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## **INTERNATIONALISATION - THE WAY TO BUILD UP A EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY**

**Daniela CĂRUȚAȘU**

„Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy/Sibiu/Romania

**Abstract:**

Internationalization can be achieved through the study programs carried out at the institution level, the projects involving the institution and other scientific, sporting, cultural and social activities that are organized within the institution.

We can talk about internationalization „at home” and internationalization abroad, and from this point of view the institutions that consider the first option show maturity and profound understanding of the realities of the national, European and international higher education system.

A program that is carried out at European level and facilitates the achievement of the institutional objectives of internationalization is the Erasmus+ Programme. It is a complex and useful program that can financially support any institutional objective related to internationalization, a program through which collaboration relationships with any higher education institution or company in the world and covering all fields of activity can be established.

For the military higher education institutions in Europe there is another European program, namely the European Initiative for the Exchange of Young Officers. This is a program that, although not enjoying financial support, contributes to expanding and strengthening cooperation relations between military higher education institutions, to making educational curricula compatible and, in particular, to promoting military training modules that can be carried out jointly for cadets. The Implementation Group, through the 8 Development Lines it has in its composition, tries to identify the most appropriate ways to translate the above-mentioned objectives into practice.

The study will reveal a number of aspects related to internationalization, the peculiarities that arise in the military higher education institutions and their exemplification at “Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy in Sibiu.

*Key words: internationalization „at home”, internationalization abroad, mobilities, quality assurance, international semester, strategic partnership.*

### **1. Introduction**

The issue of the internationalization of higher education institutions is becoming more and more important, and even if there are no clear indicators and standards to assess the degree of internationalization of an institution, in the assessments made by national or international higher education quality assurance agencies, they also take into consideration the dimension of internationalization, even if it is not quantified.

Today, internationalization has become the white knight of higher education, the moral ground that needs to be defended, and the epitome of justice and equity. Internationalization has become a synonym of “doing good”, and people are less into questioning its effectiveness and essential nature: an instrument to improve the quality of education or research. [2]

The intensification of collaboration relations between higher education institutions at European and international level, especially through different programmes, different initiatives or through their bilateral will led to:

- a deeper knowledge among the institutions;

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- comparing different policies and strategies by which institutions want to grow;
- comparing the national standards that institutions must meet in order to ensure the quality of the educational act.

These issues have generated a kind of standardization or a way of building together some recognition systems, which all the institutions involved in such cooperation have to agree on. Obviously, these standards relate not only to the didactic act but also to the research, given the coherent combination and complementarity of the two components and the fact that without a permanent connection between the didactic activities and the research the transfer to the students of the specific methods of investigation and scientific research cannot have a solid foundation, the research experience of the academics being an essential factor.

It is a principle in line with the recent transformations in the national and European system that promotes the importance of research activity in institutional development.

For the internationalization of the higher education, the implications lie in delivering education and training programs across borders. Furthermore, the increase of the role of universities in the research and knowledge production, which is becoming more and more commercial, contributes to the international growth of student and academic staff mobility, the diversification of training and vocational training programs, and the provision of the right framework for research projects. [1]

It is well known that universities are an important vector when it comes to research, and collaboration between institutions and shared use of research infrastructure only increases their potential in developing more complex projects that cannot be done individually.

On the other hand, some projects, at least at European level, have encouraged the creation of networks that have targeted at least two objectives:

- educational - related to the proximity between institutions conducting similar study programmes and especially vocational programmes;
- scientific research - which relates to the proximity between institutions with common research directions.

If until recently, internationalization was considered to be as having as many outgoing mobilities, regardless of their type, there is a paradigm change and "internationalization at home" is gaining more and more consistency, showing the real image of internationalization of a university.



Fig.1 (The ways in which the internationalization of universities can be achieved)

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In addition to bilateral and regional agreements that facilitate the efforts of universities to develop their international dimension, there are several programs at EU level that support this goal. Here we mention the programs CEEPUS - Central European Exchange Program for University Studies, ERASMUS+ - The EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, HORIZON 2020 - The EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation etc., and for higher education military institutions we mention EMILYO – The European Initiative for the Exchange of Young Officers, NATO SPS - NATO - The Science for Peace and Security Programme, programs supported by EDA - European Defence Agency etc.

