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PLACEMENT REPORT
Bachelor IR/IO
Preface

In October 2017, I found myself, due to several circumstances, without an internship, and without a good plan on what to do the next semester. I was, however, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where I was observing the presidential elections with Silba. Here, a good friend of mine, when asked for career advice, mentioned that Silba had recently gotten an internship position and was looking for new applicants for the upcoming semester. Having gotten to know the organization mostly as a meeting place for enthusiastic young professionals with a penchant for Eastern Europe, I was immediately interested. As I had nothing to lose, I sent in my application, where after I was invited for a Skype interview, which led to an invitation for the position. As I knew I would be working as general support for the organization, finding a placement assignment in concrete terms was somewhat tough. In the end, I, together with my supervisor and the then president of the association, we agreed on a set of priority tasks, which would serve as the placement assignment.
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**Introduction**

I interned at Silba – Initiative for Democracy and Dialogue for a period of five months, between February and June 2018. Silba is an organization that organizes Election Observation Missions (EOMs) and other activities in Europe and its neighbourhood (mostly in Eastern Europe). It has a main Board, located in Aarhus, Denmark, as well as local factions throughout Denmark. I ‘worked’ under the main board, helping and sometimes doing tasks they gave to me, and also worked as a Coordinator on two EOMs in Russia and Montenegro. My main tasks assisting the board consisted of working on a handbook for our missions, managing Silbas databases and preparing them for implementation of the new EU data and privacy rules (GDPR), creating and updating promotional material and working on organizational professionalization in general. I also briefly worked on a project related to acquisition.

**About Silba**

As their website states, “Silba – Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy is a non-partisan and non-profit youth organisation which aims to strengthen democratic institutions and organisations.” Founded in 1994, its main activity is the organization of election observation missions and seminars related to democracy building. In doing so, Silba to some extent mimics the work of the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE. However, Silba gives their own election training and has a different way of observing (i.e. different forms). Next to this, Silba also focuses on the perspective of young people when observing elections, and its missions are only available to young people (under 35). Silba’s missions are organized and managed on the ground by a specifically selected Coordination Team. The missions themselves consist of a programme of between four and nine days of lectures and meetings with election stakeholders. These programmes are organized by aforementioned Coordination Team.

Whenever the OSCE conducts an EOM in a country, Silba generally conducts an EOM as well, provided that the election is in a country of interest. This means that most Silba missions take place in Eastern Europe. In conjunction with this, its local branches in Denmark hold events related to the elections as well as political developments in these countries.

While having some elements of a regular association, the organization effectively functions as an NGO run by young volunteers. This leads to an organization with short decision-making lines and a lot of flexibility. As the intern, my supervisor was a member of the main board, and I was therefore greatly involved in and very close to the decision-making processes of the organization. I worked on projects together with several board members. When organizing the two EOMs as mentioned earlier, I worked in a Coordination Team, which consisted of five and three people that had been selected specifically on the basis of their expertise with the country in which the respective EOMs took place.
**About my internship**

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, I had a great variety of tasks, which I would like to divide into three categories. First, I had several ad-hoc and day-to-day jobs, such as keeping check of different email inboxes and Facebook pages used by the organization. Next to this, I had the task of keeping the membership database up to date, which, given the fact that the organization decided to change its database system twice and the entry into force of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was quite a task. As I had some experience with database work, I managed to do this through a lot of googling and extensive use of Excel. The first month of my internship was therefore mostly spent working on these databases and my ad-hoc tasks. I also had the task of gathering and writing pieces for the monthly newsletter that the organization sent out. Next to this, I made several small updates to Silba’s web content, as well as making some small steps towards search engine optimization of the Silba website. While receiving supervision and help from relevant board representatives, I was also given a lot of space for trial and error, and in this way learned a lot of things that I would not have thought I had learnt at the start of my internship.

