

Modelling the OSCE for a robust “Helsinki Generation”

BY ANNE MARTE AMBLE

“Democracy is not a given. We need to shape it.”
— A participant in the Model OSCE

The United States is gearing up to play Armenia, which in turn is looking forward to playing Austria. The Russian Federation will play the part of Norway, which will act as Tajikistan. And, in a unique twist of fate, Canada and Kazakhstan will find out what it is like to step into each other’s shoes.

These are just some of the interesting country roles that have been officially assigned to 110 students from 30 OSCE participating States when they converge on Vienna from 5 to 7 July for the first-ever Model OSCE Conference.

The roles were decided through a drawing of lots by ambassadors and representatives of 30 OSCE delegations, hosted by Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut at the Hofburg in mid-May.

Agitania, Tramanstan, Tristan, Thule and Kalovina — fictional OSCE participating States — will share centre stage, making a total of 35 countries to be represented by teams of three students each.

“For some time now, the OSCE has been keen to impart its values of dialogue and consensus-building to young people in a setting that is as authentic as possible,” says Virginie Coulloudon, Deputy Spokesperson in the Secretariat. “Now, we’re finally making it happen. This is thanks to 30 enthusiastic national delegations and a network of volunteers in the Secretariat, field operations and OSCE institutions, with the co-ordination of the Press and Public Information Section.”

The participants, who range from 16 to 20 years of age, were born at about the same time as many of the OSCE participating States, following the fall of the Berlin Wall. They will explore creative solutions by carefully negotiating their way through three realistically tense crisis situations: combating terrorists’ use of the Internet, managing shared water resources, and safeguarding Roma-Sinti children from falling prey to traffickers.

To test their negotiating skills and familiarize themselves with the OSCE before the July event, potential participants played out three scenarios earlier this year right in their own classrooms. Some 70 schools all across the OSCE area, from Reykjavik in

Iceland to Kurganteppa in Tajikistan, immersed themselves in conflict prevention and conflict resolution exercises focusing on stemming the smuggling of small arms and light weapons, cleaning up an oil spill, and protecting freedom of the media and minority rights.

“Seeking consensus in the three areas was fascinating and gave us an insight into the tools we need to apply towards our country’s formation — or rather, transformation,” said a student in Armenia. “If everyone at the Model OSCE Conference approached issues in the same co-operative spirit, we stand a better chance of shaping a more democratic world.”

“The role-playing made us realize the complexity of negotiations between two countries with diverging interests,” said students from Sciences Po, the political sciences institute in Paris. “It also left us with a first impression of the challenges that the OSCE and its field operations are tackling.”

Looking forward to his role at the negotiating table in Vienna, a student from Kyrgyzstan said, “Meeting young people from many countries will surely broaden my vision of the world and help me discover what values we share. I hope to gain new insights and put them into practice right here at home.”

Each of the 30 participating delegations was actively involved in creating the detailed scenarios that will be acted out. Austria, Finland, France, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Norway and the United States have provided financial support for the ground-breaking initiative.

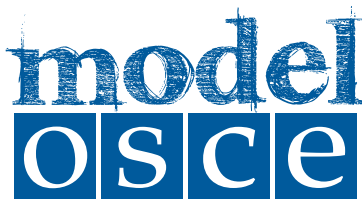
After what will probably be tough and delicate negotiations around the table, along the corridors and in the

café areas at the Hofburg, the Model OSCE Conference will culminate in a simulated meeting of the Permanent Council on 7 July.

“That will have been exactly 35 years to the day after 35 countries concluded the first stage of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Helsinki, on 7 July 1973,” says Virginie Coulloudon. “It’s a remarkable coincidence and a good omen for the new Helsinki Generation.”

www.modelosce.org

Anne Marte Amble serves as a consultant to the Model OSCE project.



Hofburg, 13 May. At a drawing of lots, Dutch Ambassador Ida van Veldhuizen-Rothenbücher discovers that the Netherlands — to be played by Serbia — will take on the role of Turkey at the Model OSCE Conference.