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“Military cultures and education: harmonizing or standardizing Europe?”

“I fully support this French Presidency's initiative to explore the possibilities for improving the exchange of officers during their basic training. I consider it an important contribution to increasing the interoperability of the European armed forces and to providing full knowledge of EU instruments and EU objectives to ensure the comprehensive approach towards crisis management that we want to promote.” Javier Solana¹

European military officer's education is now at the beginning of a new era. The recent developments taking place in the European Union environment concerning an initiative meant to ease and foster mobility among military institutions are questioning the sacred value of sovereignty with regard to the education and training of one's national military elites. The emerging and consolidating European Security and Defence Policy has paved the way, during the last decade, towards a greater European conscience in the policies and actions of the national armed forces. The initiative, often named “military Erasmus”, is meant to raise this conscience in the early education of the military officers, but isn't it another top-down project meant to feed the fiction of a “European army”?

Military officers' educational institutions educate and, for achieving this objective, they have to define themselves in this field. For some of them, they chose to integrate fully the European Higher Education Area and be legitimately recognised as excellence poles in implementing the Bologna process. Moreover, officers' institutions educate the future military elites, and then, have to conciliate the intellectual and vocational aspects of the profession's requirements in their curricula. National equilibrium would be challenged by the new European projects and the question is thus asked whether Europe is looking for a new equilibrium based on a fiction or based on the sum of the national cultures in terms of military education.

1. The European initiative for enhancing a common defence culture

1.1 Military education in Europe: a mosaic of national traditions

Military higher education, i.e. educational processes aimed at training cadets to their future functions as officers, remains very much coloured by the national visions regarding the role of their armed forces in defence and security issues. Through the recent emergence of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) – to be renamed Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) if the Lisbon treaty is ratified – the question was asked whether this had an impact on the shape of military higher education and the curricula of the future military officers. The answer, at the time being, is negative. There was no general assimilation of this particular form of education related to the change happening in its environment. However, an “organic” mutation can be observed.

In the preparation of the European initiative for the development of exchanges of young officers during their initial training, which will be detailed in this article, the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) provided a stocktaking on the European dimension of

¹ High Representative – Secretary General of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Document S309/08, Brussels, November 10th, 2008.

military higher education². This document showed that some connections exist between the national systems, which should be improved if Europe is willing to be seen as a security and defence cultural area.

Exchanges already take place between military institutions at the basic level of officers' training with various shapes and objects. They extend from simple courtesy visits made by commanding staff or students for one or two days to the complete integration of curricula - measured in years- between two EU Member States. They can involve students, scientific, academic or administrative staffs. They can take place in the academic aspect of a cadet's education or in vocational –i.e. military and professional- training activities. They can also be organised between military institutions or between one military institution and a civilian one, for example a university. Most of the time, however, they are organised on the basis of bilateral agreements and do not resort to exchange tools used by their civilian counterparts, such as the Erasmus programme. Some military institutions convened for example to meet in branches' configuration in order to exchange their views on the training of their cadets. The European Air Force Academies (EUAFA) launched initiatives for enhancing cultural exchanges and sport competitions between the Air Force military institutions for short periods. This forum, where commandants of the institutions meet, is also a place for discussions about the curricula and the way to bring them closer for allowing longer exchanges. Within the Navy forum, called the Conference of Superintendents, such discussions also took place notably on the Bologna process implementation challenges. However, no exchange possibilities were concretely realised on the basis of exchange programmes and this issue was largely reported into the stocktaking together with financial and organisational ones³.

The organisation of the military curricula is also very different from one Member State to another. The Bologna process, meant to upraise the obstacles to mobility, is considered as a global asset of military educational systems for joining the European Higher Education Area and being assimilated to excellence poles regarding their academic education. 17 Member States have started, or did, to transform their military education to integrate the Bologna *acquis*. Nevertheless, the Bologna process does not prescribe to implement all the three cycles. Then, what might be observed is that some officers' curricula contain only the first cycle (Bachelor), some only the second (Master), others the both of them, in the compulsory basic training a cadet shall attend in order to be commissioned. In some cases also, the third cycle (Doctorate) is proposed to the future officers. For those that had implemented the Bologna process, the ECTS accreditation system was generally shared and could consequently help in the recognition of foreign education.

