

## **Towards a European culture of Defence in officers' education: The initiative for the exchange of young officers inspired from Erasmus**

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*“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 Solana, High Representative – Secretary General of the CFSP, Document S309/08, Brussels, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

### Introduction:

Although European military officers basic education has always been considered as a particular island of the education, many initiatives from these institutions have flourished in the last decade to affirm their position in the higher education area. With respect to their specificities indeed, all the 27 Member States officers' educational models assert their belonging to the higher education. Before starting the training itself, all their cadets have completed the secondary education. The armed forces' missions and needs however require specific skills and competencies which can only be acquired through a professionally focused training. The challenge remained thus to conciliate their final ends with the status of societal elite that is expected from the future officers, what military education did in looking for institutional legitimacy on the European higher education stage.

In the mean time, the quick growth of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) at the European Union (EU) level hurried the search for flexible and adapted capacities for its missions. Then, the national armed forces participating to this evolving policy progressively engaged in reshaping the modern officer with respect to their own priorities and corporate traditions.

The initiative launched by the French EU Presidency during the second semester 2008 for the exchange of young officers, often named “Military Erasmus” because of the inspiration taken from the now famous symbol of European integration, is meant to meet these needs and contextual dynamics.

## I. Officers' education and European integration

Since the end of the Cold War, priorities in the hierarchy of threats for the European States have changed. Fighting against an identifiable armed force happened to be less relevant in the defence policies although new multinational logics and enemies were emerging. These new missions, such as the “Petersberg missions” for the European area, asked from the national armed forces a greater understanding of the globality of the “Peace and reconstruction” definitions. The emergence of the ESDP in the nineties confirmed that trend and went even further in this new logic in conceiving the armed forces not only as a “defence” instrument but also as a “security” means. The Lisbon Treaty expected to be brought into effect in 2009 adds solidarity and -but it is much more subject for debate- collective defence to the armed forces missions' scope. It emphasizes also, in the line of the project of Constitutional Treaty, the need for a development of the capacities. To this end, the Treaty, if actually implemented, “institutionalizes” the European Defence Agency set up in 2006 and allows the creation of a permanent reinforced cooperation structure of the most advanced Member States in capacities-building. Human means being the first resource of the armed forces, they had to adapt to such a fast-moving environment and, quickly, needs appeared to teach their future leaders the role they would have to play in the modern defence policies, which implied a comprehensive and intellectual education.

In the 2003 study of Prs. Harry Kirkels, Wim Klinkert, René Moelker, entitled « *Officer Education: The road to Athens!* »<sup>1</sup>, a distinction was made between different traditions of academic training in the context of military officers education. Two models were emphasized considering the nature of the officer and his role in the peace construction: the “Sparta” and “Athens” models. The former outlines the need for a military officer to be firstly an elite soldier, with regard to its behaviour on the operation field. The latter favours the vision of the military officer being an intellectual elite, ready for dealing with the complexity of the social, economical and policy-related tasks of his or her mission. The authors of this study were calling for a more academic-oriented education of the military officers, i.e. an Athenian model, relying on five important assessments:

- Nowadays, focusing the education on the fight training remains necessary but is not sufficient anymore;
- An education system essentially focused on the teaching of human values and practical knowledge, as it is given in classical academies, might attract an inadequate public with regard to the new missions. Then, it might not be adapted enough to the political demands that are emerging from a European environment;

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Kirkels, Wim Klinkert, René Moelker (eds.), *Officer Education: The road to Athens !*, NL Arms, Netherlands Annual Review of Military studies, 2003.

- The competency's profile of an officer shall better correspond to professional capacities than to practical knowledge;
- A growing integration of the civilian national higher education and the military education system is better suited regarding the missions' flexibility and allows budgetary coherency;
- Military academic education shall follow the university standards and, in order to provide an adapted study environment, it shall be given within civilian universities.

Effectively, the European Professional Military Educational Institutions (EPMEIs) seem to have chosen this philosophy, since the end of the bipolar era, in growingly “injecting” intellectual requirements into the contents of their curricula.

The shape of the military officers education has been consequently adapted to this common stream of intellectualisation and turned to be closer and closer to the shape of the civilian higher education. Giuseppe Caforio, in its 2000 study “*The European Officer: A Comparative view on Selection and Education*”<sup>2</sup>, outlined two models of socialisation in higher education military institutions: the divergent model and the convergent one.