Any university, including the military ones, is considering using these tools that provide financial support for institutional projects that help increase internationalization, quality standards, and international recognition.

In the case of our academy, as a military specialized institution, which aims to shape future military leaders, we are fully aware that this is an age of internationalization. In this respect, partnerships are being sought with higher education institutions, mainly military, which carry out similar study programs in order to make our educational curricula compatible with the aim of increasing mobility and exchanges of experience between our institutions. It is well known that training programs for future officers are different from study programs in civilian universities, and they intent to achieve, apart from the academic pillar, the military and physical training pillar. Thus, through the partnerships we are pursuing, we try to cover all three pillars, not just the academic one, and not only military students and academics are taken into consideration for mobilities and exchanges of experience, but also military instructors. As an education and research institution, higher education military institutions are also involved in various research projects, this being, as stated above, another dimension of the internationalization of higher education. Moreover, another point to be made is the deep understanding of the benefits of “internationalization at home”, by adapting the educational offer to the requirements of our partners and providing them with military training modules, as well as organizing different events, such as international weeks for students and teachers, that would give our partners the opportunity to discover our institution.

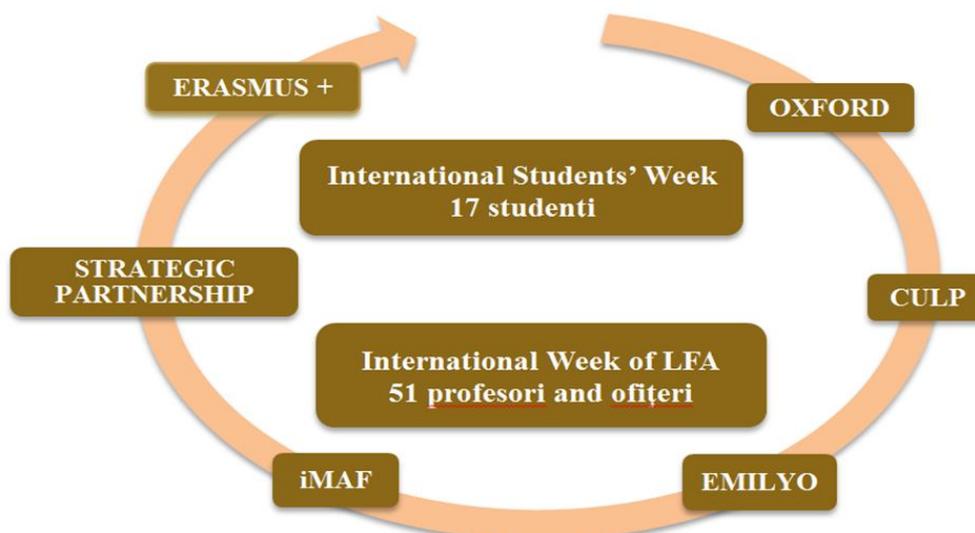


Fig. 2 (The programmes and events in which the LFA participates)

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As it can be seen in the figure above, our institution is involved in a number of programmes and events that we will describe later on.

## **2. ERASMUS+ Programme – the main engine for the internationalization of universities**

The Erasmus+ Programme builds on the achievements of more than 25 years of European programmes in the fields of education, training and youth, covering both an intra-European as well as an international cooperation dimension. Erasmus+ is the result of the integration of the following European programmes implemented by the Commission over the period 2007-2013: The Lifelong Learning Programme, the Youth in Action Programme, the Erasmus Mundus Programme, Tempus Programme, Alpha Programme, Edulink Programme and the Programmes of cooperation with industrialised countries in the field of higher education. [5]

The programme is structured around 5 actions: Key Action 1 – Mobility of Individuals, Key Action 2 – Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices, Key Action 3 - Support for Policy Reform, Jean Monnet Activities and Sport, each of which including different actions or activities. [5]

It is a complex programme that practically allows the financing of any activity aimed at the internationalization of a higher education institution.

