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THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR ITALIAN ARMY OFFICERS

Abstract:

This paper deals with the education and training programs in the Italian Army for young officers with a special focus on internationalisation and on how to increase the exchange of students during their initial and basic cycles of preparation. The goal is to inform other institutions with similar purposes about our work, in order to share ideas and initiatives. Internationalisation presents a lot of benefits for the students as well as for teachers and organizations involved. However, it also comes with some risks and difficulties. Considering that the majority of institutes who want to implement new programs in this field have to face annual budget cutting, concepts like “cooperation”, “network” and “best practice sharing” become keywords for those who are interested in the program. For these reasons, any initiatives, such as IMAF, are extremely welcome for enhancing and hopefully boosting the program within the EU and outside.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING AREA

The Education and Training Command and School of Military Applied Studies is the Italian Army institute that is in charge of planning, organizing and conducting, in accordance with the guidelines issued by the IT Army General Staff and the IT Army Education & Training, Qualification and Doctrine Command, educational activities to the benefit of Officers and NCOs aimed at:

- providing them with basic technical and professional knowledge, so as they can effectively operate in the Army’s operational units;
- granting them an effective update of their skills, through an ongoing education process;
- strengthening and consolidating their ethical and moral qualities.

For this reason, this institution is held responsible for managing basic and advanced education and foreign languages courses. According to the received tasks all other institutes and schools

in the Army related to the initial basic education and training, belong to this area and depend on the Education and Training Command. Their names and tasks are described below:

- the Military Academy in Modena is in charge for the first two years cycle of education for Cadets, the Bachelor Degree course for Engineers and the entire cycle of studies for Medical Service and Veterinary;
- the NCO's School in Viterbo runs courses for Warrant Officers while the dependent 80° "ROMA" Regiment in Cassino hosts courses for Sergeants;
- "Nunziatella" in Naples and "Teuliè" in Milan are the two military secondary schools: they are recognized as regular high schools by the Italian education system, so military students attend the last three years of high school there;
- the IT Army Foreign Languages School in Perugia, where foreign languages courses are held, both in e-learning and on site, and where the preparation of students in accordance with the Joint Forces Language Test (JFLT) is tested.

In addition to these institutions, another unit was established within the Education and Training area, that is the Post-Conflict Operations Study Centre, located in the Military Campus in Turin, with a specific mission: developing educational activities and supporting the production of concepts and doctrine with the aim of increasing knowledge and skills of military and civilian personnel, both national and international, necessary to plan and effectively conduct Post Conflict Operations of Stabilization and Reconstruction. All courses are delivered in English.

1.2 THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMAND AND SCHOOL OF APPLIED MILITARY STUDIES

The Education and Training Command and School of Military Applied Studies not only manages its dependent units/schools, as described in the former sub-chapter, but also provides education and training that focuses on Officers' basic and advanced courses.

As a basic education institute, it is in charge of the second part of the education cycle for young officers over a three years period of time. Before coming to Turin, cadets are commissioned as officers with the rank of 2nd Lieutenant and assigned to a specific branch. During their stay in Turin they achieve the Bachelor Degree in Strategic Sciences (level 1) at the third year, then they are promoted to the rank of Lieutenant at the fourth year and finally at the fifth year they graduate with a Master Degree in Strategic and Military Sciences (level 2). Engineer officers complete their program of studies by achieving the Master of Sciences in one of the following specialization in cooperation with the Polytechnic of Turin:

- Electronic Engineering;
- Civil Engineering;
- Computer Engineering;
- Mechanical Engineering;

- Communications Engineering.

The institute also provides initial and basic education and training for Direct Entry Officers, Reserve Officers and Special Reserve Officers with courses tailored on different levels of preparation and requirements.

As an Advanced School, it organizes the Army Staff Course, the Battalion Commanders Course and the qualification of military teachers.

1.3 BACHELOR DEGREE IN STRATEGIC SCIENCES AND MASTER DEGREE IN STRATEGIC AND MILITARY SCIENCES

At the end of 90's the Army, in collaboration with the University of Turin, decided to issue a special study course intended for officers. This new course focuses on a wider range of disciplines in order to cover all educational requirements that we consider mandatory for being officers in a world that changes continuously: this course hopefully enables officers to deal with new threats and challenges. In addition to this, since every branch of the army has specific additional requirements, five different curricula were created:

- Political Sciences/Management for Infantry, Cavalry and Artillery;
- Infrastructural Systems for Combat Engineer;
- Communications for Signal Corps;
- Logistics;
- Economics.