Giuseppe Caforio thereby wanted to observe if a studied institution was following the civilian university model that we know in most of the European countries - convergent then with the civilian system - or not - divergent from the civilian system, then. Six criteria were retained for questioning the socialisation process within the institution:

- Selection procedure;
- Teaching staff;
- Share of academic and military educations in the curriculum;
- Chronological organisation of these two aspects of the education;
- Civilian value of the diploma;
- And the type of socialisation favoured within the institution.

A classification on a scale was then established, from divergent to convergent institutions.

However, this distinction showed its limits in the observation of the educational models followed by the EU Member States. Officers' education is in most cases indeed operated by a few institutions, not only one. Some are in charge of the military and leadership training while others train the cadets to the academic-relevant aspects of their function. For example, in the German model, both of the aspects are conferred to different institutions and the analysis of the education policy in the universities of the Bundeswehr alone, model of convergence according to Pr. Caforio, hides somehow the fact that the training of an officer shall be looked at as a whole. On the other way round, studies<sup>3</sup> showed that the British system of recruitment favours candidates with a fairly strong academic background obtained in

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<sup>2</sup> Giuseppe Caforio (eds.), *The European officer: A comparative view on selection and education*, European Research Group on Military and Society, Edizioni ETS 2000

<sup>3</sup> Alex Alber, “*La formation initiale des officiers : Une comparaison européenne*”, *Thèse de doctorat* (PhD thesis) of the University of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, 27 November 2007.

civilian higher education. This implicit “delegation” of the academic training responsibility makes the British system a much more “convergent” one in spirit than previously suggested.

The common European dynamics in higher education nevertheless gave right to these authors’ obvious expectations to bring closer the academic training to the civilian higher education system. Most of the EU Member States, 17 out of 22 States having national education capacities<sup>4</sup>, have indeed implemented the Bologna Process in their basic officers education systems.

The Bologna Process, initiated with the June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1999 Common Declaration of the European Education Ministries and now joined by 46 European States, is meant to upraise obstacles to mobility in higher education. Three main directions are outlined through the process for attaining this particular objective:

- Education recognition, notably in implementing a credit system such as the ECTS;
- Curricula harmonisation in setting 3 main study cycles (Bachelor-Master-Doctorate);
- Quality assurance of the education.

In joining the Bologna’s stream on a voluntary basis<sup>5</sup> the EPMEIs showed their will to see their education as being a legitimate higher education form. Nevertheless, their internal arrangements for implementing it remained very much coloured by their military specificities. National traditions in officers’ education, which could not be transformed within a very brief period, left differences exist between the organisations of the academic curricula among the EPMEIs, as showed in these following figures<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> General Secretariat of the Council, Document 12843/08.

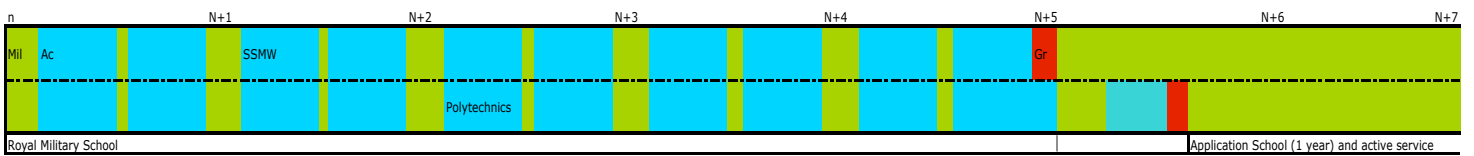
<sup>5</sup> The Process applies to forms of education administratively depending on higher education Ministries in a first place. Other forms of education, like artistic ones, may be taken into account *via* specific programmes called “Tuning” but, for the time being, military education is not.

<sup>6</sup> These figures are taken from Sylvain Paile, *Adaptation de la Politique de l’Enseignement pour l’Ecole royale militaire de Belgique aux évolutions de la Politique Européenne de Sécurité Commune*, May 2008. This research report is mentioned in the European stocktaking provided by the European Security and Defence College, Document 12843/08. These figures report Army officers’ basic education in a sample of countries, which implemented the Bologna Process within the educational military institutions.

