

“Towards a European understanding of academic education of the military officers ?”

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This contribution has been drafted with the participation of the Federal Sciences Policy and on behalf of the Royal Military School of Belgium, for the annual congress of the International Association for Military Pedagogy (IAMP), which took place in Helsinki, 19-23 May 2008. This contribution is hereby reproduced with the authorisation of the IAMP and extracted from the contributions to the congress, which shall be published for the first trimester 2009. For more information about the IAMP : <http://www.militarypedagogy.org/>

Giving keys for the understanding of and action on the surrounding defence challenges is the main objective pursued by academic education of military officers. In the past two decades, European military education systems had to adapt to global changes of their environment. They made the choice of balancing their curricula for excellence in both military and academic aspects of their education.

On the one hand, new missions have occurred and changed the relationship between military elites and the society. A new military officer emerged from the post-Cold War era while some operations *other than war* (OTW) entered his core competencies. Multilateralism, or at least international responsibility for peace maintaining, proved that military officers were meant to serve also supranational purposes. In his/her professional career he -or she- may now meet civilian participation to his/her mission, and use civilian means. Within the specific European context, military officers are called to deal with the growing integration of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The ESDP -renamed Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in the Lisbon Treaty- is an ever-evolving policy dealing with 27 individual defence policies nowadays. It may thus be challenged by being considered as a too-soft instrument for an effective and efficient European defence. Fashion is to talk currently more about a « European security » than a « European defence ». The former outlines indeed two guiding-principles of the run of the ESDP: « solidarity » and « security ».

The 1993 defined Petersberg missions are now broadly assimilated by the European society. Political mechanisms for action were created to conduct this policy but, once again, new missions seem to integrate the list. In that sense, we shall specifically, in the near future, keep an eye on the development of the collective defence mechanism that appeared in Article 42 §7 of the consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union¹. This legal clause might indeed change both the relationship of Europe with the rest of the world and between the Member States themselves². The military officer must deal with this specific environment as a « soldier-statesman »³.

¹ If the Lisbon Treaty is set in force.

² This particular article was a major reason for the negative referendum hold in Ireland about the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, in June 2008.

³ Moskos and Burk, quoted by Philippe Manigart in Harry Kirkels, Wim Klinkert, René Moelker (eds.), *Officer Education : The road to Athens !*, NL Arms, Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2003.

In parallel, the social environment of the military profession in Europe also faced changes. Transformation of the armed forces themselves led to consider the academic education as an instrument for answering these new challenges. Since the mid-1990's, the switch from conscription traditions to professional armies contributed to the loss of brilliant minds for the service of the national armies. Terms of careers became shorter and perspectives of post-service re-conversion turned to be more and more difficult for those short-term officers. In the post-Cold War era we were entering in 1991, and with regard to the growing importance of reconstruction missions, social acceptability of the holders of the defence knowledge was at stake. Institutions responsible for the education of the future officers reasonably opted for a more and more academic-oriented education, in order to reverse this "brain drain". The military officer was called to become a « scholar-soldier »⁴.

But did the national military officers education systems uniformly adapted to such changes of their environment?

A clue of this adaptation had been outlined as being the convergence of the systems of military education towards a civilian higher education one, like a university model (I). This conception seems to be strongly confirmed by the reforms initiated by schools, academies and universities of defence in their education policies (II). However, some challenges remain and call for a European education for a European defence (III).

I. Doctrines for understanding the military education systems

In the 2003 study of Prs. Harry Kirkels, Wim Klinkert, René Moelker, entitled « *Officer Education: The road to Athens !* »⁵, 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 model and the Athens model.

The former outlines the need for a military officer to be firstly a 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 for 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.
- The profile of competency of an officer shall better correspond to professional capacities than 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.

⁴ *Idem.*

⁵ Harry Kirkels, Wim Klinkert, René Moelker (eds.), *Officer Education : The road to Athens !*, NL Arms, Netherlands Annual Review of Military studies, 2003.

- Military education shall follow the university standards and, in order to provide an adapted study environment, it shall be provided within civilian universities.

A very similar distinction had been operated by Pr. Giuseppe Caforio in 2000 in his study “*The European Officer: A Comparative view on Selection and Education*”⁶. He outlined two models of socialisation in higher education military institutions: the divergent model and the convergent one.

