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Making REACT Operational

History

During the last decade, the OSCE has developed from a loose series of follow-up conferences into a full-fledged international organization. Undoubtedly, its network of field operations or missions is the Organization's most important tool for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. The first two small missions, one including about 20 persons, the other less than ten were established in 1992 (the OSCE Missions of Long Duration in Kosovo, Sandjak and Vojvodina and the Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje, both decisions to mandate these were made on 14 August 1992). During the following years the number of field operations grew continuously. Yet in 1995 only a few dozen internationals served in less than ten OSCE missions. The year 1995 was a watershed for OSCE field activities. The appeal in Dayton that the OSCE deploy a large field operation of about 250 internationals in Bosnia and Herzegovina signalled the beginning of a much faster growth of field activities than before. In 1996 the Mission to Croatia was established and not much later expanded to 250 internationals.

If the deployment of the two big missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia had put a very serious burden on the tiny OSCE Secretariat, the task of sending up to 2,000 unarmed monitors to Kosovo in the autumn of 1998 exceeded its capacity immeasurably. Only the involvement of a large number of seconded personnel (planners, logisticians, personnel officers) enabled the Secretariat to deploy 1,400 monitors by February 1999. (The fact that until 1 June 1999 one single professional officer had been in charge of mission staffing in the Secretariat illustrates the growing discrepancy between requirements and capabilities.) The deployment of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (authorized strength 760 internationals) was effected relatively quickly and with the involvement of a much smaller number of seconded personnel thanks to the strengthening of the Mission Staffing Section of the Secretariat in 1999. Nevertheless the need to further improve OSCE capacity to deploy field operations rapidly and effectively became clear for all the participating States.

The Istanbul Summit and the REACT Task Force

The OSCE Heads of State or Government attending the November 1999 Istanbul Summit agreed in the Charter for European Security to create Rapid Expert Assistance and Co-operation Teams (REACT) to enable the Organi-

zation "to respond quickly to demands for assistance and for large civilian field operations". Drawing on recent experience, especially in the Balkans, the leaders recognized "that the ability to deploy rapidly civilian and police expertise is essential to effective conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation". They foresaw that the REACT initiative would "enable OSCE bodies and institutions, acting in accordance with their respective procedures, to offer experts quickly to OSCE participating States to provide assistance, in compliance with OSCE norms, in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation", thereby giving the Organization "the ability to address problems before they become crises and to deploy quickly the civilian component of a peacekeeping operation when needed". They also anticipated REACT being "used as surge capacity to assist the OSCE with the rapid deployment of large-scale or specialized operations".

In the Istanbul Summit Declaration OSCE Heads of State or Government requested the Permanent Council and the Secretary General to establish a task force within the Conflict Prevention Centre aimed at developing the REACT programme and a budget that would enable REACT to be fully operational by 30 June 2000. Towards that end, a REACT Task Force chaired by the Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre was established in early January 2000. The Task Force was composed of both Secretariat staff and a small group of seconded personnel, with the latter being charged with the day-to-day work of developing a concept for making REACT operational and a supporting budget. In carrying out its work, the Task Force consulted closely with participating States, Secretariat staff, field missions and OSCE institutions, and other international organizations.

The 14 March Informal Meeting - Preliminary Ideas

By mid-March, the Task Force had developed some preliminary ideas for making the REACT initiative operational and these were presented to representatives of the participating States, both from delegations in Vienna and from state capitals, in a day-long informal meeting organized by the Chairperson-in-Office. In the course of consultations prior to that meeting the Task Force had encountered a variety of opinions on what REACT should be. These ranged from a view that it should, in effect, be a separate personnel system with rosters of civilian and police experts who could be called upon at short notice and used only in certain undefined "REACT" situations, to the notion, based on the language of the Charter for European Security, that REACT should be no more than a "capability" within the participating States and the OSCE to mobilize and deploy such expertise quickly. The Task Force had tentatively concluded that the latter in fact reflected the intent of the OSCE Heads of State or Government at the Istanbul Summit. Accordingly, it

140

suggested at the informal meeting in March that REACT be "embedded" as a capability within the overall system used by the Organization for recruiting, selecting and deploying international staff assigned to OSCE field activities.

