



European Security and Defence Assembly Assembly of Western European Union

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European young officers exchange scheme (“Military Erasmus”)

Modelled on the civilian Erasmus programme,¹ the military Erasmus aims to encourage European officers to share a common strategic culture from the very early stages of their training. This will help promote improved interoperability and a “common European culture” in a sector where cooperation is still very much intergovernmental. It has become essential for officers to receive common training for the conduct of increasingly complex multinational operations and for them to be open to diverse defence cultures.

In the second half of 2008, at the informal EU defence ministers summit held in Deauville on 2 October, the French EU Presidency succeeded in launching the project for the training and exchange of European officers. At the External Relations Council meeting, held on 10 and 11 November 2008, the 27 issued a joint statement officially adopting the European young officers exchange scheme, modelled on *Erasmus*.²

The young officers exchange scheme is presented as an opportunity and not an obligation. Up until now, in the majority of cases, such reciprocal training arrangements either went unrecognised or were considered as additional to strictly national curricula. As with the civilian Erasmus programme, exchanges of officers between European military academies should be fully recognised and integrated into national training curricula.

Measures planned under the scheme include drawing up a list to identify the training programmes on offer at different European military establishments and creating an IT platform with information on the curricula available in different colleges, allowing them to offer and request places on officer exchanges. On top of this comes the development of common training modules on international security issues. In order to broaden the scope of educational material, there are plans for an Internet-Based Advanced Distance Learning (IDL) system to be developed in close collaboration with the European Security and Defence College (ESDC). An equivalence system for the military components of initial officer training, based on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), is being drawn up to avoid any discrepancies between the training undertaken by European officers. Lastly, it is planned to establish mechanisms to promote the exchanges of young officers and teaching staff. Different travel grant schemes or other incentive schemes remain sensitive issues that have not been broached as yet. The joint statement stresses the fact that the member states should recognise the training that their officers have received abroad, and that they should be encouraged to increase mobility at the same time as putting greater emphasis on language teaching.

A working group comprising representatives of those member states taking part in the scheme is tasked with coordinating the implementation of these measures at European level and initiating common measures at national level. The group may adapt these measures to needs and will meet in the framework of the Executive Academic Board of the European Security and Defence College.

In the first half of 2009, the EU Czech Presidency continued to support the scheme's long-term development. Meeting on 19 February, the implementing working party adopted a 12-month programme of work, which notably included five key practical steps.³ The first consists in setting up ESDP training modules, of at least one week's duration, that can be held in any willing member state. The second aims to establish a legal framework for the exchange of officers. The third concerns the establishment of an internet platform that will enable young officers to share experiences, methods and information throughout Europe. The fourth details ideas for other subjects that might be covered in future training modules, such as humanitarian law, the legal framework for crisis-management operations or communication. And lastly, the fifth sphere of activity entails continuing work, in collaboration with the University of Liège, on a stock-take of the different national military education systems that exist within the EU. Furthermore, the distance learning system and the equivalence system are also in the process of being set up.



These steps are currently being put into practice and a first introductory module on the ESDP took place in Lisbon from 7-11 September 2009. The seminar was hosted by the Portuguese officer academies, under the aegis of the European Security and Defence College, and was attended by 39 cadets from various European colleges for officers in 18 countries (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain).

Introductory module on the ESDP, Lisbon, 7 to 11 September 2009. (Source: French Ministry of Defence)

The European young officers exchange scheme (“military Erasmus”) and the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) are two complementary projects that are essential for promoting common work and understanding. The ESDC provides training in the field of the common security and defence policy (CSDP) at the strategic level in order to promote a common understanding of the CSDP among civilian and military personnel.⁴

At the same time, the European young officers exchange scheme could play a useful role in the long term promoting the emergence of a genuine common European defence culture, despite a number of outstanding – largely financial – question marks.

On 10 March 2010, under the Spanish EU Presidency, two important milestones were reached in the implementation of the European initiative for the exchange of young officers.

Firstly, a standard framework arrangement was agreed in the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) which member states can use when they exchange young officers for training. This diminishes the administrative burden that normally comes when sending military to another country.

Secondly, a credit transfer system was officially put in place that allows member states to recognise more easily the efforts made by a student when he is on an exchange. This system can best be compared with the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) that civilian universities use for their exchange programmes. Thus, cadets who follow an education in another EU member state will no longer have to take the same training in their own country.

¹ Erasmus (*European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*): The Erasmus programme was launched in 1987 with the participation of 11 countries. It enables students to carry out part of their studies in a different European university. Today all 27 EU member states take part in the programme, along with Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey. The Erasmus programme was supported by the Bologna Process set in motion in 1999 to organise higher education on the basis of a three-cycle system (bachelor, master, doctorate) and introduce a university credit system (*European Credit Transfer System*) to facilitate exchanges and reciprocal recognition among universities. The Bologna Process and the Erasmus Programme are run by the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc80_en.htm.

² See Council Conclusions on the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), 2903rd External Relations Council meeting, Brussels, 10 and 11 November 2008, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/esdp/103999.pdf. And the summary of remarks by then EU High Representative for the CFSP, Javier Solana, at the informal meeting of defence ministers in Deauville on 2 October 2008, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/discours/103164.pdf.

³ *European initiative on exchanges of young officers inspired by Erasmus*, SG/HR report on the state of affairs, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 14 May 2009, <http://ddata.over-blog.com/xxxyyy/0/50/29/09/Docs-Textes/ErasmusMilitBilanRAP-UE090514.pdf>.

⁴ Council Joint Action 2008/550/CFSP of 23 June 2008 establishing a European Security and Defence College (ESDC), <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32008E0550:EN:NOT>.