Before we started participating in the Erasmus Programme, international relations activities were sporadic, with financial support from the institution and involving a small number of staff.

Starting with the academic year 2011-2012, our institution started activities under this programme when, with a budget of approximately 26000 Euros, 18 mobilities were carried out (the only international relations activities to which the CULP Programme is added).

**The ratio of outgoing and incoming mobilities for the academic years 2011-2012 and 2016-2017**

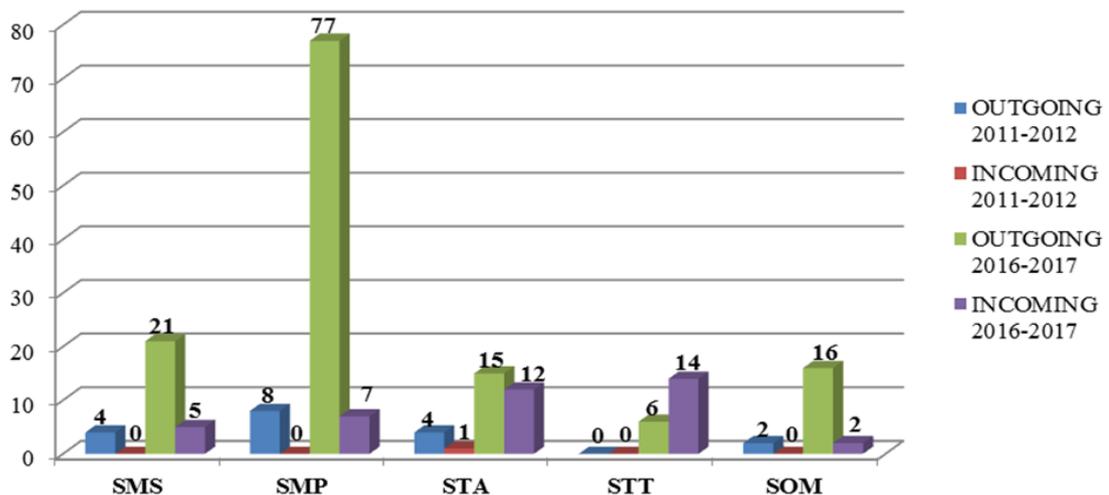


Fig. 3 (Mobilities carried out by the LFA in the academic years 2011-2012 and 2016-2017 under the Erasmus and Erasmus+ Programme)

### LEGEND:

SMS – Student Mobility for Studies

SMP – Student Mobility for Traineeship/Placement

STA – Teaching Assignment

STT – Staff Training

SOM – Organisational Support

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As it can be seen in the figure above, in the academic year 2016-2017, a number of 135 mobilities were carried out, with a budget of over 190000 Euros. The differences are immense, being just the exchanges made under this programme, without taking into account the other programmes in which our institution is involved.

An important observation is also the increase in the number of incoming activities which, from a single mobility in the academic year 2011-2012, increased to 40 mobilities in the academic year 2016-2017.

These are figures showing the progress made by our institution in international exchanges, increasing the visibility of our institution in the European space and increasing the quality of the education and training process,

Also, the international institutional assessment processes within the project "Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching - Quality, Diversity and Innovation in Romania's Universities", in which the external evaluation of "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy was carried out by the EUA - European Universities Associations in the period 2012-2013 led to the awarding of the titles "One of the Best Regional University" and "Manager of the Year" by Europe Business Assembly and The Club of the Rectors of Europe at the "Summit of Leaders - Science and Education" which took place in Oxford in 2013.

In the framework of Erasmus+ Programme, but of key action 2, our institution was a partner in a strategic partnership project with four other military institutions from Poland (project coordinator) - General Tadeusz Kościuszko Military Academy of Land Forces from Wrocław, Austria - Theresian Military Academy from Wiener Neustadt, Czech Republic - University of Defence from Brno and Hungary - National University of Public Service, Faculty of Military Sciences and Officer Training from Budapest, a project that aimed at designing an international semester for European military students to be implemented within the educational curricula of the five partner institutions and other military institutions that want to take a step towards the compatibility of university study programs at European level. The project had a funding of approximately 260000 Euros over two years, and only our institution carried out a number of 33 mobilities in the academic year 2016-2017 within the six planned activities within the project.