To create such a capability, particularly one which would be able to respond rapidly to meet a variety of requirements including a large new mission build-up or surge situation, the Task Force identified three areas of focus:

- the recruitment and selection process;
- the system used for managing documentation on candidates nominated by the participating States for secondment to OSCE field activities; and
- training which could ensure that those selected for OSCE field assignments would be operationally prepared to carry out their responsibilities upon arrival in the field.

Standards for Recruitment and Selection

From discussions with Secretariat staff, the Task Force concluded that a significant impediment to rapid identification of qualified personnel for field assignments, their selection and their deployment was the method employed for their recruitment. The latter was essentially based on position descriptions, for the most part drafted in the field by individual missions and reflecting specific requirements for each job to be done. There was no set of standards based on an analysis of the kinds of work carried out in OSCE field activities from which position descriptions could be developed. Rather, each one was created *ad hoc* and therefore was essentially unique. As a result, by the beginning of 2000 there were over 300 position descriptions for an international staff of about 1,100 people serving in over 20 OSCE field activities. Two people doing essentially the same thing in two different missions could be identified by completely different titles and the professional requirements of their positions could vary widely.

The Task Force had concluded that, as a first step towards streamlining the staffing process, the participating States and the Organization would need a clear set of standards to recruit and select mission members. Towards that end, at the informal March meeting, it proposed the creation of a staffing matrix based on an analysis of the work done in existing OSCE field activities. The matrix would provide a framework within which actual positions in the field - whether positions in existing field activities or those developed to meet future requirements - could be classified. This framework, including minimum requirements for doing the work in a given field of expertise and level of functional competence, would in effect provide the standards for recruitment and selection of personnel assigned to OSCE field activities.

Moreover, the matrix would serve as the basis for a number of tools, which could be employed by both the states and the Organization to sharpen the fo-

141

cus of recruiting efforts and to make the selection process more efficient, timely and transparent. These tools would include, *inter alia*, a glossary of terms used in the recruitment and selection process, a guide to field work in the OSCE, standardized forms used by applicants, and a candidate screening checklist for rapid verification by both the states and the Secretariat of candidate qualifications. The standardized forms would be a key factor in overcoming another bottleneck thwarting speedy selection and deployment - the time-consuming, labour-intensive essentially manual process used to handle candidate documentation.

Candidate Documentation

In the past, candidate documentation - typically *curricula vitae* - was forwarded to the Secretariat by the states (usually, but not exclusively, by the Vienna-based delegations to the OSCE) via fax over commercial telephone lines. The resultant hardcopies of *vitae* received were the basic documents used in the selection process and for the records. These *vitae* ranged in length from brief lists of educational levels attained and titles of positions held to detailed catalogues of educational and work experience, often making meaningful comparisons among candidates difficult.

The Task Force proposed that these free-form *vitae* be replaced by two documents: a formatted application form and a structured *curriculum vitae*. Irrespective of how these two documents were forwarded to the Secretariat, both could be entered into an electronic environment for purposes of processing the information contained in them and for general document management. The formatted application would elicit information about candidates that, for the most part, could be provided in a positive-negative or numerical range format, thereby making it highly machine-readable. The structured *vitae* would allow candidates to provide information in a rhetorical form but, because the format would have been structured, the document would lend itself to search using automated data processing techniques. Employment of such techniques would be absolutely essential to achieve a new scale in a large new mission build-up or surge situation, i.e., the capacity to process an exponential increase in the volume of documentation in a given amount of time without a corresponding increase in staff resources.