Giuseppe Caforio thereby observed 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.

These two studies are not replicating each other, neither do they contradict. Their objects are different: nature of the officer on the one hand, socialisation process on the other hand. However, we shall suppose that an Athenian vision of the military officer requires from individuals a level of excellence in non-purely military subjects. We may also suppose that a convergent system of education is the best way to attain the mind-openness that is required from an Athenian officer. On the other way round, a divergent system, mostly focused on the military specificity of the professional outcomes, might obviously be the most adequate instrument for educating Spartan officers. The two studies were thus, in our sense, calling for increasing the importance of academic teachings in officers’ education.

The education policies followed by European Professional Military Education Institutions (EPMEIs) is looking forward to reach a conception of the officer -Athenian or Spartan- according to one of the mentioned educational “spirits” -convergent or divergent. Is it possible however to take the “convergence-divergence” distinction as the only existing instrument for the analysis of the armed forces education policies?

These policies are the instruments that organise this socialisation but they may override the limits of socialisation. Education policies indeed may hide their divergent tendencies. Education of a long-term military officer, taken as a whole, is and will necessarily remain shared between the need for accomplished soldiers and the need for global defence actors. The analysis of the overall education of a career officer has to be done through considering both of these dimensions: the military and the academic ones. Then, the study of one institution only -even if presenting all the characteristics of a civilian university- may hide the other dimension of the apprenticeship. The existing differences observed between educational models in Europe seem thus slightly minor than at the first sight⁷ and we shall certainly enlarge the study sample from the institution to the overall education organisation.

⁶ Giuseppe Caforio (eds.), *The European officer : A comparative view on selection and education*, European Research Group on Military and Society, Edizioni ETS 2000

⁷ If we were to be taking the German system of education as an example, the socialisation process within the universities of the Bundeswehr would appear as being obviously

Nevertheless, the criteria set by Giuseppe Caforio's study remains essential for the search for exchanges and cooperation and, furthermore, for the study of national defence cultures. They are of a major importance to find out what "spirit" can lay behind a particular organisation of curriculum. This distinction remains very accurate also for monolithic education systems, i.e. the institutions in charge of the whole -military and academic- education of the officer.

Two paths may be taken, in our sense, to attain a convergent model through education policies:

- Increase the importance of academic education in a curriculum;
- Or, delegate the academic part of the officer education to the civilian higher education system.

This latter case is differently met in many of the European military education systems. We may choose three cases to illustrate the importance of this delegation: the British system, the Slovenian system and the French system.

In the British system, according to Giuseppe Caforio's criteria, the Sandhurst Academy might appear as being a divergent institution. Nevertheless, studies showed that cadets have, in average, an important academic background obtained in the civilian universities⁸ prior to their recruitment.

In the Slovenian system, the recruitment of military officers is made from the pool of master students graduated from the civilian universities. Most of them actually come from the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana. The military training starts only after their recruitment, within specialized schools. The Slovenian case suggests an intentional delegation of the academic training to the civilian higher education system. It is thus equally uneasy to qualify it as a divergent or convergent education.

In the French system, two possibilities exist concerning recruitment: cadets can integrate military schools after having obtained a university degree or after having followed two academic years within "preparatory classes". The first option signifies that the French Ministry of Defence (MoD) has no power on the pre-socialisation process of cadets whereas it is not far from the pedagogical concerns in the second option because of the *raison d'être* of these preparatory classes.

A third path exists for the recruitment of the French officers which is called recruitment "*sur titre*". It allows master-graduated students from civilian universities to integrate officers' school. In that situation, cadets would only accomplish a military training curriculum. It is then quite uneasy to define the Saint-Cyr Schools as being divergent or convergent, following the particular options.

Eight years after his publication, new kinds of missions integrated the competencies of European armed forces in a way that confirms the trends on which Giuseppe Caforio based his distinction. The European Union got itself a Strategy in 2003 that includes the need for positive actions, such as reconstruction of peace or legal State. These missions enhance the need for flexible and more and more autonomous officers, and officers that have to react with regard to a certain understanding of the global situations. The academic aspect of the officer education has effectively been growing in importance thanks to reforms engaged by the educational systems during the last decade.

convergent although the military aspect of the education was "delegated" to other military education institutions.

