



3rd OSCE Meeting on Training and Recruitment

7 – 8 February 2008, Vienna

Summary

Purpose of the meeting

The OSCE Secretariat hosted this meeting in order to take stock of the developments in the field of election observer training in OSCE participating States on the one hand, and to address the challenge of identifying suitable candidates on demand for OSCE assignments on the other. The meeting served to provide a platform for exchange, mutual information and forward planning of all relevant stakeholders such as Ministries of Foreign Affairs/OSCE Delegations, national Recruitment/Training Agencies on the supply-side and the Secretariat and Missions/Institutions on the demand-side of seconded mission personnel.

The OSCE Training Strategy for 2008-2010 (PC.DEC/796, SEC/GAL/65/07/Rev.2/Corr1), stipulates continued support by the OSCE Training Section to relevant pre-mission training programmes and Training Institutions in participating States. The conference served as a platform for exchange on best practices between Training Institutions, to facilitate co-operation among participating States in the field of observer training, to focus on their effective preparation, and to keep recruitment experts in participating States abreast of the profile requirements for OSCE field staff.

Below are the main issues discussed at the meeting, the content of the presentations by the participants, as well as summaries and recommendations of the two working groups and the conclusion of the Chairperson.

Working Group on Recruitment & sessions dedicated to recruitment

“The Key to Successful Recruitment”

The *Rapporteur* reported that constructive discussions had taken place in the Recruitment Working Group. The group was informed about the new developments and improvements in the Staff Rules and Regulations; introduced to the new trends of the recruitment procedures; and the pS were reminded of the standard recruitment procedures ensuring the effective and transparent filling of posts. Gender sensitivity and security were presented as key elements on the recruitment process and a special

note for attendance was given for the new Junior Professional Officer Programme and the OSCE Internships.

The Director of Human Resources pointed out that OSCE has the obligation to constantly deliver high standards of efficiency in the application of its mandate and to improve the working conditions for the Mission members especially, so as to attract highly experienced staff. These obligations are difficult to deliver with the tightness of the OSCE budget nevertheless high standards need to be ensured.

Regarding the issue of expanding the Field of Expertises list, it was noted that a new category was added, Education, bringing the number of areas to 12, while Media Affairs was re-phrased, adjusting to the changes of the Organization.

The improvements on the Staff Rules and Regulations were presented, posing better conditions for staff members and their families in the Missions. The OSCE has amended the non-family status of some Missions and has allowed the establishment of families in duty stations, while new arrangements were introduced on paternity and sick leave. Additionally Mission members have better entitlements and noticeable improvements have been made to the health insurance coverage for the seconded staff.

Addressing the need for transparency on recruitment of Head and Deputy Heads of Missions in Field Operations new arrangements were made to ensure the procedure actively involves the Chairmanship, Secretariat and Troika.

Addressing the challenge of the general financial tightness, it was reported that now as a rule maximum four people are invited to Vienna for interviews for one vacant post, while telephone interviews and tests via e-mail/internet are done for candidates.

Regarding gender balance in the recruitment process it was highlighted that gender is taken seriously in OSCE, but it was noted that it is still very difficult to recruit female candidates in the military and police field, as well as in high management positions. A pledge to all pS was made, to take gender into account when nominating candidates to OSCE so as to achieve better gender balance. A participant suggested using different wording in vacancy notices so as to attract more female candidates and another participant suggested being more flexible on maternity and paternity leaves, allowing part-time work for Mission members.

Security in OSCE Missions/Secretariat/Institutions was presented and special attention was given to the co-operation with ODIHR in relation to the deployment of election observers in OSCE participating States. A participant expressed concerns on the security of seconded Short-term Observers (STOs) during election observation missions, especially regarding car safety in difficult weather conditions. ODIHR representative and the OSCE Security Officer clarified that security is and remains the overriding concern to which much attention is paid. They assessed that road traffic accidents are the main security risks that observers face. In this context, they underlined the importance of training that sensitizes long-term observers (LTOs)

about the importance of security and safety since they are responsible for identifying and recruiting drivers and cars for STOs. In addition preparatory training raises STOs' awareness about security concerns so that they feel more comfortable raising them when in the field.

The need for seconded Russian speaking Environmental Officers in Central Asia was expressed to the pS; generally it was difficult to find Russian speakers other than those coming from the region. In addition it was mentioned that it was difficult to get seconded staff for the Secretariat in Vienna; the example of the long vacant position of a seconded Training Officer was used, which had already been mentioned by the SG in his welcome speech.

On the recruitment process of seconded staff it was stressed that there is excellent cooperation between the pS and the Secretariat and this is something that should continue with even more interaction between the two sides. It was also mentioned that improvements have been made on reporting and analyzing of the recruitment processes.

