian Studies’s engagement with Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia has been both institutional and



deeply human. A particularly memorable milestone was hosting Asia Forward. H.E. Ambassador Kairat Sarybay resonated strongly with Thai audiences by emphasizing that connectivity cannot be sustained by infrastructure alone; it also requires trust and confidence-building. At a time marked by growing concerns over dependence, disruption, and geopolitical competition, this message offered an important reminder that sustainable connectivity must rest on mutual understanding and cooperation.

This idea was further brought to life through the “CICA Alley @Chula” activity at Chulalongkorn University’s Centenary Park. Although symbolic, the tree-planting initiative carried a deeper meaning: trust, like trees, begins modestly, grows through

shared care, and becomes resilient through continuity. For students and staff, the activity transformed multilateralism from an abstract diplomatic concept into a lived and visible shared value. These experiences reaffirmed that CICA’s relevance grows when its mission extends beyond formal dialogue and is communicated through inclusive, public-facing initiatives that connect institutions, communities, and younger generations.

Cooperation among Member States and interaction with the Secretariat under the CICA Think Tank Forum

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia Think Tank Forum is

strategically important for a region as diverse as Asia because it provides a safe intellectual space where Member States can exchange perspectives, identify emerging risks, and develop shared understanding without the pressure of immediate political commitments. Its effectiveness depends largely on three elements: a clear division between diplomacy and knowledge production, trust in inclusive and balanced processes, and the ability to generate public value through broader outreach and understanding. In this context, think tanks can support diplomacy by contributing scenario analysis, comparative evidence, and policy options, while the Secretariat plays a crucial role in facilitating continuity, transparency, and constructive participation.

For Institute of Asian Studies, participation in the Think Tank Forum reflects the belief that academic diplomacy can strengthen state diplomacy by building literacy, networks, and long-term trust. Beyond supporting governments, think tank cooperation also helps wider publics better understand regional dynamics, reducing misperceptions and contributing to societal resilience as an indirect but essential form of confidence-building.

Conclusion: why IAS remains committed to CICA's confidence mission

IAS's ongoing engagement with CICA is rooted in both principle and practical experience: we have seen how confidence-building can be communicated, learned, and practiced. Our forthcoming inauguration of the Central Asia Studies Center (CASC) at IAS—developed in close collaboration with Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and supported by continued engagement with the Royal Thai Embassy in Astana—seeks to deepen Thailand-Central Asia

knowledge, policy dialogue, and people-to-people ties in ways that align naturally with CICA's mission.

Looking ahead, we believe CICA's greatest contribution is its ability to keep Asia's cooperative future imaginable and workable—through trust, continuity, and constructive engagement. For our part, IAS will continue to cherish and strengthen our relationships with CICA and Central Asia, and we stand ready to support a confidence-building agenda that produces win-win outcomes for Member States and for the broader public. At the same time, we sincerely hope that CICA will continue to see IAS not only as an academic partner, but as a trusted friend—one that can be relied upon for steady support, honest exchange, and long-term commitment. With that spirit of friendship, we are confident our collaboration can grow deeper over time, translating shared principles into lasting cooperation that benefits both governments and societies across the CICA space.



PART V

Secretariat Reflections

MILESTONES OF CICA EVOLUTION

Talgat Kaliyev

SWG Chair during Chairmanship of
Kazakhstan (2020-2024)

Expert in the Ecological Dimension
(2025 – present)



CICA holds a special place in my professional career as a diplomat. In 1997, after serving at the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Türkiye, I was appointed Head of the CICA Section at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By that time, CICA had already existed for five years, and active work was underway to develop the fundamental principles of the future organization. These principles later formed the basis of the organization's key documents – the Declaration on the Principles Guiding Relations among the CICA Member States and the Almaty Act. These documents became the foundation upon which the CICA institutions were painstakingly built. It should be noted that Kazakhstan's initiative to establish an Asian structure for cooperation and

security received broad support from almost all states of the continent and beyond.

My return to CICA came after a break of nearly 20 years. In 2023, during Kazakhstan's chairmanship, I was entrusted, in my capacity as Ambassador-at-Large of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with chairing the meetings of the Special Working Group (SWG). It is important to underline the role of the SWG in the daily activities of CICA. In practice, the SWG serves as a key mechanism for communication within the organization. Each SWG meeting – up to six per year – involves lively discussions, an exchange of views, and the defence of national interests. The Chair's task is to seek and find compromise solutions while never losing sight of the fundamental

principle of multilateral diplomacy – consensus. This is one of CICA's greatest strengths: decisions are adopted only with the approval of all Member States.

The process of preparing the SWG agenda also deserves attention. Draft agendas are prepared by the Secretariat, reviewed by the Chair country, and subsequently submitted to all Member States for approval.

During its second chairmanship (2020-2024), Kazakhstan put forward the proposal to transform CICA into a full-fledged international organization, which was reflected in the Astana Statement of the CICA Summit on CICA Transformation adopted in October 2022.

In pursuance of the Summit's decisions, the key issues discussed during SWG meetings in 2023-2024 included the adoption of the Road Map for CICA Transformation and consideration of the draft CICA Charter. The discussions generated many valuable proposals that enriched CICA's institutional and intellectual framework. By the end of Kazakhstan's chairmanship and the transfer of the chairmanship to

Azerbaijan, substantial progress had been achieved in drafting the Charter with a view to its adoption at the October 2026 Summit.

I would also like to say a few words about the CICA Secretariat. Today, it is a cohesive team of highly qualified experts from Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, China, India, Jordan, Kazakhstan and Russia. The Secretariat's work is focused on ensuring the uninterrupted functioning of the organization, maintaining continuous communication with Member States and advancing CICA's engagement on the international stage.

I am confident that CICA, especially following its transformation into an international organization, has a promising future. Despite current geopolitical trends, the importance of multilateral fora will continue to grow. The very fact that the CICA Secretariat is celebrating its 20th anniversary demonstrates that Asian states fully understand that addressing common challenges – whether environmental or energy-related – can only be effective through unity, cooperation and mutual support.