The stocktaking document also showed a shared expectation in the European Security and Defence College for organising common educational modules to be proposed to the cadets regarding major international security-related topics, such as the ESDP itself.

Then, if not allowing to observe one common Europe in the field of military education, important tendencies noticed from the stocktaking suggested that an effort coordinated at the EU level would help educational systems to open to their European counterparts.

² General Secretariat of the Council, Document 12843/08.

³ Notably, the point was raised that the exchanges would depend on the proficiency of the cadets in following education given in foreign languages.

1.2 The initiative for the exchange of young officers, inspired from Erasmus

The birth of the initiative for the exchanges of officers at their basic education level has been a slow process.

The French EU Presidency –held during the second semester 2008- decided to propose an initiative to boost the exchanges of cadets between the military higher education institutions and created an especially dedicated working cell within the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) structure. From September 2007 to June 2008, the so-called “military Erasmus” cell studied the interests of such an initiative for the Member States and their institutions. It worked on a questionnaire to be sent to the Member States to proceed to the above mentioned stocktaking of the military education in Europe and to ask the military institutions about their expectations related to the project. From the stocktaking, a preparatory group drafted a series of recommendations with the objective to improve the European interconnection of the educational systems.

The Council of the European Union, in its Defence configuration, endorsed these recommendations in the Declaration of November 10th 2008⁴.

The Declaration introduces this initiative in stating that it is meant to develop interoperability in the basic education of the officers, with respect to the national specificities and traditions.

The first part of the recommendations deals with measures to be taken at the European level. Those that are common to both academic and vocational training - i.e. professional and military - include the needs for comparing the skills and competencies required from the cadet along his/her curriculum, for creating a database presenting the programmes offered by the educational institutions and their demand/offer in exchanges, and for identifying the obstacles to the enhancement of these exchanges. On the academic aspects of the training more specifically, the Declaration recommends to develop ESDP and international security training modules to be proposed to the military institutions and to ease the access to internet distance learning for enlarging the academic offer of the institutions, notably in the field of ESDP education. The ESDC shall play a major role in that particular area while it is already its mission of education but addressing other publics. Besides, it is asked to develop, on the model of the academic training, credit transfer systems such as the ECTS and attraction mechanisms for exchanges in the military training.

The second part of the recommendations addresses the Member States and their military institutions. Two of these recommendations' points are related to the Bologna process implementation. Member States are asked to encourage this integration of the *acquis* and to recognise education received in other Member States, which eventually is a major point of the process. Moreover, they are asked to encourage mobility of the students and teaching staffs and to promote the development of the education in and of two foreign languages within the military institutions.

The third part concerns the follow-up and the concrete implementation of the initiative. It plans the creation of an implementation group and outlines the need for a continued assessment of relevant measures with regard to the objective of the initiative.

1.3 Fostering a common culture of security and defence through exchanges

⁴ Council of the European Union, Document 5155/1/08.

The initiative thus conceived intends to enhance a European culture in the field of security and defence, in fostering the conscience of sharing a same identity and objective among the concerned actors.

At the individual level firstly, simplifying mobility and acquiring new know-that and know-how would greatly contribute to professional development and broadmindedness of the future officer. Moving in an open space of education would also favour his/her self-learning of the ethics and values which compose the European construction. This would apply to exchange students but also to hosting institution's students through social interaction. The scientific, academic and instruction staffs exchanged would benefit also, for their own works, from interaction with new ways of thinking and doing.

Military institutions, then, would obviously benefit from this opportunity to show the excellence of their education and to demonstrate their role and visibility in the European Higher Education Area.

Member States would have the use of these constituted capacities of experts in ESDP functioning but also in multilateral logics. Their armed forces would improve their abilities to work with their foreign partners and allies.

Finally, the European Union itself would very certainly benefit from the apprenticeship of interoperability by the officers for the multilateral operations it would be willing to engage in.

We may propose, in that sense, to distinguish two main directions that use the initiative for acting on the ESDP acculturation and stimulate two correspondent aspects of an emerging culture: a formal direction and a normative one.

