

# INTERNATIONALIZATION FOR ENHANCING THE EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE HIGHER EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

Internationalization of Higher Education is one of the key trends of development. Security and Defence Education aims to prepare highly specialized military (officers) and civilian personnel who are able to operate in national as well as international environments with colleagues and people of different nationalities and sometimes in a very complex context. For this reason, it is extremely important to strengthen the internationalization process in Higher Education, using traditional and virtual modalities, in order to allow students to develop skills, to create collaborations and networks. This paper answers to the research question what initiatives and policies of internationalization can be developed, and how, in order to enhance the European Security and Defence Higher Education, by analyzing and discussing the intensive internationalization experiences of the University of Turin with the Education and Training Command and School of Applied Military Studies in the last seven academic years at different levels: students, teachers and staff, Institutions. Several data collected during this period allow to understand how the direction of actions has changed, which difficulties were encountered, and which solutions can be found. This research can be considered a useful example for those who want to increase the internationalization of Security and Defence Higher Education especially in this new digital era.

## KEYWORDS

Erasmus, Internationalization, Higher Education, Security and Defence Education

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Universities have always had international dimensions in their research, but less in their teaching. The increasing globalization of economies and societies, which started at the end of the previous century, requires a Higher Education (HE) with more internationalization programs, as a key change for a better insertion in the world of work for university graduates. In the past 30 years, internationalization education programs were inserted in the agenda of many institutions, and, in some cases, they became a business and an occasion to improve the reputation (Matei and Iwinska, 2015). English, as a globally recognized language, increased its dominance, and schools and universities had to also deal with this matter. In the period 2010–20 the number of international activities increased significantly and also many international bachelor's and master's degrees with double or joint titles were created and, in particular during the pandemic, online delivery of HE became important in order to allow these programs to continue as well. In 1987, the European Union (EU) in order to facilitate internationalization, started the ERASMUS Program, transformed into the ERASMUS+ Program in 2014, for sustaining and enhancing the mobility for students, teachers and staff. In 1988 EU approved the first directive to recognize the study abroad and in 1992, with the Maastricht Treaty, it recognized the competences in the field of education and culture at European level. In particular, the ERASMUS Program, among the various objectives, intends to offer added value to education and professional specialization provided by schools and universities, to prepare future citizens for mobility and professional career, and to encourage exchanges among students from different countries increasing the feeling of belonging to Europe. The European Commission (EC) has launched several impact studies on the topic. In the ERASMUS Impact Study (European Commission, 2014) the research, among 80.000 people, belonging to different groups such as students, teachers, staff personnel and enterprises, revealed that the so-called Erasmus generation acquires not

only competencies in specific disciplines but also transversal competencies, very much in demand in the world of work. In 2019 a research conducted by the University of Turin on ERASMUS students (Roggero and Rabaglietti, 2019) demonstrates that the effects of the experience abroad represent an enriching moment for personal development and identity construction. The education in the field of Security and Defence aims to prepare highly specialized military (officers) and civilian personnel who are able to operate in national as well as international environments with colleagues and people of different nationalities and sometimes in a very complex context. Their education curricula require a solid and round theoretical preparation and participation to practical activities, obtained via specific traineeships. In order to allow them to learn how to work in cooperation with other colleagues, coming from other Member States (MS), since the initial and basic training period (university period), and to mature a European culture for Security and Defence in the changing international scenario, it becomes extremely important to create and develop a specific internationalization program for them. At the University of Turin, a dedicated university school, the Interdepartmental University School for Strategic Sciences (SUISS), was created in order to manage the education and training of officers and civilian students in the field of Security and Defence, in cooperation with the IT-Army Education and Training Command and School of Applied Military Studies (ETC&SAMS). It provides a Bachelor Degree (in cooperation with the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia) and a Master Degree, both reserved to the Army Officers, and in parallel a Bachelor Degree and a Master Degree for civilians, with a total of 350 officers and 240 civilians. They study together, cooperate and have international experiences. In the paper the intensive international program adopted is analyzed from when it started in 2012-13 to nowadays, in order to understand how it helps to reinforce the education in this specific area (Security and Defence) and how it is changing in the new digital era. In the section two, we describe the state of art, in the section three we explain the methodology used for the research and in the section four, we discuss the results from different point of view: students, teachers and institutions. We also try to outline how in this new post-pandemic period it is destined to change.