FROM A MECHANISM OF CONFERENCE DIPLOMACY TO A PAN-ASIAN COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

Kanat Tumysh

Deputy Executive Director (2010 – 2014)
Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of
Kazakhstan to Viet Nam,
concurrently accredited to Cambodia and Laos



According to the United Nations geoscheme, Asia – the world’s largest continent – is divided into five subregions: Central (ours), East, Southeast, South and West Asia. In addition to Kazakhstan, Türkiye, Egypt and Russia are also transcontinental states.

Many states in this part of the world have maintained complex relations with one another. Unlike the relatively homogeneous Europe, Asia is distinguished by its diversity and heterogeneity, shaped both by the past (longstanding historical turbulence in interstate relations and the legacy left in the “Yellow continent” by colonial powers) and by the present (contemporary ethno-confessional, political, economic, cultural and civilizational differences). At the same time, Asia is

the birthplace of many world and traditional religions, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shenism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Jainism, the Baha’i Faith, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism and others.

It was under these complex circumstances that Kazakhstan launched the process of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in the post-Cold War period, pursuing the noble goal of building a “common Asian home” through the establishment and promotion of a universal structure for security and cooperation in Asia.

* * * * *

I was directly involved in issues related to CICA and multilateral cooperation in Asia from April 2005 to June 2010 in Astana, while serving in the relevant divisions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; from June 2010 to May 2014 in Almaty, while working at the CICA Secretariat; and periodically from 2015 to 2019 in New York during my service at the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan to the United Nations, as well as in 2023 in Astana while serving as Deputy Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan responsible for CICA-related matters.

However, even before that period, in November 1999, I had the opportunity to participate in the Sixth OSCE Summit in Istanbul as part of the Kazakh delegation (at that time, serving as Vice Consul of Kazakhstan in Istanbul). One of my responsibilities was to distribute among OSCE participating states, partner countries and Summit guests materials related to Kazakhstan's CICA initiative, including the first key document of CICA – the Declaration on the Principles Guiding Relations among the CICA Member States, adopted at the First CICA Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 14 September 1999.

In April 2005, following an interview with Kassym-Jomart Tokayev (who at that time was serving as Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan), I was appointed First Secretary of the Multilateral Security Division within the Department of Multilateral Cooperation. Having returned from a long-term posting in Hungary, I was a 29-year-old diplomat beginning a new chapter in my professional career.

“Which direction would you like to continue working on at headquarters?” the Minister asked during our meeting. After hearing my response about the United Nations and interstate structures in the Eurasian space (since, prior to my appointment to Hungary,

I coordinated the issues of the universal global organization and some regional associations), Kassym-Jomart Tokayev concluded: “Given your experience in coordinating international organizations, you are assigned a new area – the institutionalization of CICA, our pan-Asian initiative.”

In May 2005, I succeeded First Secretary Yerzhan Abishev (by coincidence, he turned out to be a classmate of my wife Leila, who studied with her at school No. 35 in Almaty), who was preparing for a long-term overseas assignment.

I was fortunate to work on this important and fascinating area at the central office of the Ministry from 2005 to 2010. At that time, the CICA process in Kazakhstan was overseen by distinguished diplomats, including supervising Deputy Ministers Askar Shakirov (currently a member of the Board of Directors of JSC NC KazMunayGas, Senior Independent Director), Kairat Abdrakhmanov (currently the Ambassador of Kazakhstan to the Czech Republic) and Nurlan Yermekbayev (currently the SCO Secretary-General).

I would also like to acknowledge the significant contribution made by the leadership and staff of the relevant department of the Ministry during that period. Among them were the directors of the department: Murat Tashibayev (former Ambassador of Kazakhstan to France), Tleuzhan Seksenbayev (currently a senior diplomat representing Kazakhstan at the international Turkic Academy), Yerlik Ali (currently Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Romania) and Alibek Bakayev (currently the Deputy Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan supervising CICA-related matters). I would also like to mention the deputy directors of the department: Dastan Yeleukenov (former Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Sweden), Sergey Saveliev (former Chargé d'Affaires of Kazakhstan to India), Ruslan Akhmet (former

Part V. Secretariat Reflections

Chargé d'Affaires of Kazakhstan to India), Marat Kalizhanov (currently Deputy Chairman of the Board of the NJCS “International Center for Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue”), Olzhas Toguzbayev, Head of the International Security Office at the MFA of Kazakhstan (former Chargé d'Affaires of Kazakhstan to Malaysia), and Viktor Temirbayev, Head of the Asian Security Division (currently Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Bulgaria and former Head of the Political Division at the CICA Secretariat).

* * *

In 2023, CICA Secretary General Kairat Sarybay and I, in my capacity as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, signed the Road Map for the Implementation of the Priorities of Kazakhstan's Chairmanship. The document was aimed at advancing the transformation of CICA into a full-fledged international organization and included concrete measures to implement the initiatives of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. The signing took place within the framework of Kazakhstan's active chairmanship agenda focused on strengthening regional security and cooperation. The Road Map outlined practical steps to enhance security and stability across Asia.

In 2026, when Secretary General Kairat Sarybay paid a working visit to Cambodia and Laos, I joined the trip together with Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos Shovgi Mehdizade – an outstanding diplomat, a remarkable individual and a sincere friend whom I regard as a brother. During the visit, our joint delegation held successful and important meetings with Acting Head of State of the Kingdom of Cambodia and President of the Senate Hun Sen, as well as with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Laos Thongsavanh Phomvihane.



I believe that this first-ever foreign visit by the CICA Secretary General, undertaken with the support and direct participation of the Ambassadors of Azerbaijan (as the Chair of CICA) and Kazakhstan (as the host country of the CICA Headquarters) significantly strengthened the organization's profile and contributed to the successful outcomes of the negotiations regarding the participation of the leaders of Cambodia and Laos in the Seventh CICA Summit in Baku in autumn 2026, as well as on other pressing issues.

