



“Suddenly, it was no longer a game”

BY SABA GVETADZE

It all started early this year when our professor at the University of Georgia in Tbilisi told me and my friends Nino and Salome about the first Model OSCE due to take place in Vienna in July. The project was still in its initial phase and he could not tell us too much about it yet. In the meantime, however, the thought that I might be given the opportunity to take part in the event kept me in a state of suspense, especially as I had never been abroad before.

The concept behind this conference for young people — namely, that participants would represent a different country from their real one — appealed to me. I felt that my independent streak would serve me in good stead in such a

setting. But first things first: Since I didn't know too much about the OSCE, I immersed myself in studying its history and its structure.

I'll never forget the look of disbelief and excitement on my friends' faces when our professor confirmed that, yes, we *were* going to Vienna. And that was not all — the OSCE Mission to Georgia would pay for our fares and accommodation. We started screaming at the top of our lungs out of sheer joy. It would be a while before I would come into contact with the OSCE, but my relationship with the Organization had already become intensely personal. And it was going to have a direct hand in translating my youthful dreams into reality.

I decided early on that the Georgian team would have to be among the best participants.

Hofburg, 8 July. Model OSCE participating States were euphoric when they reached consensus on three security dilemmas despite their initial differences.
Photo: OSCE/Susanna Löf



Theresianum, Vienna, launching of the Model OSCE, 7 July. Left photo: Thomas Rantasa (left) and George Bazinas of the American International School in Vienna sing their own composition, the national anthem of “Agitania”. Right photo: Saba Gvetadze from Georgia at a question-and-answer session with the (real) OSCE Secretary General and the French, Russian and U.S. ambassadors to the OSCE. Photos: OSCE/Dragan Pilic

We found ourselves working harder than we had ever done before. I made sure I would not miss a single preparatory session on the three scenarios we received from Vienna.

I was pleased to be given responsibility for conflict prevention around the Syr Daria River in Central Asia — the economic and environmental dimension scenario — but was a bit worried that no one could give me any first-hand advice. I had never been faced with such a dilemma before. Slowly, it dawned on me that the OSCE is a mechanism that enables people confronted with complex issues to come up with a joint solution after a great deal of trying.

Suddenly, it was no longer a game. It had become real life! I can’t explain exactly how the Model OSCE changed us. All I know is that I emerged from the intense three days feeling different from my old self in ways I could not have imagined. While the experience awakened the

patriotic side of me, for the first time I felt like a cosmopolitan citizen of the world. I became determined to make a contribution to my own country and to its relations with other States.

I found out that I truly cared about the OSCE’s three dimensions of security. Not even for one minute could I tear myself away from the conference hall at the Hofburg when “members” of the “Permanent Council” were having a lively exchange of strongly held views on water as a source of potential conflict, the plight of Roma and Sinti, and terrorism and the Internet.

Through the many good people I met from all over the OSCE area, I gained fresh insights about myself. For one, I would like to think that my friends and I have left our narrow thinking and self-centredness behind us. For another, I am now more convinced than ever that one is free to choose which path to take, and that one is completely free to pursue one’s goals and ideas no matter how out of reach they seem to be.

Yes, we *can* do it, I thought, as we boarded the plane back to Tbilisi. We’ll make the world a better place yet.

“We truly look forward to observing you negotiating and, hopefully, finding consensus on a number of documents that some students playing the role of OSCE officials have drafted and distributed. Consensus is a key word at the OSCE. It is built into our genetic code. To adopt a document, we need the agreement of each and every one of the participating States. This is another way of saying that each State holds veto power. Good luck in your search for dialogue and consensus! And I’d like to once again thank Austria, Finland, France, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Norway and the United States for their generous support.”

Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut
Model OSCE welcoming ceremony, 7 July 2008

Saba Gvetadze, 18, is a freshman at the University of Georgia’s School of Politics and International Relations in Tbilisi. He and his friends were assigned to represent Spain at the first Model OSCE conference. Georgia’s interests were, in turn, represented by Irish students.

