

Common Security and Defence Policy Common Module

The experiences of two cadets

Introduction

From the 23rd until the 27th of April 2018, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) 'Common Module' took place at the Hellenic Air Force (HAFA) Academy in Athens, Greece. These so-called *common modules* are part of a bigger European initiative to promote the exchange of young military officers, cadets and security studies students, which is called 'EMILYO' (Exchange of Military Young Officers), inspired by Erasmus. The goal of these exchanges within the framework of EMILYO is to promote and improve interoperability of various European militaries and the security and defence sectors. Moreover, the concerning participants are the future military and security sector elites whom should understand, at least at a basic level, what their future role in international defence and security cooperation might be. Therefore, the goal of this Common Module was to give a broad overview of the European Security and Defence Policy. On the other hand, another reasonably important aspect of this week was to enjoy our time in Greece with participants from all over Europe and, in that way, expand our network. People from seven different countries participated: Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Italy, Poland and last but not least the Netherlands. Greek cadets from the army, air force, navy and police academy and also students from multiple Greek universities took part. The international students were mainly cadets from several military academies, both army and air force.



Picture 1: *meeting each other on the first day during the breaks between the lectures*

Lectures and working groups

The week consisted of multiple interesting lectures, varying from the subject of *lessons learned from EU space missions and operations to the European Union External Action Service (EEAS) and Crisis Management Structures*. Most lectures were delivered by Greek professors, but some international lecturers gave presentations as well. Among others, the Belgian dr. Joris van Bladel from the Austrian Institute for European and Security policy and advisor to the Austrian Ministry of Defence gave two brilliant lectures on the EEAS. Also dr. Daniel Fiott, security and defence editor at the European Union Institute for Security Studies, gave some great insight in the EU Global Strategy. Besides the lectures, Thursday consisted of a working group case study, conducted by the Institute of Research and Training on European Affairs. In short, cadets and students were divided into mixed syndicates, forming several EU institutes such as the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD), the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) and the European Commission. Then we were handed a case of an artificial scenario in North Africa (called 'Sodor' in this case) and a simulated total budget of €15 million. During the day, the goal was to come up with a solution to the fictional Sodor crisis by devising an external European military and/or civilian mission and/or operation. The process to come to this solution was a combination of giving presentations, debating and cooperation between the several EU-institutes. The final result was a combination of a military and civilian mission/operation which was, fortunately, even approved by the 'European Commission'!



Picture 2 & 3: Discussion and our presentation as the 'CMPD' on possible military action during the working group case study

Sightseeing in and around Athens

Besides the lectures and group work, there was quite some time for sightseeing and enjoying Athens. We must admit that we had a magnificent time and great experiences there with our new Greek and other international friends. Not only the great weather (we are absolutely not used to that in the Netherlands) but also the Greek food (Gyros, Souvlaki) and drinks (Ouzo) made it even better. During the week, we got the opportunity to see a lot from Athens. We experienced all kinds of different (especially the Greek, or Hellenic) cultures as well. On Monday it started with a short tour through the Hellenic Air Force Museum, which we left to go to the City of Kifisia. This town is a suburb of Athens and was explained to us as 'something like a small Monaco' and although we only had a short time to spend there, it lived up to that name; we saw Ferraris, Porsches and Rolex shops, you could just feel the exclusive vibe there. The second day we went to the Athens city centre, where we, of course, grabbed some Greek pita gyros again and ended up at a rooftop bar enjoying the beautiful scenery of Athens and the Acropolis by night. The third day consisted of a visit to the Acropolis museum. After this, we had the perfect supper at a wonderful picturesque restaurant at the foot of the Acropolis hill. On Thursday we finally had the chance to climb up the Acropolis and appreciated the astonishing view from up there. Once more, something to mark off the bucket list. Another special moment during the week was seeing the change of guards in Athens.



Picture 4: *the renowned Greek food*



Picture 5: *a part of the international delegation that took part in the module, in front of the Acropolis Parthenon*

Closing ceremony and departure

The week ended on Friday the 27th of April 2018 with a closing ceremony, in which everyone received their certificates which are even worth two European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits. After a short reception, we were brought to the airport to catch our flight to Amsterdam once again. It felt quite weird to leave all these amazing people after such a great week and to say farewell. The good thing is that we might see each other again in the future; maybe even during some kind of European Mission or other kind of cooperation! We would like to thank everyone that was involved in making this week possible and especially the cadets for guiding us through the week, over the academy campus and in Athens.



Picture 6: group photo after everyone received their certificates during the closing ceremony

In our opinion, the CSDP Common Module was a fantastic experience! Hopefully, it will improve the safety and security cooperation between the EU member states in the near future.

Article by:

Officer-cadet T. (Thomas) Kloosterman

Officer-cadet T. (Tom) van der Steen

Royal Military Academy Netherlands
Royal Netherlands Air Force