* * *

The planned transformation of CICA into the Organization for Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (OICA) at the Baku Summit will coincide with the 34th anniversary of the launch of the CICA process. This milestone will symbolize the emergence of a mature and viable structure within the Asian space – our ancient, wise and shared Mother Asia.

I am convinced that OICA is capable of becoming the foundation for a much-needed system/architecture of security in our part of the world, built on the principles of dialogue and trust, while also promoting the economic, cultural and social revitalization of Asian states.

CICA IN TRANSITION: INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION AND MULTILATERAL COOPERATION IN ASIA

Anel Bakytbekkyzy

Member of the Professional Personnel (2007 – 2014)

Deputy Executive Director (2014 – 2019)

Consul General of the Republic
of Kazakhstan in Strasbourg

Representative to the Council of Europe



As the Secretariat of the Conference on interaction and Confidence building measures in Asia (CICA) marks its 20th Anniversary, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to all those who have contributed to the development and strengthening of this unique multilateral institution over the past two decades. I am also grateful for the invitation to share my reflections on the years of service within the CICA Secretariat.

My more than decade-long experience at the CICA Secretariat has been both a deeply meaningful professional journey and a profoundly personal one. In many respects, it mirrored the evolution of the organization itself. From my early role as professional personnel to my appointment as the first woman

Deputy Executive Director, it was a rare privilege to witness and contribute to CICA's gradual emergence as an increasingly relevant platform within a complex and evolving geopolitical environment.

One of the most enriching dimensions of my tenure was the opportunity to serve under the successive chairmanships of Kazakhstan, Türkiye, China, and Tajikistan. Each brought distinct diplomatic traditions, priorities, and working styles. I often reflected on how differently states approach common objectives, and yet, within CICA, these differences did not divide; rather, they enriched the dialogue by adding depth, perspective, and nuance. Through these transitions, I came to appreciate the delicate balance between continuity and change, as

well as the quiet but indispensable role played by the Secretariat in preserving that balance.

When I joined the Secretariat in 2007, the institutional foundations of CICA had already been firmly established. Key documents, including the 1999 Declaration on the Principles Guiding Relations between the CICA Member States, the 2002 Almaty Act, the 2004 Rules of Procedure, the 2004 Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures, and the 2006 Statute of the CICA Secretariat, laid out a comprehensive framework for cooperation. These instruments addressed a broad range of challenges, from conflict prevention and international terrorism to disarmament, transnational crime, and humanitarian concerns, while promoting economic development and the well-being of the peoples of Asia.

From that point onward, I had the opportunity to observe and contribute to CICA's transition from institution-building toward practical implementation. Confidence-building measures gradually assumed more concrete forms through cooperation coordinated by Member States across five key dimensions: economic, environmental, human, new challenges and threats, and military-political. This structured framework enabled Member States to incrementally align policies, exchange best practices, and develop practical initiatives, reflecting the pragmatic and consensus-based nature of CICA's approach.

Throughout this process, the Secretariat remained the institutional backbone of the organization. Its role was often understated, yet indispensable. It ensured continuity, coherence, and the effective implementation of decisions adopted by Member States. Over time, I witnessed its transformation from a primarily administrative structure into a more

proactive and strategic institution supporting CICA's broader development and growing international profile. Increasingly, the Secretariat assumed a dual function, both facilitator and custodian, preserving institutional memory while maintaining momentum across rotating chairmanships.

My recollections of this period are closely associated with the many ministerial meetings, summits, and expert-level consultations that shaped CICA's activities. These occasions were far more than formal diplomatic gatherings; they represented living expressions of multilateral diplomacy, where dialogue often complex, delicate, and highly nuanced, unfolded in real time.

Behind these visible processes stood the sustained efforts of a dedicated international team. The Secretariat operated under demanding conditions, frequently navigating tight timelines and high expectations. What remains most vivid in my memory is the shared sense of purpose, professionalism, and mutual support that guided our work. These experiences strengthened my conviction that effective multilateralism depends not only on political will, but equally on the quiet and consistent dedication of those who work daily to sustain dialogue and cooperation.

In today's increasingly complex geopolitical environment, CICA's relevance is particularly evident in the breadth and diversity of its membership. It brings together states with differing strategic priorities, historical experiences, and, in some instances, long-standing sensitivities or unresolved tensions. This diversity makes CICA a rare and valuable platform where dialogue can be maintained, confidence gradually fostered, and engagement sustained even amid profound differences. Its strength lies

precisely in its inclusive character and its capacity to encourage communication, mutual understanding, and cooperation across a highly diverse CICA region.

Looking ahead, the central challenge will be to preserve constructive engagement against a backdrop of evolving conflicts and emerging security challenges, while maintaining the organization's inclusive and flexible nature. It is precisely this capacity to convene, accommodate differences, and promote dialogue without preconditions that continues to define CICA's relevance as a mechanism for confidence-building in an increasingly fragmented and uncertain international environment.

As I reflect upon my years at the Secretariat, I do so with a profound sense of gratitude. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the leadership and staff of the CICA Secretariat past and present, whose

professionalism, commitment, and dedication have been instrumental in advancing the organization's work over the past two decades. I would also like to commend the priorities advanced by the current Chairmanship of Azerbaijan, whose leadership continues to guide CICA at an important stage of its institutional development, including its ongoing transformation, the strengthening of confidence-building measures, and the enhancement of its international profile.

I remain confident that CICA will continue to evolve as a constructive and relevant platform for dialogue, cooperation, and confidence-building across Asia, preserving its unique role in fostering engagement and mutual understanding in the contemporary geopolitical landscape.

BLESSED IS HE WHO VISITS THIS LIFE AT ITS FATEFUL MOMENTS OF STRIFE

Doulat Kuanyshev

Expert in the Military-Political Dimension
(2020 – 2025)



It so happened that I joined the CICA Secretariat at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and departed during the first year of Trump 2.0. Both periods brought serious trials for humanity and, not least of all, had a negative impact on the role and standing of multilateral diplomacy in international affairs.

