

Dr. Franjo Tuđman Defense and Security University

Zagreb, January 25th 2024

Erasmus policy statement 2021 - 2027

Dr. Franjo Tuđman Defense and Security University (hereinafter SOISFT) is a newly founded university in the Republic of Croatia, located in Zagreb and Split. It was formally established in April 2021 with the adoption of the Act on the Establishment of the Defense and Security University (Official Gazette 34/21). SOISFT is a leading higher education and scientific research institution for the needs of the homeland security and defense system in the Republic of Croatia.

The establishment of SOISFT has, for the first time in the Republic of Croatia, paved the way for citizens to enrol in studies focusing on homeland security and defense. Additionally, this has facilitated active participation in the Erasmus+ Programme within the realms of international cooperation and project activities. The Erasmus+ Programme, recognized as a pivotal instrument in the internationalization process, contributes to the establishment of a contemporary university that adeptly responds to the evolving challenges and security dynamics of the 21st century.

Given that SOISFT has just started its official existence and that we are in the process of comprehensively taking over all study programs that, in accordance with the Act on the Establishment of the Defense and Security University, will be in SOISFT in the next 45 days, we do not have any existing international projects, nor do we engage in student and staff exchanges, as we are currently in the application process for the Erasmus+ Charter in Higher Education.

After receiving the Erasmus+ Charter in Higher Education, we will continue with the existing projects that the Croatian Military Academy dr. Franjo Tuđman (hereinafter HVU) is currently planning and implementing within the framework of the Erasmus+ Charter of the University of Zagreb. This also applies to EMILYO exchange projects of military personnel (cadets, underofficers, officers). SOISFT will actively promote and prioritize, as one of the key components of its existence and future academic activities, the intensive mobility of students and teaching and non-teaching staff with the aim of strengthening both individual and collective educational and scientific-research capabilities. Both within Erasmus+ and through EMILYO. Furthermore, SOISFT will take over and continue to act with regard to the existing, previously signed and contracted Erasmus+ inter-institutional agreements (7) between the HVU and program countries.

In alignment with the legal framework, the pivotal activities of SOISFT include: 1. Organizing and conducting university undergraduate, graduate, integrated undergraduate and graduate, and postgraduate studies in the field of the defense system and homeland security system, 2. Organization and execution of undergraduate professional studies and specialist graduate professional studies in the field of defense system and homeland security system, 3.

Organization and execution of educational programs based on the principles of lifelong education in the field of the defense system and homeland security system, 4. Development of military-defense and security-intelligence sciences and arts, performing scientific and highly specialized work, 5. Active participation in international cooperation, conferences and projects, 6. publishing, library and IT activities for the needs of educational, scientific and professional work.

Considering the imperative of international cooperation and engagement in international projects for institutional development and the reinforcement of university capacities, in line with the core principles of the European Higher Education Area, engaging in Erasmus+ activities is an indispensable and vital trajectory for the university's future endeavours. SOISFT plans to participate in Erasmus+ activities:

1. KA1 Learning mobility (Programme and partner countries),
2. KA2 Cooperation among organizations and institutions and
3. KA3 Support to policy development and cooperation.

In the execution of mobility initiatives, SOISFT will apply the key principles of non-discrimination, transparency and inclusiveness for both students and staff, whereby special attention will be placed on people with fewer opportunities. In this regard, SOISFT will ensure that all information about mobility opportunities for people with fewer opportunities is publicly available (on the university's website, in lecture halls, on notice boards, etc.) and that teaching and non-teaching staff across all components of the university are informed about the opportunities and mobility rights of persons with fewer opportunities. SOISFT will support all forms of dissemination of the mentioned information through the organization of meetings of persons with fewer opportunities, presentations of personal experiences of persons with fewer opportunities, expert lectures and panel discussions at the university. Furthermore, SOISFT will actively cooperate with all relevant state bodies and civil society institutions (associations, etc.) that professionally deal with issues of protection and ensuring the rights of persons with fewer opportunities, and will implement their advice, opinions and recommendations as necessary.