The second type of tasks were related to the organization and professionalization of Silba’s EOMs. Next to working for the main board, I was asked to serve as the Financial Coordinator for two EOMs, which were the EOM to the Russian presidential elections of March 2018 and the Montenegrin general elections of April 2018. I therefore spent most of March and April preparing for these missions. This meant sending a lot of emailing organizations in order to persuade them to join our programme, contacting government bodies to obtain accreditation, creating and maintaining the financial budget, and keeping in touch with EOM participants. During the EOMs, me and my fellow Coordinators worked around the clock to ensure a smooth programme and, in some cases, the security of the participants. Personally, I gave election training and arranged accreditation in Montenegro, and handled all finances in both Russia and Montenegro. While heavy in workload, the EOMs presented the most fun part of my internship, as they allowed me to work with very inspiring people in an extremely interesting environment. Because of my first-hand ‘field experience’ with these missions, I was also asked to be involved in updating Silba’s security protocols and Code of Conduct used on its EOMs. Later, I was asked to revise Silba’s EOM Handbook, which meant taking all my comments, criticisms, lessons learned and updated protocols and translating them to useful information for next missions. In the end, I produced a completely revised version of the Handbook. Later, I conducted interviews with former and current Coordination Teams in order to improve Silba’s evaluation and feedback processes during the missions. All in all, I learned a great deal from these missions, especially because I was involved in all sides of the organizational process, from preparation to execution to evaluation and feedback.

Lastly, I had several large and time-consuming tasks related to the development of the organization. The first was helping create promotional material for Silba. As I had no experience with graphic design whatsoever, I was taken aback a bit by this task, but I was given a full week to get to know the tools used (Adobe Indesign)
to create a set of flyers. Using a lot of Google Search skills and receiving feedback at every stage, I eventually managed to create some decent designs, mostly using trial and error. Next to this, I was tasked with gathering and archiving all receipts for membership registration of 2017. Finally, I was asked to make an feasibility assessment of a funds application.

All in all, I had a great variety of tasks, something that I had not expected when starting the internship. I greatly enjoyed most of the tasks, as they were often close to things I had learned in my courses in university(such as writing a policy paper) but had real-world significance and impacted the work of others.

**Evaluation**

Overall, I was very satisfied with my internship. I learned a great deal, had enough responsibility, learned to work better in both teams and individually and met a great deal of inspiring people. In terms of learning goals, I became very familiar with Election Observation Methodology, the relevance of Election Observations and their place in the larger political structure of a country. As such, I became somewhat of an Election Observation Expert, as I worked on methodology, a practical handbook for Election Observation, experienced Election Observation myself, and did some evaluation after Election Observation Missions. However, I worked a lot less on internationalization of Silba than expected. This was mostly because further internationalization was deprioritized by the organization itself. I learned a lot about social media and search engines. Next to this, I got very familiar with the administrative and organizational infrastructure of Silba. I would therefore say that I achieved my learning outcomes to the extent that this was possible within the framework of my internship.

I gained and discovered quite a few competencies, the most surprising of which was learning basic graphic design. Next to this, I learned about teamwork in a more professional setting, as well as learning what it means to work in a team and alone in a high-stress and chaotic environment through the co-ordination of two EOMs. I further strengthened my writing and presenting skills, and learned in practice what the policy feedback loop is about. In this regard, the internship was close to my degree programme. I am definitely grateful for the acquired skills in writing, presenting and team work as acquired in the IR programme. The knowledge I gained in the last years also helped in mentally preparing me for working with the bureaucracies in two post-Soviet democracies. In terms of work ethics, I discovered that I do like to work hard, contrary to what my IR/IO grades perhaps would show. I learned that I will be quick to take initiative as well as responsibility whenever people are depending on me. I feel that I have contributed to the organization on a high level, and have really enjoyed the fact that I was given so much responsibility. I would have liked to have a clearer picture of how much the organization could change during one’s internship, as I was not always prepared for these changes. Also, I felt that communication and evaluation between the intern and Silba’s supervisor could be more formalized both in terms of content and when they take place. Now, I had weekly meetings with my supervisor, but they were not always clearly identifiable as evaluation meetings.
I feel that this internship was able to highlight some of my competencies, gave me a lot of new skills and experiences, and also helped me show how I could put my skills and experiences already present to practice. In this respect, I feel much better prepared for my future and future career. I am thankful for the advice and networking opportunities the people of Silba have been able to give me, and hope to be able to work with them in the future.