Despite these circumstances, this period will remain one of the most productive chapters in the history of the CICA Secretariat. It was during these years that the Secretariat consolidated itself as a modern multilateral institution capable of serving as an effective mechanism for coordinating the interests of the Member States of the Conference. The unfavourable international environment was not

a consequence of the Secretariat's shortcomings, but rather an external challenge with which it had to contend. Yet paradoxically, it was precisely during the 2020s that the CICA Secretariat evolved into a permanent, fully operational and genuinely functioning institution.

No doubt, the impetus for these changes was provided by the address of the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, at the CICA Summit in Dushanbe, where he outlined the political objective of transforming the Conference into a full-fledged international organization. Kazakhstan once again assumed the responsibility of the Chairmanship. This was a natural development, given that the very

idea of a pan-Asian structure had originally been proposed by Kazakh leader Nursultan Nazarbayev, while Kazakhstan's diplomats worked hard, including through "shuttle diplomacy", to convene Ministerial Meetings and Summits, developing common principles, preparing foundational documents and shaping CICA institutions. Furthermore, the Secretariat's premises were first located in Almaty and later in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

In pursuit of this ambitious political objective, Kazakhstan nominated Ambassador Kairat Sarybay to serve as Executive Director of the Secretariat. His role proved instrumental in forming the Secretariat's day-to-day agenda and in encouraging Member States to actively engage in discussions on the measures and steps proposed by the Kazakh Chairmanship. It was also through the initiative of Kairat Sarybay that I had the opportunity to join the Secretariat staff, for which I remain sincerely grateful.

Upon the initiative of the Executive Director – later renamed Secretary General by the CICA Summit held in Astana in October 2022 – the Secretariat was joined by numerous specialists with extensive experience in multilateral diplomacy, bringing their necessary know-how. Equally important was the contribution of several Member States that seconded highly qualified and dedicated diplomats, who became the backbone of the Secretariat's professional personnel.

The essence of the work carried out within the Secretariat walls during these years may best be described as the creation of the legal and regulatory framework of a modern international organization, in accordance with accepted international standards and procedures. Given the challenging external context, which limited opportunities to move directly to the critical agenda, this approach represented a deliberate,



absolutely correct and realistic choice, allowing to concentrate on achievable objectives and outcomes.

Without realizing it, I mentioned the Secretariat's physical premises, which cannot be overlooked. There is a saying that "two relocations equal one fire." During these years, the Secretariat moved twice, yet without any disruption to the effectiveness of its activities. On the contrary, the current state-of-the-art office of the CICA Secretariat, located in one of the most prominent areas of the Kazakh capital, has become a source of pride for its staff and admiration for its visitors.

As far as I am aware, this important work is continuing successfully under the leadership of the Azerbaijani Chairmanship. The Secretariat carries out its planned activities and has already begun preparations for the Summit in Baku, scheduled for the second half of this year. At the same time, while reflecting on the above, I cannot help but mention with concern the instability of global politics and the international situation, as tensions continue to rise in the very heart of the CICA region.

I would like to extend my sincere wishes to the leadership of the Secretariat, my colleagues, the current staff and all those who have contributed to its work over the years: may they continue to achieve professional and personal success and enjoy good health and many years of active and fulfilling life.

AN ARTICLE FOR A COMMEMORATIVE BOOK CAPTURING THE EVOLUTION AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE SECRETARIAT

Adel Aladaileh

Expert in the New
Challenges and Threats
dimension (2021 – 2025)



My four years of service (2022-2025) with the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), provided me a direct exposure to the working mechanisms of the Secretariat and its pivotal role in consolidating CICA's position as an effective platform for dialogue and cooperation, translating the orientations of Member States into concrete practical initiatives, while strengthening the Organization's standing and broadening its influence.

One of the most striking aspects was the Secretariat's consistent emphasis on substance over form. This was evident in its sustained efforts to ensure that discussions went beyond symbolic exchanges to foster deeper and more meaningful understanding among Member States.

Equally important was the collaborative working environment within the Secretariat. This culture cultivated a high level of professionalism and a strong shared sense of purpose, both of which significantly enhanced the Organization's external engagement and overall effectiveness.

The Secretariat's internal mechanisms also reflected a high degree of professionalism and institutional coherence across its various units. The Secretary-General, alongside experts and staff, worked in a coordinated and structured manner to translate the political orientations of Member States into actionable programs and practical initiatives.

Over time, the Secretariat has emerged as a key driver of the Organization's ongoing transformation. This evolution reflects a broader ambition among

Member States to strengthen institutional capacity and enhance the Organization's relevance in addressing both traditional and emerging security challenges. Such an approach has proven instrumental in reinforcing the Secretariat's effectiveness—not only by facilitating dialogue among Member States but also by deepening the substance of discussions around evolving regional and international issues.

In this context, the Secretariat has played a central role in consolidating the standing of the CICA in Asia as a credible and effective platform for dialogue, while also enhancing its ability to respond to an increasingly complex and dynamic regional security environment.

Today, the CICA Secretariat serves as the institutional memory of the Organization and a central pillar of policy continuity. It has adopted a proactive approach, tasking experts and specialized committees with producing in-depth studies and analytical papers, while simultaneously expanding engagement with international organizations and research institutions across Asia. In parallel, it has taken an active role in proposing and organizing conferences and workshops on issues aligned with the Organization's agenda.

These efforts have significantly enhanced the quality of conceptual notes and analytical outputs, thereby reinforcing the credibility of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia as a reliable partner for a wide range of international actors, most notably the United Nations.

More recently, the Secretariat has emerged as a central driver of the Organization's ongoing transformation. This trajectory reflects the broader

aspirations of Member States to strengthen the institutional capacities of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia and to enhance its role in addressing both traditional and emerging challenges and threats. In this context, the Secretariat's ability to adapt to evolving demands—while preserving its principles of neutrality and inclusivity—has been instrumental in sustaining momentum and ensuring continuity throughout the transformation process.