It is obvious that, with appropriate funding, as is done under the Erasmus+ Programme, the institutional objectives on internationalization are easier to achieve.

As a development direction under this programme, our institution aims to expand its partnerships with similar institutions outside the European area, with so-called "partner countries" through KA107 - Key Action 107 (KA103 - Key Action 103 being the similar action with European institutions, or the so-called "Programme countries").

Moreover, we want to exploit the experience gained in the strategic partnership by participating in other similar projects together with the partner institutions or with new institutions with which we can start cooperation relations.

### **3. Other programmes and events that contribute to military institutions' internationalization**

As we mentioned before, besides the Erasmus+ exchange Programme, our institution is involved in other programmes, such as EMILYO, iMAF - International Military Academic Forum where our institution is partner together with 4 other institutions from Austria, Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, CULP - the Cultural Understanding and Language Proficiency, a programme supported by CELTT - the Cadet English Training Team etc.

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EMILYO is a program agreed by EU defense ministers in 2008 to facilitate exchanges of military students and instructors. These exchanges cover the physical and military training pillars and consist of offering voluntary and free of charge modules for a period of maximum 2 weeks by military higher education institutions in which cadets and young officers from other institutions military in Europe can participate. It is a programme that, if at first it did not work almost at all, the offers are limited and the international participation almost non-existent in the last three to four years has also intensified through a better involvement of the Implementation Group - IG, a group created for the implementation of the Initiative, and composed of representatives of the Ministries of Defense of all EU states and iMAF where, as mentioned above, our institution is a partner (and organizer of the 2015 edition) - the forum aimed at improving relations of collaboration between military higher education institutions.

If at the beginning our institution was only a beneficiary of these modules offered by the partner institutions from the academic year 2014-2015, our institution has also provided two military training modules for a week's duration: The Reconnaissance Module and the Survival in Temporary Isolation Module.

CULP is another programme that has as main objectives the enhancement of English skills for Romanian students and the cultural and military interactions between the two parties involved in this programme.

After a break of several years, this programme was restarted in 2012 and runs annually for a period of 3 weeks, both inside and outside the institution. Within the institution, the American cadets and our students carry out activities of mutual knowledge of the traditions, culture and customs of the two countries, the specific terminology of the military field, and also participating in various social and tourist activities in Sibiu or other locations in the country.

The CULP program is important for our institution because it contributes significantly to "internationalization at home", by involving a considerable number of students and also to the development, as mentioned earlier, of cooperation relationships with US partners, in KA 107.

In the chart below, we can see the evolution of these two programmes during 2011 and 2017.

The internationalization of research refers to the measures and concerns undertaken to ensure publication in international journals, access to the international database platforms, the institution's research priorities and involvement in international research events etc. Even if our institution is not involved in any international project, a project is being carried out in the academy under the framework of PNCDI - National Research-Development and Innovation Plan and several projects within the Sectoral Research Plan of the Ministry of Defense. Also in this direction of internationalization two scientific publications that are indexed in various international databases are supported: the Review of Land Forces Academy and the Scientific Bulletin, but also the conferences organized for students - SECOSAFT and CADET INOVA, respectively for academics - The Knowledge-Based Organization, whose editions from 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2015 are indexed in ISI CPCI and enjoy a large international participation.

In addition to these programmes, our institution honours various invitations from partner institutions to international weeks, sports competitions, military exercises etc. In this respect, starting with this year, our institution also organizes international students and academics', which will give our partners the opportunity to discover our institution.

### **4. Conclusions**

Even if we notice the advantages offered by a mobility period in another partner institution or in the home institution, but in an international environment, there is no satisfying answer concerning the increase in skills and competencies of future military leaders by internationalization is provided.