⁸ 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.

II. Post-reforms observations of a few European educational models

The implementation of the Bologna Process, even if slightly different from one educational system to another, confirmed the trends toward a growing need for academic education. The development of programs and exchanges between the different institutions, sometimes using the same instruments as their civilian counterparts like the “Erasmus” programs, actively participated to this « Europeanization » of the educational challenges.

The Bologna Process, initiated with the June 19th 1999 Common Declaration of the European Education Ministries -implementing the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe- is meant to upraise obstacles to mobility in higher education. Three main directions are outlined in this text for attaining this particular objective:

- Diploma recognition;
- Curricula harmonisation;
- Quality-assurance of the education.

The signature of the now 46 member States of the Process is not constraining though the goal is not a proper “harmonisation” but a convergence of the education systems, on a voluntary basis. The Process is not linked to supranational legal sanctions in case of delay in the implementation. Some differences may then be observed⁹ between the member States.

The recognition of the three university cycles is set with the implementation of the ECTS¹⁰ system in the curricula. Practically, an ECTS represents an amount of student workload of 25 to 30 hours, according to the country¹¹ observed. According to the evolution of the prescriptions of the Process itself, outcomes expected from an educational module shall be taken into consideration when assigning ECTS. The duration of the cycle is in no way involved in the mutual recognition of the value of this education. Only credits attached are important for the Process’ implementation: 180 ECTS minimum for the first cycle (Bachelor), 90 to 120 for the second (Master). Doctorate level education is left to national coordination.

A monitoring is provided by a rotating presidency -currently entrusted to Benelux- assisted by a Secretariat composed of officials of higher education Ministries since 2005. The presidency collects data concerning the implementation of the Process and presents a « Stocktaking » report in which it suggests complementary actions to be taken for realising the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) during the presidency final meeting¹². In 2005 in Bergen for example, the debate issued a document on quality-assurance standards¹³ in education. The

⁹ A report on the national progresses towards implementation of the Process is made by the Presidency and presented at the biannual conference. It also suggests means for attaining the planned objectives. The 2007 London Conference report is available (checked 16/05/08):

www.dfes.gov.uk/londonbologna/uploads/documents/6909-BolognaProcessST.pdf

¹⁰ European Credit Transfer System.

¹¹ See (checked, 16/05/08):

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/index_fr.html

¹² 27-28 April 2009 in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve for the Benelux Presidency.

¹³ See : “*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*”, February 2005. Available on the Bologna Secretariat website:

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/> (checked, 16/05/08)

issue is still thought about today with the recent creation of a « Quality-assurance Agencies European Register »¹⁴.

Military higher education is a very particular island in the Process and its implementation suffers somehow from structural specificities related to the European Professional Military Education Institutions (EPMEIs) missions. Formally, stocktaking procedures exclusively take into account data communicated by higher education ministries, which are the main actors concerned by these challenges. Consequently, curricula administratively depending on other ministries are little or not considered in these data. Basic military officers curricula, which are generally under the authority of the Ministries of Defence (MoDs), lay in that category. Nevertheless, instruments have been created in order to assist some of these higher education institutions in their implementation of the Bologna Process, as for example the « Tuning »¹⁵ program for art and music curricula, which in many countries are under the authority of Culture Ministries. However, those curricula are not included in the data collected for the monitoring of the Bologna Process and no such program has been planned yet to include the basic military officer curricula. It is only on a voluntary basis then that the systems might have integrated these prescriptions.

The following graphs present an overview of the Bologna forms of implementation met in some EPMEIs. They are taken from the report “Adaptation of the education policy for the Royal Military School of Belgium to the evolution of the Common European Security policy”, Sylvain Paile, May 2008, concluding a research program ordered by the Royal Military School of Belgium and coordinated by the Federal Scientific Policy of Belgium.

These figures represent the Land officer education process in a limited number of European countries¹⁶. Their education systems were studied in order to evaluate the potentialities of exchanges between some institutions of these countries and the Royal Military School of Belgium.

¹⁴ « Report to the London conference of ministers on a European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies », ENQA (European Association for Quality assurance in Higher Education) occasional paper n°13, 2007.