At the beginning, the program was only intended for young officers, but some years later it opened to civilians students as well (limited to 40 selected students per year) with some adjustments, in order to offer them a specific preparation instead of military trainings. The presence of civilian students is considered an added value for our courses and a real peculiarity in the national university environment. There are three curricula open to civilians: Political Sciences/Management, Logistics and Economics. The University of Turin established a special Interdepartmental University School for Strategic Sciences (SUISS) that manages all these courses with dedicated boards and commissions and deals with the various aspects involved in a didactic autonomy that is comparable to a Faculty. The cooperation with the University of Turin and the creation of a special University School is considered a strategic partnership and it allows us to benefit of a privileged relationship (teaching and research) with one of the biggest State University in Italy, also in a Lifelong Learning perspective. The multidisciplinary education is the key feature of the education of the military and civilian students of Bachelor and Master Degree in Strategic Sciences. Students study subjects that belong to different areas: politics, science, law, economics. Professors at SUISS come from eight different Departments of the University: Chemistry, Computer Science,

Cultures, Politics and Society, Economic, Social, Mathematical and Statistical Sciences, Law, Management, Mathematics and Physics. Teachers come from both the military and the polytechnic areas.

2 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

2.1 LINES OF DEVELOPMENT

The institute has a long tradition of hosting officers from other countries who attend our courses according to the Ministry of Defence annual program. Normally this program gives education and training to foreign officers in long and short courses; however, since we believe that internationalisation programs could be beneficial for our students and staff, some years ago we started to send our young officers to the initiatives offered within the European Union (EU). In 2012 the IT Army Staff invited the Education and Training Command to join the European Initiative for the Exchange of Young Officers and to organize modules in accordance with the rules established by the Implementation Group (IG), a task oriented Executive Academic Board (EAB) of the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) in Brussels. Since then, we have worked to widen the range of possibilities and we defined four lines of development: the Military Erasmus, the ERASMUS Program, the international traineeship and some modules held in English inside the academic programs. Before going further, it is fundamental to point out that the Education and Training Command and School of Military Applied Studies and the University of Turin adopted e-learning as a strategic tool for the internationalisation program, [1]. Nowadays, e-learning is not considered as just a system for distance learning anymore (it reduces costs for students and gives workers the possibility to attend courses). It has taken on a whole new role of support for didactics, with a lot of new possibilities and tasks, such as delivering pre-reading materials and lessons, spreading out information, testing students, evaluating courses, tutoring (synchronous or asynchronous) and creating social classroom systems that can help students to better understand topics and allows them to learn in a faster and deeper way.

2.2 THE MILITARY ERASMUS

Initially, we joined the Military Erasmus by sending our students to attend modules offered by other European institutes. The importance of this kind of exchange for students was immediately clear: they were developing modern soft skills while studying together with foreign colleagues. In this century, in our world, the more required soft skills are ethics, cooperative working, ability to do and problem solving, [2]. Through these soft skills students can develop a leadership by reinforcing their self-confidence. As a result, we organised our first Common Module (CM) on Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in December 2013, open to our selected personnel with good skills in English and to international students and civilians. In the last three academic years we organised two CMs per year on CSDP and Law Of Armed Conflicts (LOAC) with good results in terms of international participation and positive feedbacks by students (internationals, nationals and civilians). In each CMs,

as suggested in the standard curriculum, we introduced more interactive activities, such as workshops and Q&A lessons, in order to involve students in the learning process.

Table 1 Common Modules data of participation

Common Module	period	Army	Air Force	Civilians	EU Students		Total
CSDP	16-20 December 2013	10	2	9	9	2 AT 1 CY 1 EE 2 DE 1 EL 2 PL	30
CSDP	5-9 May 2014	10	4	6	10	1 AT 1 EE 8 DE	30
CSDP	24-28 November 2014	10	4	10	14	2 AT 1 EE 5 DE 2 EL 2 IE 2 PL	38
LOAC	4-8 May 2015	16	2	12	9	1 EE 2 CY 3 DE 2 EL 1 PL	39
LOAC	19-23 November 2015	12	5	11	3	2 EE 1 EL	31
CSDP	14-18 March 2016	8	4	14	15	1 BG 1 CY 2 HR 2 FI 2 FR 2 PL 3 RO	41

In addition to our regular program within the Military Erasmus, this year we have organised a new activity in cooperation with the Carabinieri Officers' School in Rome: "The protection of the International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in the international crisis management: the new challenges". The activity will be held in Vicenza (18-26 June) while a preparatory phase took place in Pisa (5-8 May) for civilian students only. Partners are the Centre Of Excellence for Stability Police Units (COESPU) in Vicenza, the University of Turin, the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna of Pisa and the Libera Università Internazionale

degli Studi Sociali (LUISS) of Rome. Participants are Italian Army and Carabinieri Officers (5th years courses), 35 civilians students from the three university partners and 7 EU officers from Finland, France, Greece and Netherlands.