## Organisation of the academic education in 7 Army officers national education systems

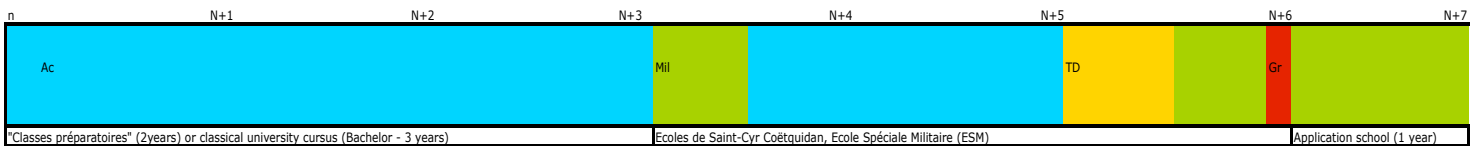
- Mil Military training period
- Ac Academic period
- Gr Graduation exam
- TD Particular time dedicated to thesis drafting (if applicable)
- Pr Practice, Stage

### Belgium



Source: Direction de l'Enseignement Académique DEAO (Academic Education Department)

### France



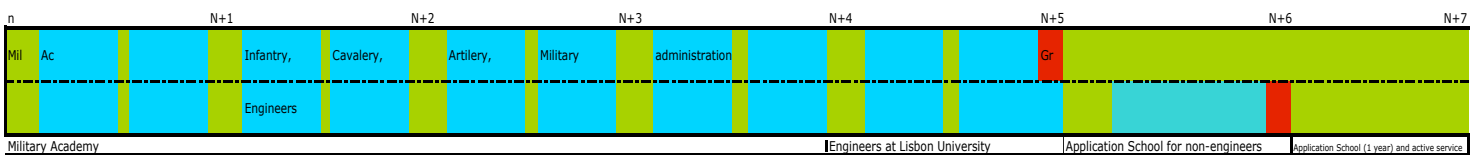
Source : Direction International Affairs ESCC (Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan), ESCC website : <http://www.st-cyr.terre.defense.gouv.fr/>

### Germany



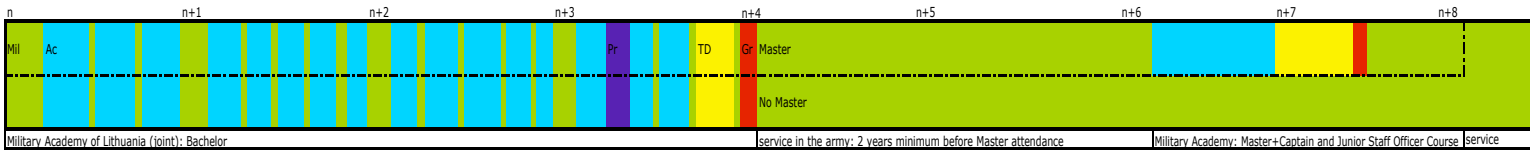
Source : Public Relations Section of the University of the Bundeswehr, Munich (Briefing)

### Portugal



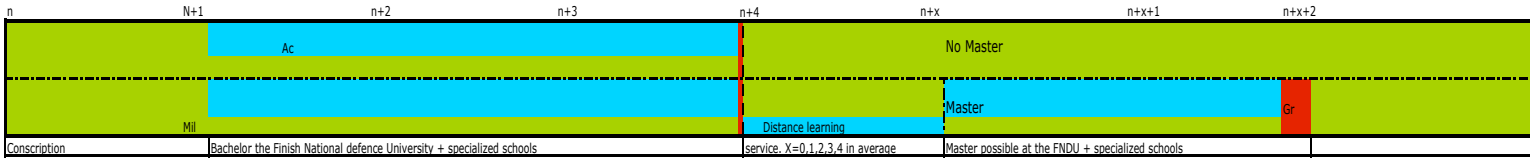
Source : Studies and Planning Department of the Military Academy of Portugal (Briefing)

## Lithuania



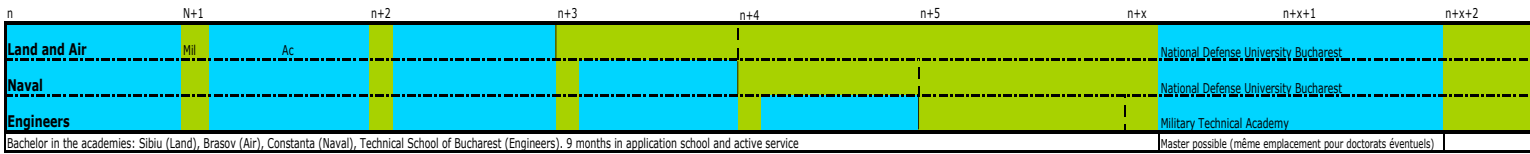
Source : Chief of Staff of the Military Academy of Lithuania (Briefing), Scholarship for the year 2007-2008 (<http://www.ika.lt/index.php/en/112898/>)

## Finland



Source : Finish National Defence University, Department of Military Pedagogy (Briefing)

## Romania



Source: Romania National Defence University (Briefing)

The integration of the Bologna *acquis*, in theory, was meant in the first place to lower the existing obstacles to mobility between the military institutions. Many of them these last years signed - or expressed their will to do so - an Erasmus Charter in order to take part to the European Communities' exchange programme. Up to date, no such exchange took place between military institutions and voices raised to create instruments adapted to the military education specificities.