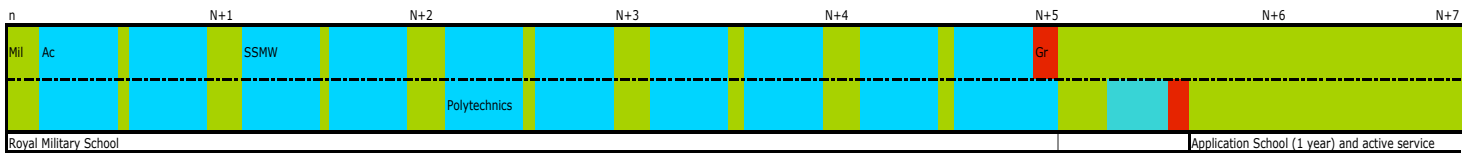
¹⁵ See : <http://www.tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/> (checked, 16/05/08)

¹⁶ “n” in the following graphs represent the start of the curricula, generally the year after the end of secondary education.

Organisation of the academic education in military officers national education systems

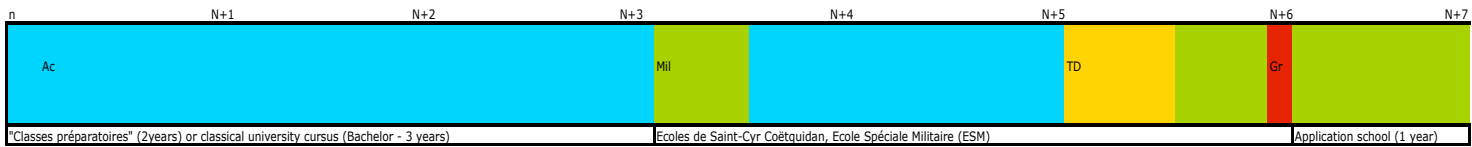
- Mil Military training period
- Ac Academic period
- Gr Graduation exam
- TD Particular time dedicated to thesis drafting (if applicable)
- Pr Practice, Stage

Belgium



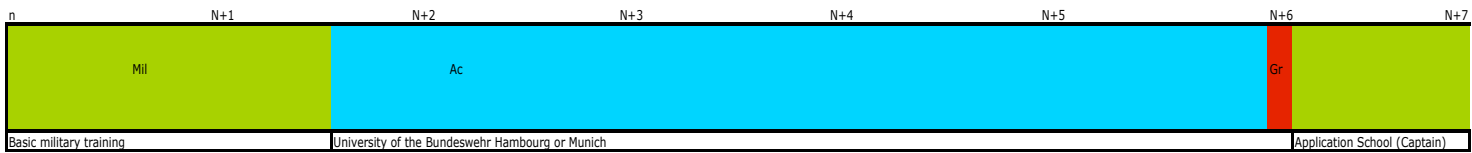
Source: Direction de l'Enseignement Académique DEAO (Academic Education Department)

France



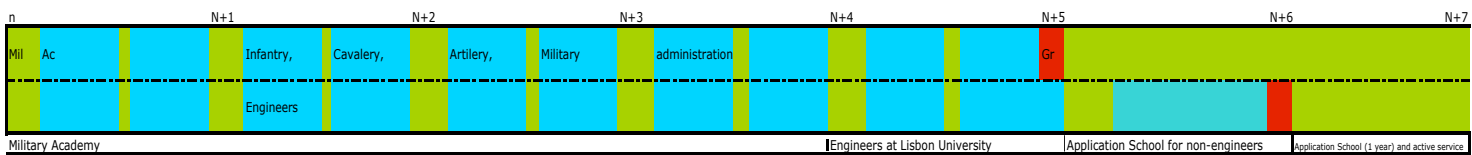
Source : Direction International Affairs ESCC (Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan), ESCC website : <http://www.st-cyr.terre.defense.gouv.fr/>