Linking the States and the Organization

Both to achieve greater speed and to enhance collaboration between the states and the Organization in the selection process, the Task Force proposed linking components in a human resources extranet based on the world wide web. Doing so would allow states to input candidate documentation directly into

the OSCE Secretariat's computer system where such documentation could be managed electronically and be subjected to the data processing techniques that would contribute to the rapidity which was a basic objective of the REACT initiative. Moreover, while any state choosing to continue providing documentation via commercial fax (or even by post or hand) could do so without prejudice or disadvantage, those opting to go online would be able to "pull" information from the extranet's electronic document repositories as well as to "push" such information to the Secretariat.

The Training Dimension of REACT

To work effectively in OSCE field activities, those assigned to them must be both professionally qualified for the jobs they will do and operationally prepared to work in the environment of the OSCE field activity in which they find themselves. The latter implies that some kind of specialized training will be required. If the objective is one hundred per cent effectiveness from the first day in the field, then training will be required prior to arrival. And since any training programme takes a certain amount of time to carry out, the REACT objective of rapid deployment will be facilitated by providing such training as early in the process as possible.

Based on the results of a questionnaire circulated by the Task Force prior to the informal meeting in March, it was clear that the capacity of states to provide training prior to departure or, even better, prior even to selection for assignment to an OSCE field activity varied considerably. The issue for participants at the meeting therefore was to determine the area of training that the states wished the Task Force to focus on. The virtually unanimous response of those participants who voiced an opinion was for the development of standards for generic training aimed at making candidates operationally prepared for the jobs to which they might be assigned. And since states might be called upon to provide personnel for deployment by international organizations other than the OSCE, they asked that at a minimum these standards not be contrary to and preferably complement any training requirements other organizations might have.

Conclusions of the Informal Meeting on 14 March

In addition to standards for generic training, participants at the March meeting welcomed the proposal to develop a staffing matrix as the basis for recruitment and selection standards, as well as the various tools to be derived from the matrix. In general, they also saw the merit of linking the states and the Secretariat for transfer of information on candidates in standardized formats so that electronic data processing techniques could be applied to that

143

information for the purposes of achieving speed in the selection and deployment process. There was, however, a considerable difference of opinion between some states as to where the centre of authority for managing candidate information should be placed. Whether for reasons of perceived efficiency, concerns about privacy or requirements of law, several states were strongly of the view that candidate information should not be forwarded to the Secretariat until an actual requirement in the field had been identified. Among this group, however, some did say they would be prepared to indicate in advance the numbers of candidates by field of expertise their states would be prepared to offer for REACT purposes. A few states were even prepared to forward candidate documentation as soon as available, if for no other reason than to get an early indication of whether or not individual candidates met minimum requirements.

Developing a Concept for Making REACT Operational

On the basis of the feedback received at the informal meeting in March, as well as ongoing consultations with individual participating State delegations, Secretariat and field missions staff members, and international organizations, during the remainder of March and April, the Task Force refined the concept for making the REACT initiative operational. It also worked on a supporting budget proposal. The concept, circulated to delegations in early May 2000, was based on the same three pillars proposed to participants at the informal meeting in March: 1) standards for recruitment and selection; 2) a system for managing candidate documentation in an electronic environment; and 3) standards for generic training.

The Task Force developed a staffing matrix, which divides work done in OSCE field activities into twelve fields of expertise at four functional levels of competence. This matrix - and accompanying descriptions of the various kinds of work and the minimum qualifications required to do it - is the basis for both a standardized formatted application form and a structured *curriculum vitae*. These documents capture candidate information in formats that can be easily moved into a softcopy electronic environment, thereby providing the means to overcome a major impediment to rapid identification, selection and deployment of qualified candidates - that is, the time-consuming, labour-intensive manual processes currently used for handling candidate documentation.

To realize the potential of moving candidate information into an electronic environment, the Task Force proposed a web-based human resources information management extranet. The 1998 Information Systems Strategy Plan (ISSP) had foreseen the eventual adoption of an OSCE unified human resources management system (HRMS), with information electronically available for efficient and effective data exchange between the Secretariat and all

144

components of the OSCE. The Task Force sought to apply the strategic vision of the ISSP in developing the extranet proposal and to do so in a way that would deliver early functionality for REACT purposes while supporting the Organization's longer term HRMS objectives.