## 2. STATE OF ART

During the UNESCO World Conference on the HE in 2009, globalization was defined as “the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology, the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions” (Altbach et al., 2009). In this context, the universities cannot avoid dealing with the international comparison in compliance with national legislation and with the peculiarities of the various bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Globalization and internationalization are two distinct processes. The former intends to ensure competitiveness in the HE field and its tools are international rankings, marketing techniques and the establishment of branches of the same university in different countries, such as campuses abroad, while the latter follows the logic determined by political, academic (rather than economic) and cooperative incentives. Knight (Knight, 2008) defined the internationalization as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education”. The Italian universities have participated actively in the ERASMUS Program since the very beginning, and mobility is always identified as a fundamental tool in order to realize the internationalization of the university. As an example, in 2012-13 in terms of external mobility, Italy ranked fourth, with a percentage of 9,62 outgoing students, and at fifth place for the incoming mobility with 7,99% of European students. The University of Turin, one of the largest Italian universities, contributes actively to the Program, for example in 2018/19, with 1.687 outgoing and 857 incoming students. The Security and Defence Education differs a lot from other disciplinary areas, because it does not prepare students for future professions who are in competition among them - at least, this is evident for military students - but professionals who have the necessity to learn to cooperate with civilians as soon as possible, and to be integrated in international theatres of interoperability. Until 2008, every EU MS, as responsible for the education of their officers, had made decisions in total autonomy, and even the international process was a national issue. However, in 2008, during the 2903rd External Relations Council Meeting, the EU Ministers of Defence decided to establish an Implementation Group for the “European Initiative for the exchange of young officers inspired by ERASMUS” (shortly “Military Erasmus”), in order to ease the internationalization process. This Initiative has created a network of all EU Basic Officers’ Education Institutes (BOEIs) and launched a short term mobility in addition

to the medium-long term mobility (ERASMUS). The short mobility is simpler to realize than the ERASMUS (minimum of two months for traineeships and three months for a study program). In the report of 2018/19 (European Security and Defence College, 2019) Romania, Austria, Greece, Poland and Italy are indicated as the MS more active inside the Military Erasmus Initiative. In some MS the short and long mobilities of the officers are very few. Moreover Greece, Poland and Italy involved in this program civilians students too. In order to satisfy all these specific needs, the SUISS decided to adopt an intense internationalization program regarding exchange and cooperation, peace and mutual understanding, human capital development, solidarity and service to society. The definition of internationalization given by de Wit (de Wit et al. 2015) as “intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society” was adopted with the perspective to contribute to the creation of a European identity and promote a European Security and Defence culture. Moreover, it is important to mention that a certain number of international officer students who attend the Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees in strategic sciences comes from extra-EU countries in accordance with the Ministerial Cooperation Plan (from Europe, Asia, Africa and South America). This contributes to create an even more international environment in the education field.

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

In this paper we want to answer the following research question: What initiatives and policies of internationalization can be developed, and how, in order to enhance the European Security and Defence HE? The methodology adopted in order to answer is to analyze the experiences of the University of Turin in the last seven academic years using both quantitative and qualitative data. In particular, we study separately the actions introduced based on the level of the main actors involved: students, teachers and staff, institutions. The initiatives are discussed describing the type, the duration, the objectives, the effects, which tools require implementation, what kind of risks or difficulties were encountered and in which way they change in this digital era. Several data collected are used together with the answers to the questionnaires filled by the participants to the international activities at the end of each event, to collect feedback, critiques, suggestions, strong points and weakness. In 2019-20 the COVID-19 pandemic obviously had a deep impact on the internationalization: as a consequence, new solutions needed to be found, with an open mind to new prospects.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Actions for Students: From Abroad to Home

The first internationalization initiatives adopted by SUISS involving military and civilian students are those of outgoing and incoming mobility within the Erasmus + which allow them to achieve ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) during their stay abroad. Table 1 shows the numbers of incoming and outgoing students.

Table 1. Military and civilian students outgoing and incoming

Erasmus	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Outgoing	2 C	2 M + 3 C	2 M + 5 C	7 M + 7 C	7 M + 6 C	8 M + 23 C	8 M + 20 C
Incoming	2 M	2 M	6 M	5 M + 2 C	4 M + 4 C	3 M + 5 C	7 M + 2 C

It can be observed that incoming students are decidedly fewer than the outgoing ones, since the courses offered by SUISS are almost all in Italian; only since 2019-20, four university modules entirely taught in English have been made available in online version, covering an entire semester (Marchisio et al, 2019). The percentage of outgoing students of SUISS is higher than the average of the University of Turin. This can be explained in different ways: most of the destinations chosen for Erasmus are destinations reserved for SUISS students and offer a training course lasting one semester that integrates well within the Bachelor or Master