The formal direction is meant, in our mind, to accustom students to the role they might fulfil in the European defence context. Although European armed forces may be involved in various forms of multinational operations such as United-Nations' operations or NATO missions, flexibility shall be outlined as a major asset of the European officer's nature. At the institutional level, that suggests notably to launch a debate within the institutions on the conditions of use of languages such as English, adaptation of ECTS system to vocational training, or on the use of cooperation instruments such as the Erasmus. The recommendations outline some of these points, as explained above, in stressing the mobility challenges. Through exchanges of knowledge and values, the initiative would trigger a "Europeanization" of the defence education and consequently stimulate the emergence of a European culture of defence.

The normative direction deals with the amount of knowledge of the students related to the European defence issues, which the recommendations encourage to raise. In that sense, this point is subject for debate only at the national military institutions' level: amount of courses related to such issues, importance of these teachings in the curricula (compulsory or not, ECTS attached, time organisation...). The military institutions are thus asked to educate the cadets to the "Europeanization" of defence, which is expected to contribute to an other aspect of the European culture in security and defence: a European defence culture.

Besides these two main directions followed by the initiative, a third one might be outlined: a "crossover" possibility. It gathers both the formal and normative directions in providing an adequate European environment to a specific ESDP education. A practical implementation of this idea might be developed through projects of combined educations that are called for in the recommendations. The organisation of common academic modules by partner institutions, probably under the aegis of the ESDC, would provide the students a common knowledge in a common environment. In that sense, academic resources might also be rationalized and common values may arise from these social interactions. This specific possibility would then

combine both the two cultural aspects mentioned above and constitute an important symbol for the emergence of the European culture of security and defence.

2. The European Union and its emerging role as a security culture actor

2.1 Efficiency of the EU in being a cultural stimulator

The political declaration issued by the 27 Ministers of Defence in November 2008 addresses the 27 Member States of the EU and plans that the European Security and Defence College assures the coordination of the initiative. The European Union is, however, only one chain of the security strategies of the Member States. The 12 “new members”, joining in 2004 and 2007, have not mainly integrated the Union for security and defence purposes. 10 of them, the biggest in terms of population, had actually joined NATO before the EU⁵. The European Security and Defence Policy was obviously not considered as being the most important instrument for assuring security according to these Member States, counting now for about half of the EU sovereignties. The European Union itself is not a dedicated forum for these issues, security and defence being part of the second pillar of the EU policies, and is mostly concerned with Community matters, i.e. more economical issues.

The European Security and Defence Policy is very new and, one might say, still emerging, although NATO has proved its stability over the last 5 decades. The Alliance already issued a certain number of evidences showing that it has raised a culture of security and defence, notably in standardizing procedures (STANAG) or dealing with education, through the NATO Defence College. The question might be then asked whether the EU, relying on a fragile experience of security and defence, may be considered as an efficient cultural stimulator. In fact, the ESDP is a common policy of 25 Member States⁶, although NATO gathers 21 of these Member States. Austria, Finland and Sweden choose not to join NATO and preserve their neutrality but participate to the ESDP enterprise, which eventually confirms that the security culture raised by the EU and NATO are different. One security organisation actually gathers all the EU Member States; the Western European Organisation (WEO). However, if the WEO was, at the time the Maastricht treaty⁷ was signed, the common –but unused– reference organisation for a purely European security and defence coordination, the emergence of the ESDP progressively withdrew its substance from the WEO’s *raison d’être*. The Lisbon treaty⁸ –to be currently ratified– even copied articles 5 and V of the respective Washington and Brussels treaties. Consequently, the EU also formally appears as a potential cultural stimulator in security and defence aspects even if the definition of this new role for it is still an ongoing emergence.

In December 2003, although Europe was shared between its alignment with the Bush administration’s doctrine of intervention and its principles based on international law regarding the conflict to come in Iraq, the ESDP stakeholders⁹ nevertheless agreed on a security strategy defining the most important threats for the European security¹⁰. These were defined as:

⁵ Cyprus and Malta did not join NATO.

⁶ Denmark has opted out from the ESDP and Ireland participates on a very limited basis.

⁷ Treaty establishing notably the European Union and its ESDP dimension.

⁸ Article 42.7 Treaty on the European Union, Lisbon treaty consolidated version (05/2009).

⁹ Including the 12 States which, at this time, were still to join the Union.

¹⁰ European Security Strategy « A secure Europe in a better world », Brussels, 12 December 2003.

- Terrorism;
- Non-proliferation of weapons of mass-destruction (WMDs);
- Regional conflicts;
- Failure of States;
- Organised crime.