During my participation in various activities organized by Member States, I had the opportunity to travel across multiple Asian countries under the framework of CICA. These experiences offered a deeper understanding of the Organization's unique geopolitical breadth and relevance.

Through direct engagement on the ground, I realized how the CICA brings together a highly diverse strategic space, where discussions on security and stability extend across a vast geographical expanse stretching from East and Central Asia toward its western reaches, within a single framework where multiple security priorities and regional perspectives intersect.

This wide geographic scope enabled meaningful exchanges on differing threat perceptions and regional priorities, underscoring both the complexity and the value of dialogue within such a broad platform. Among the most memorable and rewarding aspects of the experience, despite its challenges, was witnessing the immense logistical and diplomatic complexity involved in reaching consensus on the drafting of resolutions.

The marathon sessions to negotiate even a single paragraph concerning issues such as sovereignty, security, and others were extremely exhausting. In

this context, the goal was not to push for a quick or hasty consensus, but rather to work toward its gradual and patient development, ensuring that it was built on shared understandings and long-term interests, and shaped through careful dialogue and continuous interaction between the parties.»

Despite the difficulties that accompanied my travels to participate in CICA activities, those years remain filled with fond and memorable experiences. Journeys from Amman to various parts of Asia were an experience in themselves, often requiring multiple transit stops due to the absence of direct flights, which made travel more complex and physically demanding.

On my way to an international conference in Samarkand, what should have been a routine trip unraveled into pure chaos. At Queen Alia International Airport, just before boarding my flight to Istanbul, exhaustion and dizziness hit me like a wave—and suddenly, my entire itinerary collapsed. After emergency medical intervention, I finally regained stability three hours after takeoff.

But instead of giving up, I made a split-second decision: I would get to Samarkand by any means necessary. What followed was less a journey and more a trial by fire—a desperate flight to Dubai, another to Tashkent, and then a grueling car ride through the night. I arrived just one hour before the conference began, having been awake for nearly 24 hours straight. I walked into the hall and participated. The lesson is that even the most chaotic journeys can birth the most unforgettable stories.

At a conference in St. Petersburg one brutal December, with temperatures plunging toward -30°C, something happened none of us could forget. In the dead of night, the piercing wail of a fire alarm shattered the silence—part of a routine evacuation drill, though no one knew it at the time. Guests poured into the

corridors, half-awake and disoriented, scrambling toward emergency exits as panic tangled with confusion. For a few surreal minutes, the freezing night outside felt less shocking than the chaos unfolding within.

Despite the seriousness of the situation, the image that remained etched in memory was that of some rushing outside in haste, wearing only half their clothes, into the bitter cold poignant scene reflecting the unexpected interplay between the seriousness of the situation and the human element inherent in such field experiences.

Nevertheless, these frequent movements were an integral part of the work, lending it a unique character that combined challenge and discovery, leaving a lasting human and professional impact, however difficult, in our memories.



The mechanism for cooperation between member states and the CICA Secretariat is notably diverse, reflecting the wide range of political systems, strategic priorities, and threat perceptions among participating countries. While this diversity enriches the dialogue, it also introduces complexity and potential challenges to coordination. In this setting, the Secretariat plays

a vital role in maintaining constructive and inclusive cooperation, helping to bridge differences and facilitate effective collaboration among member states.

Interaction between Member States and the Secretariat has generally been characterized by mutual respect and pragmatism. While consensus-building can be slow, it is precisely this deliberate pace that lends legitimacy to CICA's outcomes. The Secretariat's ability to navigate differing expectations while maintaining institutional coherence has been a key factor in sustaining cooperation.

On issues with an indirect political dimension, such as disaster response, small-scale capacity building, and technical confidence-building measures, cooperation among Member States is excellent. Several Member States have demonstrated exceptional support for the Secretariat by providing second-hand experts and voluntary contributions.

Challenges, however, are related to issues that touch upon the core of national sovereignty and chronic regional conflicts. These remain among the most sensitive and complex issues within a multilateral environment characterized by divergent priorities and strategic positions.

Nevertheless, Member States have demonstrated a genuine desire to make progress in confidence-building and promoting dialogue to address these issues, adhering to the principles of dialogue as a fundamental means of bridging differences and reducing tensions.

At the same time, there is room for deeper engagement. Enhancing communication channels, encouraging more active participation in CBMs, and fostering a stronger sense of ownership among Member States would further strengthen the organization.

At the same time, opportunities exist to deepen cooperation further, through strengthening

communication channels, promoting more active participation in CBMs, and cultivating a stronger sense of shared responsibility among member states, which would enhance the overall effectiveness and cohesion of the organization.

About the challenges confronting (CICA), From my perspective, although (CICA) has achieved notable progress over the past two decades—particularly in fostering dialogue, expanding cooperation among member states, and reinforcing the foundations of security and stability—it continues to face a range of structural challenges, geopolitical complexities, and the evolving nature of regional security, in addition to the rising economic, environmental, developmental, and non-traditional threats.

The primary structural challenges lie in translating adopted measures from conceptual frameworks into effective practical application. Although member states share a broad consensus on general principles and confidence-building measures, implementation remains uneven, contingent largely upon political will.

Consensus-based decision-making, CICA relies on unanimity, which means any single member can block decisions. This often slows progress, weakens implementation, and can lead to stalemates on sensitive issues.

Although the consensus-based approach enhances legitimacy, it proves slow, raising concerns that it may delay or even obstruct the finalization of the documents needed to transform the conference into a fully-fledged organization.

Diversity of membership, CICA includes countries with very different political systems, strategic priorities, and levels of development. This diversity makes it harder to agree on common policies or move beyond general statements into concrete action.

Lack of binding mechanisms, most CICA measures are voluntary. There are limited enforcement tools or accountability frameworks, which reduce the effectiveness of agreements.