2.3 THE ERASMUS PROGRAM

Recently thanks to a special agreement with the University of Turin who has the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE), we could create more opportunities of international mobility for our personnel. The University of Turin signed some Bilateral Agreements with universities and institutes that deal with defence and security programs (France, Poland and Romania) for the exchange of students and for the mobility of staff and teachers. The University of Turin is already linked to Universities around the world but this paper focuses the attention on the specific area of defence and security. So far, the Education and Training Command does not offer an entire semester in English yet, so we can host foreign students only for thesis preparation or for attending some courses. This year we started to host students who are able to attend courses both in English and in Italian and we began with the staff mobility; we are working to hopefully enable teachers' mobility in the next academic year. The Education and Training Command and the University of Turin aim at extending the international cooperation within the ERASMUS Program to more partners.

2.4 THE INTERNATIONAL TRAINEESHIP

Before receiving their first assignment and before defending their thesis, our Officers spend one month (Mid-June to Mid-July) in a particular internship in an Regiment in the same Branch/Specialities in order to be better prepared for the new appointment as Platoon Leader or Company Deputy Commander. We began this particular international exchange in 2014 with France (incoming and outgoing) and this year we are sending Officers to Austria and Spain, too. This is one of the easiest way to have more Officers' exchange and, in compliance with the guidelines issued by the ITA Army Staff, we can open this activity to other Countries.

2.5 MODULES TO IMPROVE THE ENGLISH LEVEL OF STUDENTS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES IN ENGLISH

In the previous academic years we progressively introduced some modules or parts of the academic programs that were taught in English, with a special focus on military courses, and we hosted other activities held in English, such as operational briefings etc. This program is mandatory for all classes.

Recently, the University of Turin has offered a special opportunity to our military and civilian students: the Teaching Mobility Program (TeachMob), that aims at increasing the number

of Visiting Professors and it is carried out in cooperation with a local Foundation. Non-Italian professors with high professional and scientific qualifications and expertise are appointed for teaching a semester at University. For the current academic year the Scuola di Studi Superiori of the University of Turin “F. ROSSI” (SSST), an institution of excellence and higher education, shared with the Master Degree in Strategic Sciences Courses one visiting professor, Prof. Simon Salamon from King's College of London, who held a course on Game Theory. The class was composed of 12 SSST students, 7 SUISS civilians and 10 Military students (8 Italians and 2 French coming from Saint-Cyr). The TeachMob program with limited access for students will be replicated in the future and thanks to the positive results obtained, the number of courses and visiting professors will be increased.

In order to improve our students' English skills and to give them a better preparation that allows them to attend more modules delivered in English we have prepared a special program. This year we introduced two modules based on CSDP and LOAC, mandatory for the 4th year course. We adapted these modules in order to concentrate in one week only topics selected by the curriculum and special lessons with English teachers specialised in sectorial language. We had our students attend some “Note-taking and Active Listening” workshops before the lecturers and specific lessons on vocabulary and appropriate collocation. The positive results encouraged us to continue this project: in the next academic year we will also involve the 3rd year course with two modules: a specific “Note-taking and Active Listening” Module and a Military English Module, based on Basic Military English (BME) Common Module of the Military Erasmus Common Module list. The modules for the 4th year course will be the same, CSDP and LOAC, enriched with more lectures.

Our students can also take part in other international initiatives such as the annual International Humanitarian Law Competition, organised by the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) of Sanremo (Italy) - for the first time one team of our participated - and the National University Model United Nations (NUMUN) in New York, where starting from last year our Officers are allowed to participate voluntarily.

3 OPPORTUNITIES AND PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNATIONAL TRAINING

3.1 BENEFITS AND RISKS OF INTERNATIONAL TRAINING

Many benefits arise from international training. The idea to put in a classroom some young officers and civilian students, coming from different parts of Europe, and give them the possibility to study and work together comes with a lot of advantages. Students can:

- learn to work, to study, to collaborate in a multicultural environment;
- use a different language to work and study;
- learn together how to solve problems;
- acquire skills of project management;

- create links with other colleagues around the world;
- be prepared for a future multinational assignment.