## II. The initiative for officers' exchanges: fostering the ESDP through exchanges

The birth of the initiative for the exchanges of officers at their basic education level has been a slow process. Many countries and EPMEIs had already thought before about exchanging their cadets or their know-how in the broad sense, not only within the Erasmus framework.

EPMEIs convened for example to meet in components configuration in order to exchange their views on the training of their cadets. The European Air Force Academies (EUAFAs) 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.

None of these fora actually meets in a purely “European” configuration in the sense that their members could all be ESDP Member States. Then, an initiative in the European Union’s configuration remained desirable and needed.

The French EU Presidency 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 a stocktaking of the military education in Europe and to ask their opinion to the EPMEIs about their expectations related to the project.

The European Security and Defence College (ESDC) - created in 2005 - analysed the answers to the questionnaire and drafted the stocktaking<sup>7</sup>. This document showed a wide variety in the European military education not only in the organisation of the curricula – some Member States experiencing basic training only at the Bachelor level and others at the Master level - but also in the shape of their exchanges - from the complete integration of their curricula to the simple courtesy visits. This brief study also demonstrated the need for a deepened education in ESDP-related issues and a major interest in the development of exchanges, even expressed from Member States having no national education capacity<sup>8</sup>. This stocktaking revealed helpful for the drafting of recommendations. The Council of the European Union, in its Defence configuration, endorsed these recommendations in the Declaration of November 10<sup>th</sup> 2008<sup>9</sup>.

The Declaration states that this initiative is meant to develop interoperability in the basic education of the officers, with respect to the national specificities and traditions. Then, all the measures recommended should not be understood as a “harmonisation” in the meaning of a “standardization” of the curricula, but more as lowering the differences that might impede the mobility of students and teaching staffs. Three directions were stressed for achieving this objective.

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

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<sup>7</sup> General Secretariat of the Council, Document 12843/08.

<sup>8</sup> Cyprus, Luxemburg and Malta.

<sup>9</sup> Council of the European Union, Document 5155/1/08

creating a database presenting the programmes offered by the EPMEIs 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 EPMEIs.

The third part, which shall be analysed later in the course of this article, concerns the implementation arrangements of the initiative and organises the short-term developments.

### III. The enhancement of a European culture of security and defence

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.



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 EPMEIs 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 EPMEIs 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.

#### IV. The way ahead, remaining issues

The initiative for the exchange of young officers has been endorsed in principle. It is a subsidiary implementation that is now to be expected: every actor shall act at its own level according to its room for manoeuvre. The recommendations are a first step towards the improvement of mobility but issues remain and other obstacles might also emerge in the course of implementation.

One of these challenges will obviously concern calendars. As showed in the study sample presented earlier in this text, military institutions have traditions and visions of the organisation of their curricula that differ one from another. Consequently, the identification of the periods when an exchange could take place will depend not only of the potential sending institution but also of the hosting one. This probable obstacle is illustrated by the case of the calendars of the German universities of defence in Munich and Hamburg. Both of them are the only institutions in Europe indeed that follow a trimester organisation whereas others follow the semester system. Practically, what would happen with a foreign student hosted in Germany? He - or she - would complete his/her academic course and would then have leftover time before restarting courses in his/her national institution<sup>10</sup>. Starting another course would be meaningless if the students could not attend it fully. Improving mobility through the Bologna Process, in the particular German case, would probably lead on the long-term to a change in the structure of the education even if the Process does not intend to standardize the curricula.

At the appropriate decisional level also, the debate shall be launched about the budget to dedicate to this initiative because, even if applying a certain principle of reciprocity, money would be a major challenge in the improvement of the exchange's quantity.

More generally also, one might ask about the differentiated effects on the military and the academic education policies of the implementation of what we could call the "package of encouragement", mentioned in the recommendations:

- Integration of the Bologna Process, of which the recognition of training delivered in other Member States is a part;
- Signature of Erasmus charters;
- Training in foreign languages.

Prospectively, the second and the third points of this package shall be differently appreciated following the aspect of the education for which the mobility is to be debated. The implementation of a recognition system for the military training, on the model of the ECTS, is yet to be almost created.