Geopolitical tensions and rivalries among major powers within the region affect cooperation. These tensions can spill into the organization and limit trust-building efforts. Given the divergent geopolitical visions, reconciling these competing perspectives to agree on a common Asian security architecture presents a significant challenge that must be overcome.

Furthermore, the regional security landscape is becoming increasingly complex, shaped by evolving geopolitical competition, rapid technological change, and the emergence of unconventional threats. Cybersecurity risks, the spread of disinformation, and climate-related challenges are no longer peripheral concerns but are now closely intertwined with traditional security issues.

Ultimately, addressing these challenges effectively will require a renewed collective commitment grounded in genuine cooperation and meaningful exchange of expertise. Such an approach will be key to sustaining past achievements and building upon them toward a more stable, secure, and prosperous future.

Based on my experience and observation of CICA's activities, I believe that the Secretariat, under the leadership of His Excellency the Secretary-General, Ambassador Kairat Sarybay, has already taken meaningful steps to enhance its effectiveness. This progress is reflected in the emphasis placed on human capital development, including continuous professional training, the strengthening of internal expertise, and the enhancement of analytical capacities.

That said, I would like to offer a few additional recommendations:

1. Strengthening knowledge management and digital/data capacities

International secretariats often face the risk of losing institutional memory due to staff turnover. To mitigate this, it is essential to establish a centralized, searchable digital repository that consolidates decisions, procedural precedents, and institutional records. This should function as a structured knowledge management system.

2. Moving from reactive to proactive workflows

Secretariat's work is frequently dominated by immediate logistical demands and ad hoc requests. A more sustainable approach would involve strengthening planning, anticipating risks, and embedding continuous process improvement mechanisms. This shift would allow the institution to operate in a more strategic and less reactive manner, improving both efficiency and long-term coherence.

3. Strengthening internal culture and institutional identity

Given the diversity of CICA's membership, internal cohesion is particularly important. Efforts should continue to foster a neutral, professional working culture centered on facilitation rather than political positioning.

In this context, it is important to maintain a balance between ambition and realism, as well as between inclusiveness and effectiveness, and between continuity and institutional renewal.

CICA TRANSFORMATION: STEP BY STEP TOWARDS INSTITUTIONAL EXCELLENCE

Yerzhan Birtan

Advisor to the CICA Secretary General
(2021-2023)
Director of the Office of the CICA Secretary
General (2023-2025)



I congratulate the CICA Secretariat and all Member States on the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Secretariat and sincerely wish them continued success in strengthening the organization. I had the honor to take part in and make a modest contribution to a very important and highly interesting stage in the evolution of CICA and its Secretariat in 2021-2025. I would like to briefly share my vision of one of the key areas of work of the entire organization during this period – the transformation of CICA.

At the Fifth CICA Summit in Dushanbe in June 2019, President of Kazakhstan H.E. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev delivered a keynote address that laid the foundation for the activities of Kazakhstan's

Chairmanship in 2020-2024. The transformation of CICA into a full-fledged international organization became the strategic priority of Kazakhstan, alongside other political and institutional initiatives aimed at strengthening CICA.

With the beginning of Kazakhstan's Chairmanship in autumn 2020, the CICA Secretariat, headed by the newly appointed Executive Director Ambassador Kairat Sarybay, launched active work to promote the Chairmanship's priorities in close dialogue with all Member States.

Drawing on the analysis of discussions on Kazakhstan's initiative to transform CICA into the Organization for Security and Development in Asia (OSDA), first put forward in 2012 and discussed

in 2015-2016, the CICA Secretariat assisted the Chairmanship in conducting broad preliminary consultations with all CICA capitals in 2021 in order to explore their views on the goals, principles and ways of implementing the transformation.

The results of this dialogue, namely the views of the Member States, formed the basis of the Conceptual Approaches to Transformation, developed in August 2021 for substantive discussion of Kazakhstan's initiative. This document reflected a shared vision of the main goals of transformation – strengthening the global role of Asia and moving to a new qualitative level of cooperation within CICA. It also reflected the widely held view that CICA already possesses the status, role, functions, working methods, structure and other attributes of a full-fledged organization, and is already *de facto* functioning as an international organization.

The document emphasized the position of virtually all Member States regarding the need for a gradual and step-by-step approach to transformation, without changing the fundamental goals, objectives and principles of CICA. In particular, this referred to preserving the consensus principle of decision-making and the voluntary nature of participation of Member States in CICA confidence building measures (CBMs).

In February 2022, the Kazakh Chairmanship, with the assistance of the Secretariat, presented the Concept of CICA Transformation, which took into account all views expressed during the discussion of the Conceptual Approaches. Additions made mainly concerned the vector of transformation – proposals on key directions of institutional reform.

The first important outcome of this broad and inclusive dialogue was the official discussion of the Transformation Concept at the meeting of the CICA Senior Officials Committee (SOC) in March 2022,

where the SOC, on the basis of consensus, expressed general support to the proposals of the Kazakh Chairmanship and to launching the transformation process at the upcoming CICA Summit in October.

Following intensive negotiations on the final document of the highest-level meeting, on 13 October 2022 the Sixth CICA Summit adopted a historic document – the Astana Statement on CICA Transformation, which launched the process of gradual and incremental transformation of CICA into a full-fledged regional international organization.

In this document, the Heads of State or Government defined the goals of transformation – defining the overarching areas of cooperation and strengthening the organizational base of CICA, and institutionalized the supreme governing bodies – the Summit and the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Ministerial Council), and the position of Secretary General. The Chairmanship and the Secretary General were tasked with presenting a roadmap of necessary measures to implement the transformation process.

In fulfillment of this mandate, the Kazakh Chairmanship, together with the Secretariat, immediately began work on this “home assignment” and already in early 2023 developed a comprehensive draft roadmap with specific proposals on the main areas of reform, necessary measures and transformational decisions.