Degree; moreover, a group of teachers and staff of SUISS offers a support service for the preparation of the Learning Agreement and for the search for accommodation abroad. The number of military students participating in Erasmus exchanges is decidedly lower than the number of civilian students, and concerns only the Master Degree. It is more difficult to fit the training officers activities during the exchanges since their education follows, in each MS, national protocols that differ from one another. Moreover the mobility cannot be placed during the external training or specific military training. Officers who spend an entire semester abroad certainly have the opportunity to have a very formative experience in a European key that allows them to develop teamwork skills with peers from other MS, very useful when they will be deployed in international operational theaters, where they have to work with other colleagues from different countries. These medium and long-term mobilities (3 months up to 1 year) were immediately accompanied by short mobility in the context of Military Erasmus because, in addition to being more easily feasible for officers, it allows to involve a greater number of students also at home. Short mobilities are international training modules lasting three weeks, two remote and one face-to-face, involving about 40 civilian and military students from different armed forces and from different EU MS. The face-to-face activities are intensive, in English, and involve active participation in group works, workshops and discussions. The professors and tutors of these modules are teachers from the University that organizes the module but also from other universities within the EU, mainly BOEIs. The SUISS, in collaboration with the ETC&SAMS, since the academic year 2013-14, has decided to organize two international modules CSDP (Common Security Defence Policies) and LOAC (Law Of Armed Conflicts) in Turin to further expand the number of students involved in short mobilities, to increase collaboration between teachers, and to strengthen the network between EU institutions. Tables 2 and 3 show the numbers of military students involved in incoming and outgoing short mobilities. The number of outgoing SUISS students in the span of 6 years has increased tenfold and in the academic year 2018-19 the number of students who attended a common module in Italy, represents a fifth of the officers who attended courses abroad and it can be said that internationalization has spread from abroad to home. Starting from the academic year 2020-21 SUISS offers also the international module Biosafety and Bioterrorism and moreover, in this pandemic crisis, decided to deliver the international modules completely online by exploiting the digital learning environment that it has developed for e-learning activities.

Table 2. Military and civilian students in incoming short mobilities

Year	CM	IT Officers	EU & US Officers	Civilians	Total
2013-14	2 CSDP	20 Army 6 Air Force	19 EU	15	60
2014-15	CSDP – LOAC	26 Army 6 Air Force	23 EU	22	77
2015-16	CSDP – LOAC	20 Army 9 Air Force	16 EU	25	70
2016-17	CSDP – LOAC	23 Army 2 Air Force	11 EU 3 US	20	58
2017-18	CSDP – LOAC	20 Army 7 Air Force	17 EU 4 US	33	81
2018-19	CSDP – LOAC	16 Army 8 Air Force	27 EU 4 US	30 (2 PL)	85

Table 3. Military students in outgoing short mobilities

Year	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Officer	2	2	0	3	7	20	17	29	55	68

Other mobilities, semi-short, lasting 2 months, were organized with the aim of having the degree thesis carried out and/or for an international traineeship. For these mobilities, as part of the Erasmus program, financial support is granted to participants to cover travel and accommodation expenses. To participate in the various mobilities, students make an application in a call that takes into consideration the evaluation of career, language skills and motivations that lead to participate in the proposed initiative. The number of applications to participate is always much higher than available places. This pushed SUISS to expand the available places and denotes a strong desire to be involved in an internationalization experience. Among the most frequent motivations of applicants there are: to get to know and collaborate with peers from other foreign countries, to enrich their curriculum, to broaden their cultural horizon, to strengthen their linguistic skills, to test themselves, to get a better preparation for a work in multinational contexts at the end of the university course, to develop soft skills useful to face the insertion in the world of work. One of the major difficulties encountered in increasing the flow of incoming civilian students is the lack of accommodation and support facilities for reception. For the military, there are reciprocal agreements between Academies that facilitate the logistic

matter. One of the most interesting effects of having officers involved in mobility activities is the creation of informal networks among peers operating in the ward. This confirms how the Europeanization process in the field of Security and Defense starts during HE. There are also international initiatives with non-European countries such as USA, but at the moment, they are reserved for an elite of particularly good students. Table 4 below shows, on a Likert scale from 1 to 6, the average overall satisfaction of the participants to the short mobilities organized in Turin. The comments collected in the questionnaires are all extremely positive and all the participants say that they recommend the experience to a colleague and would like to repeat a second one during their university path.