On the job application form many participants expressed the need to expand the length of the blocks, so that there can be more detailed explanations, and that a CV can always be attached. To this matter the Secretariat reported that it would work to extend the blocks without necessitating additional changes to the system, but that it wouldn't be functional to have very long application forms and extra CVs, because that would heavily prolong the screening and recruitment procedure. The pS were urged to use the field on the page 7 of the application form for any additional information about the candidate they are proposing.

Participants requested that the application form can be saved by the applicant to make changes later, like in the United Nations Secretariat Galaxy system, and noted that you cannot change the information in the language boxes. The Secretariat promised to look into the matter with IT services, but pointed out that problems may occur if making too many changes, since a unified application system with the pS forms should be considered. To temporarily solve this issue it was suggested to the pS to save the forms in their systems so that the candidates can make necessary changes and just copy and paste, if needed.

It was, also, brought to the attention of the pS to thoroughly check the application forms before sending them to OSCE and making sure that they are filled in correctly. A notice was given to the pS to read the work descriptions properly, so as to assure that their candidates match the necessary criteria, and thus improving the chances, of their candidates, to be selected. Many questions followed around this matter, with the pS representatives wanting to know the reasons that some of their candidates don't get selected and requesting to receive exact explanations for the reasons of rejection. The Secretariat replied that this can only be done in the case of short-listed candidates, because this is a time consuming procedure.

The participating States were encouraged to consider nominating for seconded positions from amongst recent participants in the OSCE Junior Professional Officer programme or those that have undergone OSCE internships.

A participant asked if the OSCE accepts candidates from countries in conflict with the host country in which they will work. The Secretariat replied that in most cases this isn't possible because OSCE wants to assure that its staff will be fully accepted in the host country and free to perform its duties in implementation of the mandates.

Some participants noted that the time between the assignment and arrival date of a Mission Member to the duty station is too short, since 2-3 weeks are not enough for someone to prepare for a Mission. The Secretariat replied that this is something that is stated when applying and that the date of arrival is determined from the GO Programme schedule and the need for a handover procedure to take place. A quick overview showed that unfortunately this goal of a handover is only achieved on 30% of the cases.

Many participants expressed the desire to know beforehand when a vacancy notice is published and which positions will open, so that they can have more time to find the right candidates. It was suggested that the pS check the website in a regular basis so that they can be updated on vacancies. The Secretariat will do its best to do as much advance planning as possible.

The issue of the insurance coverage for OSCE seconded staff was addressed and the Secretariat stated that any insurance that a staff member might already have, has to be equal with that of the OSCE insurance agreement, or else the OSCE insurance can be provided. The full information package on insurance was promised to be included in the CD-ROM to be distributed after the Conference.

Exchange of views on the use of psychological tests in recruitment took place. The Secretariat confirmed that no such tests are used and similar practices are sometimes employed by some participating States in the selecting processes for particular categories of staff.

Finally the pS were urged to continue seconding staff in the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, since no decision has been taken yet on the future of the Mission, and the Mission is still functioning fully.

Working Group on Training & sessions dedicated to election observer training

“How can we ensure minimum preparation of election observers?”

The working group focused on training of observers and permitted fruitful discussion and exchange on best practices in this field. Participants presented training activities and new initiatives conducted in their home countries. The imperative need of training election observers was reaffirmed and the development of an e-learning module for STOs was also discussed.

ODIHR underlined the importance of training and presented its training approach and activities. ODIHR's approach is two-pronged: 1) support national training centres of OSCE participating States and 2) provide observer training to the 19 OSCE States eligible to the Fund for Diversification¹ through extra-budgetary contributions. In addition, ODIHR provides in-country briefings for long- and short-term observers during observation missions. The main responsibility for observer preparation rests with the participating States. ODIHR can only play a supporting and complementary role to national training programmes. Currently, ODIHR doesn't have the capacity to provide training to all OSCE States.

One participant suggested that ODIHR should only accept LTOs and STOs that have a security training certificate. ODIHR responded that this suggestion should be given further consideration because its practical implementation may be arduous due to the lack of capacity to verify that observers possess this certificate. It may be easier for OSCE States to implement this recommendation at the national level.

One participant expressed the view that as elected officials, parliamentarians are good election observers because of their experience in contesting elections.

Several participants asked questions about the ODIHR election experts database. ODIHR representative clarified that every interested person who has some electoral expertise can register in the database. There are no restrictions and all applicants are accepted. The database is used in cases when positions for an election observation mission are not filled through the recruitment page posted in the OSCE and ODIHR website. This is a process open to the public at large. One participant expressed the need for a standard application form or CV, like the one used by the EU. Another participant shared the opinion that that it should be a requirement for the applicants to state whether they had election observation training before. The need for increased transparency in the recruitment procedure as well as feedback on the performance of election observers was mentioned.