It is worth noting the enthusiasm with which Member States engaged in substantive discussions on the draft roadmap. As a result, at the informal meeting of the CICA Ministerial Council in New York on 21 September 2023, a key milestone was reached in the transformation process – the Road Map for CICA Transformation (RMT) was adopted, consisting

of eight clusters of forthcoming reforms. The RMT represents a structured agenda of the negotiations on transformation for detailed discussion and decision-making:

1. Elaborating a charter,
2. Improving modalities of CICA CBMs and exploring future areas of cooperation,
3. Defining the international status of the Secretariat personnel,
4. Updating the Rules of Procedure,
5. Updating the Guidelines for External Relations,
6. Defining the role and functions of the Secretary General and the Secretariat,
7. Budget reform,
8. Reform of human resources management and internationalization of the Secretariat.

Following the approval of the RMT, all Member States, under the leadership of the Kazakh Chairmanship and with substantive and analytical support of the Secretariat, immediately proceeded to its implementation and, by the end of 2025, achieved significant progress in clusters 1 and 4 and successfully completed work on clusters 2 and 3.

In early 2024, the CICA Secretariat, based on an in-depth analysis of the experience of other international organizations, submitted proposals on key elements of the Charter and, after discussions with Member States, developed a full draft CICA Charter (cluster 1). At the same time, the Secretariat proposed a draft of updated CICA Rules of Procedure (cluster 4), which underwent one full round of detailed discussion and was deferred to a later stage of the transformation.

It should be emphasized that in 2024 Member States proposed to consider the adoption of the

Charter as the quintessence and culmination of the transformation process and to prioritize this work. In this regard, the Kazakh Chairmanship has conducted the first round of general discussion of the document and elaboration of its text before handing over the CICA Chairmanship to Azerbaijan in December 2024 at the Seventh Meeting of the Ministerial Council.

Azerbaijan, having “taken over the baton” of the Chairmanship from Kazakhstan, along with the negotiated draft of the Charter, declared the development of a legally binding Charter of the organization as one of its main priorities. The President of Azerbaijan, H.E. Ilham Aliyev, set the goal of adopting the Charter at the Seventh CICA Summit in Baku in October 2026, and at the very beginning of 2025 the Chairmanship launched intensive negotiations on the document, including both general debates and detailed work on the text.

With regard to cluster 2, it should be noted that work on improving the modalities of CBM implementation – the main operational area of CICA – began long before the launch of the transformation. In 2021, the Secretariat developed general guidelines for holding CBM events, which were approved by the SOC in June 2021 and significantly improved the efficiency of their planning, coordination and organization.

In 2022, also at the initiative of the Secretariat, the SOC conducted the first-ever review of the implementation of CBMs, decided to carry it out on an annual basis and tasked the Secretariat with submitting proposals for further improvement of their modalities. The Secretariat successfully fulfilled this mandate by developing a comprehensive framework document regulating all key aspects of the implementation of CICA CBMs, including best practices and new approaches. This document was



adopted at the Seventh CICA Ministerial Council Meeting on 17 December 2024.

The successful completion of cluster 3 of the RMT through amending the Host Country Agreement of 26 June 2007 can be considered as another highly significant achievement of the transformation. The amendments to this legal document, proposed by the Secretariat, were agreed upon by all Member States and underwent thorough review by state bodies and the Parliament of Kazakhstan in 2023-2025. After being signed by the President of Kazakhstan, H.E. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the updated Agreement entered into legal force on 28 May 2025.

The new Agreement grants all CICA Secretariat personnel, regardless of nationality and category of position, a number of fundamental privileges and immunities enjoyed by staff of the United Nations and other full-fledged international organizations, in particular functional immunity and exemption from income tax of the host country.

This reform makes a significant contribution to the task of internationalizing the Secretariat by enhancing its international status and attractiveness as an employer. It is expected that future decisions within the framework of clusters 7 and 8 of the RMT – budgetary and human resources reforms – will provide the main boost to attracting best talents from across the CICA region.

In conclusion of this brief essay, I wish all Member States, the Azerbaijani Chairmanship and the CICA Secretariat successful finalization of the Charter of the organization at the upcoming Baku Summit and further breakthrough decisions in transforming CICA into a full-fledged pan-continental international organization.

CICA SECRETARIAT 20: A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON INSTITUTION-BUILDING, MULTILATERALISM, AND REGIONAL COOPERATION



Dharmendra Singh

Member of the Professional Personnel
(2018 – 2021)

The twentieth anniversary of the CICA Secretariat is an occasion not only to mark an institutional milestone, but also to reflect on a journey of steady evolution. My own association with the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), particularly during my tenure at the Secretariat from January 2018 to July 2021 as a seconded diplomat from India, provided a close and practical understanding of how this institution has grown in both form and substance.

This period coincided with three successive Chairmanships: China, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan; and I had the opportunity to work under the leadership of three Secretaries General (then designated as Executive Director). These years were marked by continuity as well as gradual transformation, and

offered valuable insights into the functioning and potential of the Secretariat.

The Secretariat as the Institutional Backbone

From my experience, the most notable feature of the Secretariat has been its steady evolution towards greater institutionalization. What began as a relatively modest administrative structure has progressively developed into a more structured and professional body, aligned with international standards.

Moments and Professional Experience

Working within the Secretariat offered a unique vantage point. It allowed me to observe how ideas are translated into processes, and how consensus is built among diverse Member States.

Several important steps were taken during this period where I also had the opportunity to contribute in:

Systematic streamlining and compilation of CICA's core documents, which significantly improved institutional clarity and accessibility;

Adoption of international practices, including alignment with the United Nations system in the designation and structuring of Secretariat officials;

Expansion of the scope of cooperation among Member States through the addition of new areas of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs);

Introduction of an annual Roadmap, which brought greater predictability and coherence to CICA's activities;

Revision of coordinators and co-coordinators for various CBMs, ensuring more balanced and effective participation;

Updating of Concept Papers and Action Plans to reflect evolving priorities;

Launch of the Voice of Asia: CICA Digest, which contributed to greater visibility and dissemination of the organization's work.