These threats were in no case intended as being synonymous of armed intervention. The strategy document has no legal force from a formal point of view¹¹. Diplomacy remains the privileged instrument of the EU within the Common Foreign and Security Policy, which ESDP is an aspect of. However, if one of these threats is realised and if diplomacy fails, the ESDP may be used as a coercitive instrument with respect to the United-Nations Charter and regarding the actions possibly taken within the North-Atlantic Alliance.

The Security Strategy was updated as to integrate the new emerging threats in December 2008. Cyber security, energy security and climate change were thus integrated into the scope. In practice, the ESDP interventions are more pragmatically motivated and, in a number of situations, the missions make use of either civilian or military, or both, instruments. The external anticipation of its own security lead Europe to send notably police forces or legal assistance on the field it considers as being challenging. The EU vision of its external security maintaining can thus be considered as “soft”, compared to NATO doctrines, and as a sign of cultural individuality.

The European Union can legitimately be considered as a cultural actor in other sector of its activities. If the initiative for the exchange of young officers is about the future of its security policy, it is also, and maybe above all, about the higher education of its citizens. In this area, which is at the basis of “culture” in its most substantial meaning, the EU has done a lot to outline its assets. All the 27 EU Member States are taking part to the Bologna process for lifting “the barriers to knowledge” and realise the European Higher Education Area. The European Community, however, did not wait for this continental coordination and, since 1988, launched its famous Erasmus programme for the exchange of students in higher education. This programme allows the signatory institutions of an Erasmus university charter to exchange students, staff and administrative personnel among them through mobility or in putting knowledge in common in creating combined educational modules. In that sense, Erasmus shall be conceived as a “toolbox”. The programme concerns not only the academic education but also the vocational one, since 2007. In the preparation and conduct of the initiative for the exchange of young officers, this particular *acquis communautaire* is conceived as the main toolbox to be used for effective mobility.

Thus, the European Union -to be understood as including the European Community- is indubitably to be seen as a cultural area in its broadest meaning. The EU has already proved itself a reliable cultural stimulator in the past and, through this initiative inspired from Erasmus, is now looking forward, on the basis of its experience, to build a similar cultural community in the field of security and defence.

2.2 Its means: harmonizing without standardizing

The initiative for the exchange of young officers rests upon the basis of the Europeanization of the higher education itself. The Bologna process and the Erasmus programmes are now, or

¹¹ A project of « white book » on the European security and defence has been discussed many times along the last few years. Such a document would give more legal force to its content than the Security Strategy.

are about to be, widely considered as a stable and consensual ground for making the higher education area emerging. Within the European Union, a majority of military institutions are now aware of the importance of the potentialities of such instruments. Many of them already implemented these actions, some are about to do so. It is, here again, a sign of this cultural conscience the European Union is seeking to foster within its frontiers. Due to the specificities of their activities, i.e. educating the tacticians and strategists of the future armed forces for the new kind of missions they will have to lead, the military institutions could have made the choice to remain outside the stream. However, societal and practical motivation lead them to “reconfigure” the shape of their education. Indeed, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, national armed forces and their *raison d’être* were challenged because of the disappearance of the “enemy”. On the one hand, the support for military elites being rapidly –for the needs of their protection mission- trained mainly for fight considerably lost importance. Public opinions considered them unadapted to the new missions of a new world. Then, the choice was made to train them also as societal elites, i.e. intellectual and educated actors of their society, which suggested a need for the military institutions to become comparable to the civilian higher education. On the other hand, more practically, the need for numerous human capacities lost its importance and many European armies made the choice during these last two decades to end conscription and retire a considerable amount of their human resources. A difficulty was revealed when these officers had to reconvert themselves on the civilian labour market: they were under-qualified. Anticipating the reconversion issue has been an other stimulation in bringing the military higher education closer to its civilian counterpart.

This assimilation of military education with the civilian one is not sign of a standardization of the higher education in general, nonetheless. The military specificity is to be preserved and the Bologna process is providing a common understanding of the educational issues rather than standardizing the curricula. Even if it organises the studies in cycles, the process does not prescribe any particular pre-determined form: studies may be bachelor or master levels. National military educational systems remain diverse in their organisation of the officers’ basic training; some choosing the bachelor level while others continue to the master one and may even propose doctoral studies. The only standardized issue is the ECTS –inherited from the Community Erasmus programme- for the accreditation of the academic modules or courses. However, in this particular matter, only the name “ECTS” is standardized because the States develop individually the criteria of the ECTS accreditation¹².