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<sup>10</sup> This argument certainly explains why, during the discussions on the practical implementation of the initiative held in Paris 13-14 November 2008, German speakers insisted on the full-cursus exchanges, which would erase this particular issue.

Only a few EPMEIs have already converted it for this particular aspect of the education. The hierarchical interactions that are prominent in the context of the military training especially might also impede the enhancement of a participative (instructors-cadets-administration) quality assurance system. Concerning the language education, notably in its education-in-foreign-languages aspect, it shall be taken into account that the apprenticeship of the use of arms – ships and aircrafts included - is not only a very important element of the overall education, for which the understanding of the cadet shall be asserted, but also an important part of the socialisation of the cadet and a self-identification element. Then, traditions might be very much anchored and reveal difficult to move on.

A final observation about implementation would concern the application scope of this expected mobility. As showed in the earlier presented study sample, a few national systems experience Master education only at the advanced level of the officers' education, i.e. during the course of their career. For these Member States, basic education consists in the graduate education only. In the context of the military education, this period is certainly more dedicated to the first apprenticeship of the national role of the officer. He or She has to accustom with the position and role an officer shall have in the national armed forces and, as it may be necessary in many European countries, consolidate its language skills. Then, if it were privileged to enhance mobility at the most favourable Master level, social acculturation - one of the most considerable element of the exchanges - would be undermined by professional differences existing between participants, some being cadets while others being high-ranked officers. The initiative shall also apply, as it was stressed in the stocktaking, to cadets educated abroad because their countries have no national capacity for military education. In that particular case, their hosting institutions shall be especially encouraged to implement the initiative.

A monitoring shall then accompany this implementation in order to identify the unpredicted obstacles and remedy those foreseen above in formulating potential solutions. In the mean time, this survey shall allow to draw the lines of an administrative framework needed for these exchanges, based on the experience of the Erasmus programmes and structures.

The monitoring, to be coordinated by the European Security and Defence College, is expected to start in early 2009 in order to allow the General Secretariat of the Council, as mentioned in the recommendations, to provide a report as soon as possible. Then, the ESDC plans to detail the stocktaking that was previously made during the preparation process of the initiative, through a deepened questionnaire. Two major objectives were formulated.

The first one is to allow a comparison between the curricula presented by the EPMEIs. In doing so, two aspects are underlined: the organisation of the curricula and the skills and competences expected from a cadet according to the programmes. The first aspect would ease the identification by the institutions of the military or academic periods when they can favourably exchange students with a partner institution and prevent calendar obstacles. The second aspect would allow the EPMEIs to

present the pedagogical outcomes they expect from both the military and academic dimensions of their training and plan the content of education they want to exchange for.

The second objective is to monitor the early implementation of the “package of encouragement”, also in both the military and academic trainings, within the institutions. Then, a close look would be done at the Bologna Process implementation as a “common idiom” for the mobility, the co-operation policies engaged, the education in and of foreign languages, the European –and more specifically ESDP- training capacities, and certainly also at the communication strategies followed by the EPMEIs to inform their counterparts about their educational offers.

All these points, when scientifically observed, will constitute the cornerstone for the creation of the database mentioned in the recommendations and meant to be a roundabout for the meeting of offers and demands of the military higher education institutions in terms of exchanges.

### Conclusion:

The initiative for the exchange of young officers launched by the French EU presidency is, in our sense, fully coherent with the context of the European military higher education. It is an instrument meant to integrate the military institutions into an area of knowledge and know-how and, as such, is only prolonging previous efforts made by these actors to reshape mobility. Specific care were taken in preserving the national visions and traditions in this field but fears may remain that some educational systems, because of their specificities, be left apart from this mobility instrument. In any case, standardization is not looked forward but a certain harmonisation is certainly expected in the perspective of the greatest number of exchanges and the best European integration of the military curricula.

The initiative, inspired from the Erasmus programme, is also a process. The enhancement of a European culture in security and defence to be favoured by this instrument will probably take time. The implementation of the recommendations has already started, for long with respect to some institutions, or is to be started according to the enthusiasm showed by a majority of Member States. Nevertheless, it is very likely that accompanying measures will be required, notably in giving an administrative framework to this instrument. To that end, the European Security and Defence College envisages to discuss the creation of a specific charter, on the model of the Erasmus’ one, to be signed by the participating institutions. It is also very likely that the financial arrangements of the exchanges shall be discussed in this short-term period.

The first exchanges may be expected to take place at 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 at 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.