Germany



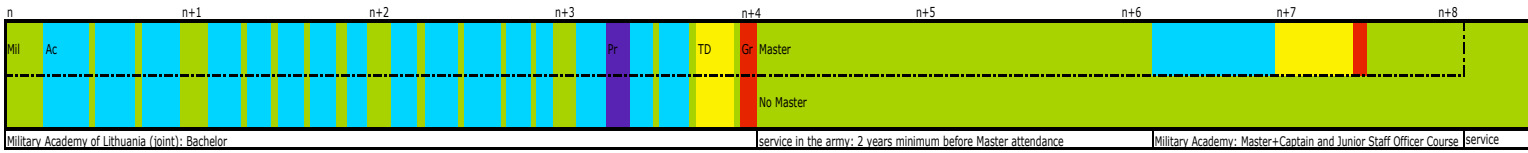
Source : Public Relations Section of the University of the Bundeswehr, Munich (Briefing)

Portugal



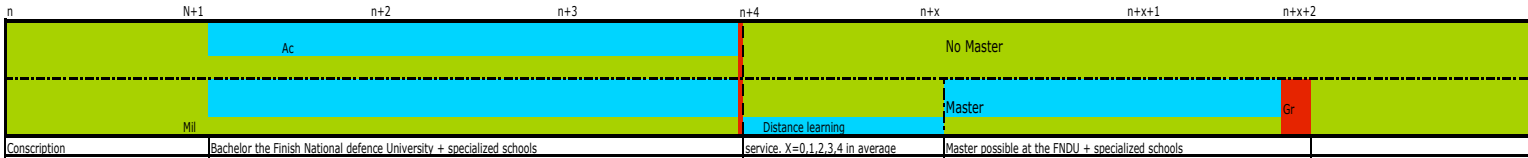
Source : Studies and Planning Department of the Military Academy of Portugal (Briefing)

Lithuania



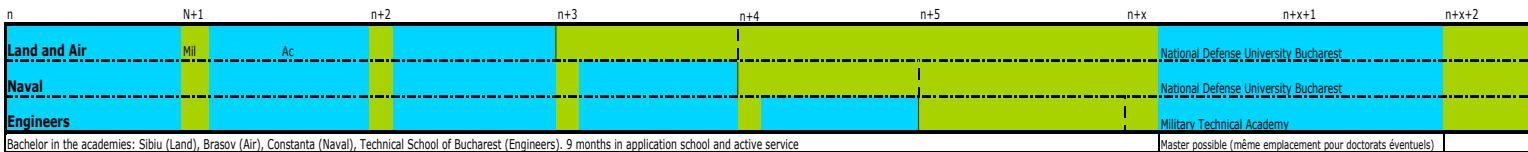
Source : Chief of Staff of the Military Academy of Lithuania (Briefing), Scholarship for the year 2007-2008 (<http://www.ika.lt/index.php/en/112898/>)

Finland



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

Romania



Source: Romania National Defence University (Briefing)

A wide variety of implementation forms may be observed from these figures. In that sense, it confirms that the Bologna Process does not intend to harmonize the curricula. However, regarding the purpose of mobility stressed in the course of the Process itself these differences might potentially obstacle effective exchanges between EPMEIs.

The main observation concerns the organisation of curricula themselves. It is indeed necessary for the EPMEIs to conciliate scientific –in a broad sense- and military trainings. Then, the time organisation remains different from one system to another. When some cadets might be training in camps, others might be following academic teachings. Difficulties might also occur when assigning the learning outcomes expected from a study period. In the same way, academic periods do not follow the same organisation from one EPMEI to another. The universities of the Bundeswehr are following a trimester organisation when others follow the semester one. A German cadet hosted by one of these EPMEIs would thus challenge the normal conduct of his/her studies regarding to back home curriculum when willing to attend a whole educational unit.

Finally, these structural observations shall not shadow the fact that these internal Bologna reforms contributed to the growth of the part of academic education in the basic officer curricula in comparison to the last decades. Even before the start of the Process, Giuseppe Caforio foresaw this evolution: *“the trend towards a convergence of officers’ basic educational processes with university appears generalised in Europe and destined to continue, at least in the medium term”*¹⁷. The Bologna Process implementation by these EPMEIs tends

¹⁷ Giuseppe Caforio, Op. cit, p.15.

to confirm his hope. Even if slightly different from one system to another, the space awarded to academic knowledge will certainly contribute to the *entreprise d'excellence* pursued by modern officer higher educations.