The initiative itself is not intended to standardize the military curricula. The national institutions remain free for organising their exchanges in the way they prefer. The initiative is only meant to provide the necessary instruments for the institutions that face difficulties in finding the suitable partners. To sum it up, it is about lifting the barriers...To military knowledge. In that sense, the only implementation of the Bologna process actions and of the Erasmus is not sufficient because of the specificities of the military education, notably with regard to the vocational education. Is it not either about standardizing the exchanges procedures. As mentioned in the previous part, some institutions use to meet in specialized *fora* such as the Conference of Superintendents of the Naval Academies or the EUAFA for Air Force educational institutions. These *fora* have already thought about exchange strategies and the European initiative is ultimately meant to hand in the new shape of military education to these *fora*, which are the most suitable for discussing the concrete exchanges, regarding to their activity in a specific armed force branch. In the form of the initiative as much as in its

¹² According to the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), the ECTS are defined according to the student’s workload and/or the learning outcomes expected from the module or course. Nevertheless, reports showed that the former is often privileged and the BFUG is now seeking to encourage taking into account the both of them in the accreditation process.

content, it shall then rather be talked about harmonisation –bringing closer- than standardization.

Europeanizing the military higher education is thus about preserving the specificities of the armed forces' components, but also the national know-how, in line with the European principle of subsidiarity: relevant actions shall be taken at the most adapted level. The initiative thus respects the most important principles at the basis of the European Union's action in order to stimulate an interoperability of the capacities as early as the basic education level.

Some elements of standardization however appear in the content of the European initiative. The preparation of common educational modules, first related to ESDP and certainly later also about international security issues, is already ongoing and the results will be proposed, within a short term, to the military institutions that would like to benefit from an expertise concerning these issues. The European Security and Defence College, which primarily trains civil servants and career officers to ESDP notions and developments, intends to adapt its orientation course to a cadet attendance. The content of this educational module would then be standardized as much as a pedagogical exercise can be considered as being "standardized". This aspect of the initiative deals with a common security and defence reality and, as a consequence, it is not meant to challenge the national characteristics of officers' education.

Finally, it shall be mentioned that the initiative is ultimately addressed to the cadets, who will be at the centre of this mobility. The exchange of knowledge in military education is primarily intended to feed the competences of the future actors of the European defence. They shall thus be made responsible also for their own education. In order to hand in these expected results of the initiative, a website and a forum will be built in the coming months as to allow discussions and feedbacks of this cultural enterprise. In doing so in the context of the initiative, the European Union is, in our sense, promoting the idea of a "soft-governance" in the cultural area. The EU must leave the Member States free of their action in the conduct of their future exchanges, but a coordination of these actions is helping in giving the tools to ease the emergence of a common culture in security and defence.

Conclusions:

In the preparation and conduct of the initiative for the exchange of young officers, specific attention was made to respect the specificities of the national systems and the room for manoeuvre of the institutions responsible for the education of the future military elites. In that sense, the initiative fully complies with the spirit of the European Security and Defence Policy, which is about preserving the sovereignty of the States in defining their defence priorities. The process in which these institutions engaged is not a top-down one but rather a bottom-up one. It is about meeting the individual resources and projects concerning the shape of the military education in order to define the scope of the commonalities and, therefore, to start growing new projects from this ground.

The emergence of this expected common culture of security and defence at the EU level is, and will be, a long process. The first exchanges may be expected to take place on a middle term. The Bologna Follow-Up Group itself, in its most optimistic forecasts, hopes that the process be completed with the creation of the European Higher Education Area only in 2010. It would only be on a long-term perspective that we could thus expect to measure the first

concrete effects of this European acculturation among the officers. At the action level, they will be noticed when the cadets will participate as officers to multilateral operations - which might be relatively quick - but, at the decision level, it must be waited that these officers reach real decisional high-ranked positions within their national armed forces –which will eventually take much more time.

Nevertheless, even if the effects of this initiative might not be fully measured before long, clues that were given by the example of the Erasmus programme for the civilian higher education, now considered as a symbol of the European integration, assure that this pro-activity of the military institutions in the context of the ESDP grants the success to come.