The Model OSCE: It's a long, hard road towards consensus

"Intense and dynamic and exciting from beginning to end": This was the general feeling among 140 students from 30 OSCE participating States after representing countries other than their own at the first Model OSCE conference in Vienna from 7 to 9 July. All born in the 1980s or even in the early 1990s, the participants were challenged to think about their common future. In working groups and committees, in the corridors and over coffee, they debated and sought consensus on three major issues: tackling terrorists' abuse of the Internet while protecting human rights and freedom of expres-

sion (first dimension); defusing tension and preventing conflict over water resources in Central Asia (second dimension); and combating the trafficking of Roma and Sinti children (third dimension). An eight-minute film capturing the spirit of the negotiations is available for viewing on YouTube and on www.modelosce.org. Here are some of the students' impressions of the three-day experience:



On Monday morning, the representatives of the participating States of "Tristan" and "Tramanstan" told me they were exhausted. They said they had stayed up late debating the issues underlying the three scenarios and searching for specific points they could agree on. We had three major goals during the Model OSCE exercise. Firstly, we had to achieve consensus. It was anything but easy, but we did manage to find common ground. Secondly, to have fun — and we did precisely that! And thirdly, to try to make a contribution to the real OSCE participating States. In our model Permanent Council, we engaged in a real debate, we had a lively exchange of ideas, and we presented, I think, more world views than are presented at the real PC.

Raphaël Ténau, 24 years old, French
(*Model OSCE Secretary General*), *Diplomatic Academy of Vienna*

There were times when there was a lot of strife and contention, but everyone seemed to be very dedicated to discussing the new threats to security. The intense desire to "fix" things kept everyone going.

Christina Hawley, 24 years old, Austrian
(*Model OSCE Chairman-in-Office*),
Diplomatic Academy of Vienna

A few months have gone by since the first Model OSCE took place, but we are still reeling from the breathtaking event and are still under its spell. The second scenario on water resources in Central Asia taught us that safeguarding the environment is a key component of security. Through negotiation and dialogue, the countries of "Tristan" and "Tramanstan" were able to agree to share their natural resources and to apply good governance practices in the region. Armenia is in the process of developing co-operation with its neighbouring countries, so we were particularly interested in the tools that the OSCE uses to move these efforts along. After experiencing the Model OSCE and playing the country of "Tristan", how we wish that our generation were more active and better informed! We are not even aware of our rights. Looking in from the outside, the OSCE seems accessible and inclusive. But the Model OSCE gave us a wonderful chance to explore it fully and be an integral part of it. This amazed us greatly. Up close, we learned that the OSCE is like a mechanical watch where every small detail is of utmost importance for the functioning of the whole. Although the three days were hectic and packed with events, interacting with the participants gave us a rush of positive energy.

Tatevik Vardanyan and Nadezhda Tsolakyan, 20 years old, Armenian
Yerevan State Linguistic University after V. Brusov

What am I going to take home from the Model OSCE? A first experience in close-to-real negotiations. Having played the role of Sweden, I now yearn to make my own contribution to the development of co-operation between Europe and Central Asia.

Farrukh Ashrapov, 20 years old, Tajik
Russian-Tajik Slavonic University

My keen interest in meeting new people was what motivated me to take part in the Model OSCE conference. But when I read the three scenarios, I began to get really passionate about the whole thing. The third scenario, focusing on discrimination against Roma and Sinti, really touched me. It was not easy to prepare for the event. I found it difficult to put myself in the shoes of a diplomat from a country that was "foreign" to me. I had to learn as much as I could about the Netherlands within a short time. Fortunately, my teacher walked us through the whole process. Then, in Vienna, I met the students from the Netherlands (who were, in turn, playing the role of Turkey) and they also enlightened me on several issues. At the opening of the conference, a guy stood up and asked the distinguished panel: "So what is so sexy about the OSCE?" I could not believe anyone would ask senior diplomats a question like that in front of an audience — at least, I would not have phrased it that way myself. But then everybody, including the OSCE officials, started laughing and tried to respond as best as they could. "Thank goodness they are not as formal as they look," I thought to myself!

Danijel Stefanovic, 25 years old
Singidunum University, Serbia

I was pleasantly surprised by the level of professionalism of my fellow delegates; it was much higher than in previous model conferences I have taken part in elsewhere. I hope this will be maintained when and if it is decided to make the Model OSCE into a tradition — which I hope will be the case. The extremely friendly and positive attitude shown towards us by the real OSCE representatives also made a big difference. I think the total consensus system suits a model conference extremely well, as everyone has to co-operate and everyone's opinion matters. The ability to compromise while sticking to one's principles is the key to success and, I believe, was positively used throughout the discussions.

Olli Päivänsalo, 18 years old, Finnish
(*representing the Czech Republic*)
Kulosaari Upper Secondary School, Helsinki