Taken together, these developments reflect a conscious effort to strengthen the Secretariat as a modern, efficient, and responsive institution.

These experiences reinforced my appreciation for the importance of institutional continuity. While Chairmanships bring their own priorities and momentum, it is the Secretariat that ensures stability and follow-through.

Cooperation Among Member States

CICA's diversity is both its strength and its challenge. Member States bring varied perspectives, shaped by their unique political, economic, and security contexts. In such a setting, cooperation requires sustained effort and mutual respect.

The Secretariat has played a central role in facilitating this cooperation. By acting as a neutral platform, coordinating CBM activities, and ensuring transparent communication, it has helped maintain a constructive environment for dialogue.

At the same time, my experience suggests that there is scope to further deepen engagement. While several Member States actively contribute to various initiatives, encouraging more consistent and broad-based participation will enhance the effectiveness of CICA's work.

Challenges and Future Prospects

The current global environment presents complex and interlinked challenges. Geopolitical uncertainties, complicated economic landscapes, climate-related risks, rapid technological changes, and persistent development gaps continue to affect countries across regions.

In such a context, the importance of multilateral platforms like CICA becomes even more evident. They provide space for dialogue, promote understanding, and enable practical cooperation while respecting national priorities and different stages of development.

CICA's inclusive and non-confrontational approach reflects the core principles of multilateralism. It allows Member States to engage constructively, even in times of uncertainty, and to work towards confidence-building measures that contribute to regional stability.

Experiences from other cooperative platforms, including groupings such as BRICS, underline the value of dialogue-based engagement and pragmatic cooperation. CICA, with its focus on Asia, is well positioned to play a similar role in fostering trust and collaboration across the region.

As CICA continues its journey, it faces a number of challenges. These include ensuring effective

implementation of agreed initiatives, maintaining institutional coherence during its ongoing transformation, and enhancing its visibility in a crowded multilateral landscape.

The evolving geopolitical environment also calls for adaptability. Emerging issues; whether related to security, technology, or sustainable development; require CICA to remain responsive and forward-looking.

Yet, the prospects remain positive. The need for inclusive, dialogue-based regional platforms is increasingly evident. CICA, with its accumulated experience and growing institutional strength, is well placed to play a meaningful role in addressing shared challenges.

Suggestions for the Secretariat

Based on my experience, a few suggestions may be considered:

Further strengthening analytical and policy support capacities within the Secretariat;

Ensuring effective follow-up and implementation of CBMs and agreed initiatives;

Expanding outreach to think tanks, academic institutions, and other stakeholders to enrich policy discussions;

Leveraging digital technologies to enhance coordination and communication;

Continuing efforts towards standardization, professionalism, and alignment with international best practices.

Conclusion

Looking back at my time at the CICA Secretariat, what stands out is a sense of gradual but meaningful progress. The institution has evolved through careful steps; each contributing to a stronger and more coherent framework for cooperation.

The Secretariat's role has been central to this journey. It has provided continuity amid change, structure amid diversity, and support to Member States in advancing shared objectives.

In an increasingly complex global environment, institutions like CICA carry added responsibility. With sustained commitment from Member States and continued strengthening of the Secretariat, CICA can further consolidate its role as a credible and effective platform for cooperation, confidence-building, and shared progress across Asia.

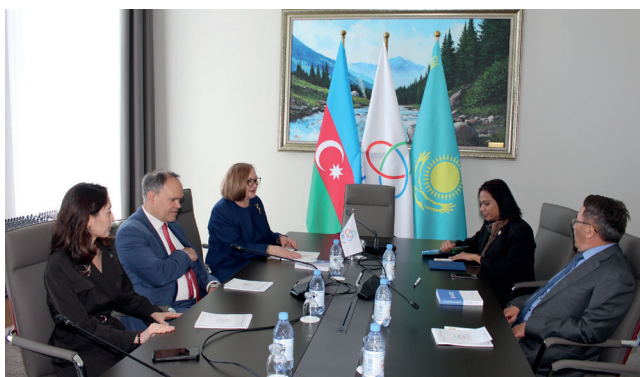
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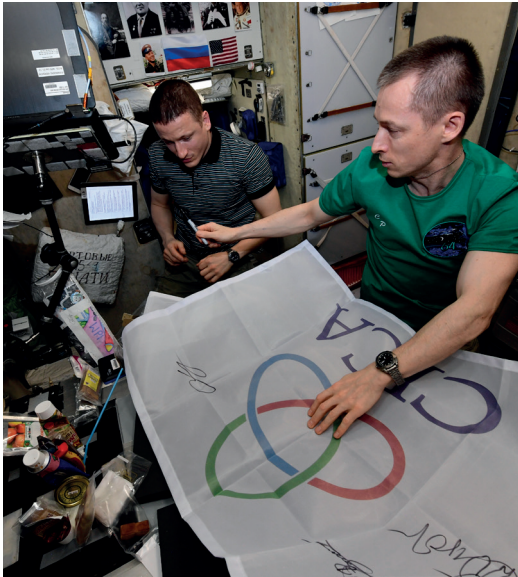
Part V. Secretariat Reflections











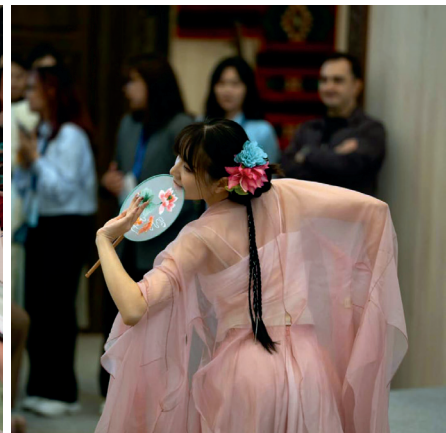






FIRST SPRING BAZAAR









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