¹ The Fund for Enhancing the Diversification of ODIHR Election Observation Missions was created in 2001 in order to further diversify the composition of ODIHR missions by giving the possibility of some OSCE states who do not regularly second observers to participation in observation missions. This fund has thus far allowed the deployment of more than 1,200 long and short-term observers from 19 OSCE States.

Some participants stated that one week during which experts can apply for core team positions in election observation mission is too short. Time is also often short for OSCE States to recruit observers and conduct training. ODIHR representative concurred but explained that ODIHR also operate in a tight timeframe dictated by the calling of elections, the conduct of the needs assessment mission (NAM), the publication of the NAM report, the receipt of the invitation and the open recruitment for core team positions. All these steps must be taken before the deployment of the first core team member who should at least remain in country for six weeks before election day. The timeframe is even more challenging when early elections are called.

A participant expressed concern on the conduct of needs assessment and reaffirmed the need for better co-operation with the host country. ODIHR stressed that thorough need assessments missions take place in country before deciding on any observation activity, and constitute consultation mechanism with the host country.

One participant stated that some OSCE participating States are under-represented in election observation missions and advocated for more diversity. ODIHR reminded participants about the Fund for Diversification, its objectives and results in the past six years. The Fund has permitted to increase the number of OSCE States represented in observation missions (on average 43 States in 2007).

ODIHR regretted that only 20% of the total number of observers trained by ODIHR in the OSCE Bishkek Academy was nominated by participating States as STOs through the Fund for Diversification. It encouraged eligible States to nominate through the Fund for Diversification candidates who have undergone the ODIHR training for STOs.

Some participants requested that ODIHR provides STOs and LTOs evaluations after election observation missions. Some participating States stated that they already have an internal evaluation system and that they receive evaluations for their STOs and LTOs from the EU. ODIHR explained that due to the larger numbers of observers deployed (on average 3,000 per year) and the limited period STOs remain in country (about 6 days), there is no time and capacity to adequately and fairly evaluate the work of each observer. Due process should apply which implies feedback on the performance appraisal from the appraisees. Another unresolved question is who should have the responsibility to conduct these evaluations and whether this person is trained and qualified to conduct them. ODIHR reminded participants that in cases of serious breaches of the observer code of conduct, ODIHR informs the participating States concerned. On this topic, ODIHR agreed with participants that the observer code of conduct should be formally signed by all observers.

A possible e-learning module for STOs was extensively discussed during the Conference, thus demonstrating a high level of interest. Participants concurred that e-learning alone cannot replace face to face training; it is rather supporting and complementing face-to-face training. It is therefore important that e-learning is followed up by face to face training where skills are tested in real life. Blended

approach allows acquiring knowledge and skills. Participants agreed that interaction, cases studies, role plays are essential for observer training. However for these OSCE states who do not offer any training for their election observer, an e-learning module would help levelling the basic knowledge that observers should have when undertaking their duties. ODIHR expressed interest and suggested that an informal group could meet in order to discuss and study the feasibility of such an e-learning module. The module could include some elements such as STO role and responsibilities, observer code of conduct, etc. This project could be funded by extra-budgetary funds and a national training centres could possibly take the lead.

ZIF, USIP, SIDA, Folke Bernadotte Academy Sweden, ASPR, NORDEM, ERIS, the Russian Diplomatic Academy, CMC Finland presented their work and policies with a case study on election observation from Serbia presented. The participants confirmed that the exchange of practices was very beneficial.

Conclusion by the Chairperson

Concluding the Chairperson noted the fruitful nature of the ideas and suggestions made during the discussions and thanked all participants for their active involvement and presentations. The Chairperson also took the chance to thank the team that organized the Conference, the Secretariat and DHR for hosting it and especially the colleagues from ODIHR who contributed to the Conference.

Christo Polendakov, the Chief of Recruitment, thanked the new Training Co-ordinator Ms. Andrea Kienle for taking the initiative and successfully organizing this conference, as well as her new Deputy Ms. Matanat Rahimova. He assured the participants that all of the issues that were mentioned during the Conference will be taken into consideration and that improvements on the application forms will be made shortly. He urged the pS to regularly contact the Recruitment Officers from the Secretariat on any matter, problem or issue that concerns them. He concluded by noting that the Secretariat will produce a summary of the meeting including the speeches, presentations and summaries of the working groups on CD Rom and that he looked forward to receiving nominations from participating States for vacant seconded positions in the Secretariat.