Table 4. Overall satisfaction of participants to the short mobilities organized in Turin

Year	Common module	Feedback	Common module	Feedback
2013-14	CSDP	5.34	CSDP	5.10
2014-15	CSDP	5.00	LOAC	5.10
2015-16	LOAC	5.10	CSDP	5.20
2016-17	CSDP	4.80	LOAC	5.00
2017-18	CSDP	5.00	LOAC	5.40
2018-19	CSDP	5.10	LOAC	5.20

Table 5 shows an overview of the proposed opportunities and services for students.

Table 5. Overview of the proposed service mix for students

Scope and objectives	Recommended actions and initiatives	Expected benefits
Create new opportunities of mobility for students.	Hosting Common Modules with international students, teachers and staff.	Having an international experience at home for national (fits for all kind of students) and receiving more international students who participate in short mobility.
Develop digital skills and support learning activities during the mobility.	Implementation of online Courses.	New kind of exchange plus digital skills. It can be used to complement residential program for internationals while helping national students after mobility in order to recover part of the program. Increasing of obtained ECTS.
Facilitate participation to international activities.	Creation of support group of teachers who helps students before the mobility for logistic and admin activities.	Increase the number of participants to short, medium, long and virtual mobilities.
Increase the exchange.	Integrate different kind of mobilities in the curricula and offering new activities abroad.	Engaging more students with more topics.
Create a network of EU partners.	Selection of specific partner with the same topics (BOEIs).	Enhancing the quality of academic activities.
Increase the number of ECTS gained abroad.	Supporting students for academic issue.	Increasing the ECTS per students and the number of students who obtained ECTS abroad.

## 4.2 Actions involving Teachers and Staff: Curriculum and Collaborations

The internationalization initiatives in which the teachers and staff of SUISS are involved and committed have two objectives: the construction of more international curricula and the creation of collaborations, including research. For the first objective, two visiting professors from foreign universities are invited every year for the provision of two courses entirely in English: teachers are asked to adopt in their teachings the CLIL methodology (Content and Language Integrated Learning). The Erasmus program is used for incoming and outgoing mobility for educational activities of teachers and staff within the international modules. Teachers have also implemented four open online courses held in English among the compulsory modules of the curriculum, both to facilitate the recovery of teachings by outgoing students and to offer training activities in English to incoming students. To facilitate the participation of officers in the mobilities, an immersive week is organized at the beginning of each semester on military English. Civilian students, on the other hand, can attend a cultural intercomprehension course which aims to develop the ability to integrate into different cultural contexts. For the second objective, teachers and staff participate periodically to international conferences and

meetings on Security and Defense HE to share experiences and initiatives, to discuss and to implement common activities together. In the period 2014-20 several European Erasmus+ Key Action2 Strategic Partnership among Higher Institutions which deal with Security and Defense education were funded. They reinforce the research and facilitate the spread of good practices. The SUISS participates in two of these: MGS – Military Gender Studies on gender gap and DIGICODE – Digital Competences for Improving Security and Defence Education to develop teachers’ digital skills.

Table 6 shows an overview of the proposed opportunities and services for teachers and staff.

Table 6. Overview of the proposed service mix for teachers and staff

Scope and objectives	Recommended actions and initiatives	Expected benefits
Increase the research and cooperation.	Participation to all international activities (In & Out) and create a network of researchers with similar interests in Security and Defence Sector.	Having an international experience at home for national (fits for all kind of students) and receiving more international students who participate in short mobility.
Enhance the possibility to lecture abroad.	Creation and implementation of a Pool of Lecturers.	Receive more lecturers and participate to modules abroad.
Improve digital skills.	Create new digital contents.	Possibility to share more contents with other teachers and improve didactic.