Finally, the Task Force developed a set of generic training standards that states can use for pre-selection/pre-deployment training should they be in a position to conduct such training. These standards cover the skills and knowledge that those assigned to OSCE field activities will need to be operationally prepared and effective. They are also designed to be complementary to standards of other international organizations, including the United Nations, so that states carrying out in-country training programmes need not structure them solely according to OSCE requirements.

Second Informal Meeting and the Budget

On 2 June 2000, the Chairperson-in-Office arranged a second informal meeting of representatives from participating-State delegations and state capitals at which they were briefed on all aspects of the REACT concept, as well as the Operation Centre concept and its relationship to REACT. Participants focused overwhelmingly on the information-management dimension of the REACT concept, specifically, the proposed web-based extranet and how it related to the 1998 ISSP. Not coincidentally, about ninety per cent of the proposed supplementary budget for the year 2000 earmarked for REACT implementation was allocated to the development of the extranet. At the end of the meeting the Task Force offered to prepare a paper relating the proposed extranet to the ISSP and the budget dimension to assist the states in reaching a decision on the REACT concept. That paper was then used as the basis for a meeting on 21 June 2000 by the information technology experts who advise the Informal Financial Committee. These experts gave an unqualified endorsement to the extranet proposal as consistent with the ISSP and supportive of a unified HRMS. However, they recommended that the budget earmarked for REACT implementation be combined with the amount required to initiate the HRMS project in 2000 since the two in effect are aspects of a single information management system.

Secretariat Re-organization and the Permanent Council Decision

In the meantime, in the context of work being carried out by the REACT Task Force and to establish an Operation Centre, the Secretary General undertook an examination of the management structure of the Secretariat. This effort led in late May 2000 to a re-organization proposal, including the creation of a new department in which all of the Secretariat's human resources-

related activities have been combined. The REACT capability has been embedded within this new department.

The Chairperson-in-Office opted to address all of these interrelated matters - REACT, Operations Centre and re-organization - in a single Permanent Council decision. Debate continued throughout most of the month June, in which the REACT/HRMS extranet was frequently a point of contention. By the end of the month, however, a consensus was achieved and the decision was adopted when the term of unbroken silent procedure had expired on 30 June 2000.

The Road Ahead

With the approval of the REACT concept and its supporting budget, as well as the other initiatives covered in the Permanent Council decision of 30 June, the REACT implementation process began in earnest. The objective to be achieved no later than the end of the year 2000 was to have a functioning REACT/HRMS extranet. This will give the Organization a capacity to manage the inevitable influx of candidate documentation, which must be dealt with in a brief period at the outset of a new large mission build-up or a surge. Much of the work done to design, build and test the extranet laid groundwork for HRMS implementation that was to follow in 2001. Implementation of use of the staffing matrix developed by the REACT Task Force will continue, and the various tools derived from it will need to be completed and introduced.

The Secretary General has established a steering group to oversee this entire process. This group, which consists of heads of units with major stakes in the process and is advised by a number of experts in different related fields, will be headed by the REACT Senior Advisor until such a time as a director for the new Department of Human Resources is selected and can take over. The steering group is charged with developing a strategy for implementing REACT and the HRMS. Various working parties were formed to implement different aspects of the scheme, whether this was extranet development or human resources policies and procedures, under the direction of the steering group.

In sum, a great deal of work remains to be done in a relatively brief period of time. However, approval of the REACT concept and a budget and the Secretary General's unified human resources department initiative, along with the establishment of the Operation Centre and implementation of the Secretariat programme officer system, have profound implications for the capacity of the Secretariat to support OSCE field operations. If these various programmes can be successfully put in place during the remainder of the year 2000, the OSCE will enter 2001 far better positioned to deal with the kinds of challenges that concerned the OSCE Heads of State or Government in Istanbul

146

and which led them to adopt the Charter for European Security, including the decision to create REACT.