III. Prospective view on tools of a European education for a European Defence

What does the Bologna Process mean regarding the cooperation between the European military officers education systems? Concretely, it is meant to allow institutions to exchange students and teaching staff on an equality basis. The institutions that have implemented the Bologna Process might also exchange teaching modules thanks to the ECTS system. Recognition of teaching values is made in attaching ECTS credits to courses given within an institution. Then, meeting the number of credits required for a student, for example 60 ECTS for an academic year, may be done in attending courses in a partner institution of his national school.

However, the Bologna Process does not solve all of the practical problems linked to the mobility. As we mentioned it earlier, it did not prescribe any time organisation for the curricula. Then, as we explained it earlier, a student coming from a school where courses are given along a semester may meet timing problems if hosted by an institution where the courses are given following a trimester system. When would be the most suitable period for exchanges in the curriculum, then? The Bachelor is the first socialisation period for a cadet with his/her future professional environment and, as mentioned earlier, an apprenticeship of the national dimension of Defence and of the required behaviour as a future military officer. It is also, in a number of national education systems, a necessary period required for improving the foreign languages knowledge and capacities of a young student, not only for technical language concerns. The language role shall reveal itself fundamental in the mobility challenges. For these reasons, it appears that the most adequate time frame for actual exchanges between EPMEIs might be the master level education. It is important then not to exclude from the search for potential partners institutions that are providing master courses at the advanced officer courses level, as it is the case for example in Lithuania or Romania¹⁸. In that sense, the Bologna's mobility purpose would somehow challenge the distinction between basic education and advanced education of officers. A major issue would be, in that situation, to cope with the social and professional experience differences between the students taking part to the same education.

What could be the future of the integration of the education models into a European context? There is obviously a movement toward convergence of the socialisation processes with the civilian higher education systems, in the broad majority of national military officers' curricula. Furthermore, and to link it with Kirkels, Klinkert and Moelker's distinction, the trend is to see the European officer, in the context of the European Security and Defence Policy, as an Athenian one. These tendencies are the sign of the emergence of a European culture in the military officer curricula. We might today go further in that way in looking

¹⁸ See graphs presented above. Finnish masters are difficult to characterise due to the possibility offered to attend master courses shortly after the bachelor. Career experience is not comparable with Lithuanian or Romanian master officers, then.

forward to implement a culture that might be proper to the European officers and directly linked to the future of their missions: an « ESDP culture ».

The objective would be not to force this dynamic but to ease its implementation in the educational systems with help of the EPMEIs education policies, which are direct instruments for action.

We may propose, in that sense, to distinguish three paths for acting on the ESDP acculturation: a formal direction, a normative one, and a “crossover” possibility.

The formal direction is meant, in our mind, to accustom students to the role they might fulfil in the European defence context. While the European armed forces may be involved in diverse 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 would notably imply a debate within the EPMEIs on the conditions of use of languages such as English, or on the use of cooperation instruments such as the Erasmus.

The normative direction deals with the amount of knowledge of students, related to the European defence issues. In that sense, this axis 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 concept of “crossover” possibility 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. The organisation of common academic modules by partner institutions 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. The initiative for a “Military Erasmus”, which are currently launched at the European level and coordinated by the French EU Presidency, will certainly also concentrate on this crossover dimension for easing a European form of officer education.

Conclusions:

The perfect “convergence” with civilian university socialisation process is not meant to exist with regard to officers’ higher education. Giuseppe Caforio himself obviously did not mean it either in choosing his terms: “convergence” is the representation, the idea, of a dynamic, not of a finishing line. The idea of convergence itself slightly changed compared to the time when it was defined because it is actually “*en route*” in most of the national models. The officer’s higher education is becoming an intellectual process. Less and less people may be found that would challenge this new “*acquis*”. Even if we cannot meet one common standard in education forms, we may say today that we can observe an actual convergence...Towards convergence. The implementation of the Bologna Process, expected for 2010, is one of these signs that will obviously favour the discussion regarding an actual mobility of the students and teaching staffs. These movements, if the possibility is given to the greatest number of students-officers, will obviously trigger an acculturation that is meant to improve their role as members of the society, as students and as future actors of the ESDP. Efforts shall be made now to comfort these expectations in building the relevant instruments for these particular students, both battlefield deciders and intellectual actors.