Even if benefits are more evident for students, lecturers and staff personnel involved are key factors for the development of the program because they participate more than once and thus they are able to learn from their experience and improve lectures and modules/courses where needed. The positive effects coming from the exchange of teachers are immediately transferred to the students. [3]

In addition, it is possible to create a common path of education that is able to answer to a European Union need to have armed forces ready to work together for defence and security in a comprehensive approach perspective. Sharing experiences in the field of education and training also means to ease and increase international cooperation among countries. Interactions between different Universities/Schools/Academies allows to improve the quality of learning, to create modern strategies in education with a more interactive learning and to share competences and cover new topics.

On the other side, it is important to prevent any possible risks: we have to reduce the number of possible failure for our military students as they have a very dense program to attend and carry out (academic and military training). For this reason it is essential to clarify the expected learning outcomes for each offered activity and the requirements for the admission to a course/training as well as have a backup plan in case of failure, so that students can be given the possibility to achieve the results with an alternative training.

3.2 DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL TRAINING

During the implementation of internationalisation programs some difficulties may occur. First of all, we need to recognise activities that our students attend in a different country, so as not to duplicate the courses. The ERASMUS program is not a problem from this point of view, thanks to a very consolidated procedure, but it is not the same for the Military Erasmus program. In fact, in order to solve this problem the University of Turin created a procedure for recognising modules coming from Military Erasmus. Approved Common Modules are in a special list of activities and they are recognised if the Certification of achievement with ECTS is showed, whereas a validation is required by the university program commission for other activities without the status of “common” (certification and syllabus are needed).

Now we are moving to a new university regulation for the Strategic Sciences Courses starting from academic year 2017/18 and we are working on the possibility to include an international semester, [4]. Modularization of the semester could be another challenge as our semesters are at the moment organized in a more classical way. For this reason e-learning is a strategic resource and tool for the implementation of the program, especially when considering the reduced budget.

Due to the lack of money, e-learning is fundamental to establish a network of possible partners for applying to the ERASMUS Plus Key Action 2 Program or other similar programs and it is a great opportunity to prepare materials, lessons and e-courses for common modules and international semesters.

It is also necessary to give visibility to these initiatives; for example the homepage of SUISS (<http://www.suiss.unito.it>) and the two e-learning platforms (Military <https://scappli.unito.it> and University <https://suiss.i-learn.unito.it/>) are linked to the EMILYO website.

Wikipedia also has the Italian translation of the page for the European Initiative for the Exchange of Military Young Officers, inspired by Erasmus. (https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iniziativa_europea_per_lo_scambio_di_giovani_ufficiali).

There are other two main challenges that the University of Turin wants to take up for the Bachelor and Master Degree in Strategic Science. The first one is to build a double degree program between UE Member States for civilian students, because having experience gained in different countries is surely considered an advantage in the European labour market. The second one is to start collaborations with extra EU countries in order to exchange students and staff. These challenges are the way to our future, because we need to be prepared to global changes: the University of Turin is ready to invest in e-learning to carry out these initiatives, because online education and the use of information communication technologies (ICT), offer real and efficient opportunities of lifelong learning.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The adoption of a common international strategy by the European Institutions in charge of military students education means to have the possibility to easily share best practises in training, to improve education but moreover the give our military students the chance to grow a common European feeling. The modern world is in continuous evolution and new challenges arise daily: for this reason the improvement of international programs became strategic, to allow educators and students to be prepared to meet new challenges.

Internationalisation requires many e-courses available to partners. The Education and Training Command and the University of Turin have a great experience in the preparation of open on line courses and have the interest to invest time and effort into developing a module in Problem Posing and Solving and to share it with partners. This module will not be a module of “recipes” but a module that effectively develops the capability of discerning, combining and applying the knowledge. These skills are very useful in the professional environment, especially for a military officer.

For all these reasons we are committed to increasing the number of opportunities for our students to be involved in international programs (ERASMUS, Military Erasmus and others) and in accordance with the budget and the guidelines of IT Army Staff, in collaboration with the University of Turin, we would like to increase the CMs offered and to work on the implementation of an international semester in the near future within our education

system, with the purpose of building new common paths in education to deal with the next frontiers of innovation and competition.

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