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In order to provide a scientifically substantiated answer to this issue, in [3] the author studied the development of achieved grades of future leaders who spent mobility periods abroad compared to those who just stayed at the home institution and noticed that all mobility students achieved better grades after their return in comparison with non-mobility students, reaching the conclusion that internationalization has a positive impact on the development of skills and competencies of future leaders. In the same study [3], the author continued the idea by comparing two groups of students participating in the CSDP Module organized at the Theresian Military Academy (internationalization at home). The first group had no international participation and in the second group cadets from different European countries were integrated. He noticed that the results obtained by the students in the second group were much better than in the first group, raising the conclusion that internationalization increases the skills and competencies of future leaders even in short modules.

Also, in [4], the author has revealed changes in the mobility of students' metabolic-data, meaning that metabolic data of mobility students cause better preconditions for managing challenges in comparison with non-mobility students, also proofing a positive effect on international activities of future military leaders. Even if these changes can not be scientifically explained, the effects on the performance of students who have participated in a period of mobility in another partner institution or in the home institution but in an international environment are obvious.

At the end, in the study [3], the author concludes that the most important results of internationalization are: interaction between different nationalities and between different education levels (the most important factor); leads to better learning outcomes; the more the study groups are internationally mixed the better the learning outcomes; even short modules increase English skills; elaborating the problems within small international study groups leads to better learning outcomes in comparison to teacher-centred teaching.

"Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy has set out clear and viable future internationalization goals, among which we mention:

- better balance between SMS - Students Mobilities for Studies and SMP - Students Mobilities for Traineeship/Placement;
- better balance between outgoing and incoming students;
- diversifying cooperation with European universities within KA103 and with universities from partner countries within KA107;
- attracting professors and researchers to build up the Doctoral School;
- increasing the involvement in national and international research projects using international funding and partners from abroad.

For the first objective, we want to increase the number of students participating in study mobilities, and in this respect we need to make a better match between the study programmes carried out in our institution and the partner institutions, the first step being the construction of the international semester that I referred to previously.

Achieving the second objective can be done by improving our educational offer, building up international semesters for all study programs at the bachelor level and diversifying the offer for military training modules.

Every year we add new European partners to run Erasmus+ activities with, our desire being to start collaborating with institutions from partner countries outside the European Union, starting with universities from USA, Moldova and Serbia, given that we have already concluded bilateral contracts, but not under the Erasmus+ Programme.

The last two objectives are ambitious and challenging, but they can be tangible by better exploiting collaboration relationships with teachers in partner institutions and building on the experience gained in the strategic partnership of key action 2.

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At the same time we are aware there are a lot of challenges in accomplishing these goals, among them we mention:

- national standards in the accreditation of study programs;
- communication in English language;
- increasing competition to attract highly trained graduates;
- identifying topics and partners for international projects.

For the first challenge, for example, that a study programme should be entirely in Romanian or English language, it is not possible to run only part of the semester or only part of the curricula in English, which makes it difficult to implement an international semester.

The growing demand for English in research and teaching and its implications for cultural and linguistic heritage, as well as implicit requirements for higher education institutions are well known. Although in our institution English is one of the exams of the admission contest, some of the students have communication problems in English, the same situation being encountered for teachers.

The problem of attracting well-trained high school graduates is complicated for all universities in Romania and for all military academies in Europe. For military institutions it is all the more complicated given that, before taking the admission examination, candidates must also pass sports tests and must be evaluated both physically and psychologically.

Even if until now the exchanges of academics and the experience gained within the strategic partnership of key action 2 have focused on the didactic activity, we believe that the premises of collaborations in the field of research have also been created. In this context, for example, when referring to the HORIZON 2020 programme, one of the eligibility criteria, the background of the director and the members of the project team, can be very difficult to accomplish.

Maybe, the most challenging thing is obtain accreditation for an entire study program in English that is common for at least two partner institutions.

Anyway, things are evolving, and most of the challenges today will be normal in the future and most of the current problems will be solved and implemented in the military institutions.

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