### 4.3 Actions of the Institution: e-Learning, Nets and New Scenario

The SUISS and the ETC&SAMS have taken various actions to support this internationalization process. First of all, they invested in e-learning as a winning tool to facilitate mobility. It reduces costs, increases participation at a distance, in presence and in hybrid mode (students in presence and at a distance at the same time). Since 2016, they developed and adopted a digital learning environment, enhanced the infrastructure, trained many teachers and put available content also in English (Marchisio et al, 2017 and Spinello et al., 2017). Thanks to this huge investment, the internationalization process has been only reduced but not interrupted by the pandemic (Spinello et al., 2021). Much attention was given to organize meetings with outgoing students to present the initiatives and incoming to welcome and support them also with peer-to-peer initiatives. Secondly, 17 bilateral agreements were signed with other European Institutions/Universities dealing with Security and Defense Education. During the pandemic, a virtual mobility agreement was also signed with the Military University of Technology - Warsaw to involve Polish students in the didactic activities in e-learning offered in Turin. For the next few years, also in the light of the COVID experience, the University of Turin intends to further invest in the production of content on Security and Defense in English as micro-credentials that are more easily usable than other modules, also in a lifelong learning perspective. Furthermore, according to the new Erasmus+ Programme (European Commission, 2021) opened on 25 March 2021, SUISS intends to increase the virtual mobility, not to replace the one in presence, but to integrate it. It will be helpful also in a lifelong learning perspective (Spinello et al., 2019 and 2020). The virtual mobility paradigm will transform the mobility into a blended mode. In this new scenario SUISS intends to organize Blended Intensive Programmes (BIP) that also allow in addition the acquisition of digital competences.

Table 7 shows an overview of the proposed services for Institutions.

Table 7. Overview of the proposed service mix for Institutions

Scope and objectives	Recommended actions and initiatives	Expected benefits
Facilitate and increase the exchange.	Adoption of Legal Framework. Creation of dedicate staff for international activities	Admin procedure simplified. Task oriented personnel and increased numbers of mobility.
Enhance the quality of Education and be able to face new challenges.	Participation to international fora and meetings. Integrate a Learning Management System in support of didactic activities.	Best practices sharing and adoption of new ideas and procedures. Possibility to adopt e-learning contents created by partners.

#### 4.4 Lessons Learned and Suggestion for Guidelines

The internationalization process adopted by the SUISS and the ETC&SAMS represent an interesting case study inside the Security and Defence Higher Education for the number of actors involved, for the variety of actions adopted, for the investment made in terms of personnel and financial resources. Its analysis makes it possible to help the institutions that deal with training in the field of Security and Defense to have the right approach and avoid mistakes. First of all, it suggests that adopting an internationalization process is important because it allows the development of a European culture of security and defense and to enable officers to operate more easily in international operational theaters. The analysis of the Case Study suggests that the process is now ahead not only in terms of mobility, but also in terms of curricula. It also shows how important it is to trigger the process which then in a few years became scalable at the level of students and teaching staff and staff involved. To avoid failures and practice sustainable internationalization, it is necessary to have a good e-learning service, digital learning environments that integrate presence and distance. To undertake a process of internationalization in the field of Security and Defense, a good organization of educational activities and training programs and a certain flexibility are required. As regards the internationalization of curricula, it is important to incorporate new methodologies in the didactic such as the use of resources in different languages, collaborative and cooperative learning, role play, simulations, different forms of evaluation such as peer evaluation that allow collaboration between students also from different countries also according to (Taalas et al., 2020). The development of an internationalization strategy is subject to many influences both from outside as well as within the institution. The primary drivers are the motives that an institution has, but which may not always be expressed, to engage with this process. This article looks at the internal organization and structures that are pertinent to the development of such a strategy, and provides a range of options which can be used by institutions. Finally, the development of an internationalization strategy needs an engagement at institution level. The institutions need internal organization and structures that are pertinent to the development of a strategy of internationalization and a good internal quality monitoring system. In case of risks the Institutions must think to a number of possible responses as happened in the case of the Covid pandemic.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

In the paper we answered the research question: What initiatives and policies of internationalization can be developed, and how, to enhance the European Security and Defense HE: we analyzed the experiences of the University of Turin, through the SUISS and ETC&SAMS, in the last seven academic years. This research can be considered a useful example for those who want to increase the internationalization of Security and Defence Higher Education, especially in this new digital era. The internationalization process intended not as a globalization but as a European educational training is absolutely crucial to create a European spirit and, in the field of Security and Defense HE, it is even more so for the type of complexity of the organizations in this sector. This change of spirit during the HE helps the creation of collaborations that continue throughout the career path. The actors involved in this process are students, teachers, staff, and the institutions themselves, which must adopt strategic policies to ensure that also those who, for any reasons, cannot physically move, can still be involved in this process. The EC's Digital Education Action Plan 2021-27 (European Commission, 2020) published in September 2020 indicates three main directions that will certainly facilitate the internationalization process: the development of infrastructures in terms of connectivity, devices and technologies, the enhancing of educators' digital competences and the creation of open quality content. It is important that all MS and all Institutes dealing with Security and Defence Education invest in digital education (Spinello et al. 2018) within a common framework to boost internationalization process that represents a great challenge for the future.

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