In order to achieve an enviable level of competitiveness and quality, the focus will be on long-term planning and implementation of high-quality mobility of staff and students and on cooperation with partner European universities and other strategic partners in the country and the world. In the realm of student mobility, a key priority will be to establish the necessary conditions for the automatic recognition of all credits earned through learning and training abroad (including blended mobility) that are in line with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

The Department for International Cooperation of SOISFT will be accountable for overseeing the activities related to KA1 Learning mobility (Program and partner countries), encompassing the exchange of teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as students, and the subsequent recognition of ECTS credits. The selection procedures for these mobility activities

will be transparent, fair, coherent and documented. Public calls will be issued, ensuring that students, teaching staff, and non-teaching staff are subjected to equitable selection processes that will include uniform criteria for all and the right to appeal.

The Course Catalogue in English will be published and updated on the University's website, encompassing comprehensive information about the university and life in Zagreb and Split, contact information for all university's services, details on faculty subjects and courses, exam-taking procedures, guidelines for applying for exams, ECTS credit recognition processes, language requirements for specific faculty subjects, security protocols, safety measures, and general conditions and rights for all students and staff as outlined in the Erasmus Charter in Higher Education. SOISFT will publish and regularly update data on the grading system employed, along with grade distribution tables for all study programs and ensure that students receive clear and transparent information on procedures for the recognition and conversion of grades.

All forms of mobility will be based on contractual obligations, i.e. Learning Agreements (for students) and Mobility Agreements (for staff), and the Department for International Cooperation of SOISFT will provide assistance in accommodation, visa and insurance related issues. In terms of equal treatment for all, incoming students will be exempt from the payment of tuition fees, registration fees, examination fees, as well as access fees to libraries and other specialized facilities at the university.

For the purpose of easier adaptation, SOISFT will provide all incoming students with mentoring and active support from domestic students (e.g. through the buddy system) and language training through exercises, lectures, and courses. Also, at the end of the mobility period, SOISFT will issue Transcripts of Records for incoming students, and information about the completed study and/or traineeship mobility activities will be included in the Diploma Supplement. All activities, i.e. learning, training and teaching outcomes acquired abroad, will be recognized and clearly stated in the documentation issued by the university administration.

All incoming students will be included in the student community for the purpose of integration and socialization, reduction of language barriers, exchange of knowledge and experiences, and promotion of the Erasmus program. SOISFT will organize and provide the necessary resources for the inclusion of incoming students. Workshops on student life and mental health will be conducted, along with lectures, panel discussions, sports tournaments, and various other activities.

Moreover, SOISFT will actively support the involvement of former students (alumni) and staff who once participated in Erasmus+ activities to ensure long-term and deeper integration of all Erasmus+ Programme participants and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and experience.

All international cooperation and student and staff exchange initiatives at SOISFT will exclusively rely on inter-institutional agreements and adhere to the principles outlined in the Erasmus Charter in Higher Education. In order to maintain standards and quality, the

Department for International Cooperation will perform a periodic self-assessment of the implementation of the Erasmus Charter in Higher Education.

Concerning KA2 activities (Cooperation among organizations and institutions), SOISFT plans to participate in Partnerships for Cooperation, which will enable the acquisition of valuable experience in international cooperation and the strengthening of capabilities, as well as the achievement of high-quality innovative results. One of the primary action priorities will be aimed at embracing digital transformation by enhancing digital readiness, resilience, and capacity. The key objectives of SOISFT will be focused on the realization of all Erasmus+ sector priorities, especially the creation of a more connected, innovative, inclusive and digital higher education institution, the promotion of interconnected systems of higher education and the support of higher education institutions in their cooperation with partner institutions in Ukraine in response to the ongoing conflict. In fulfilling the sectoral priority related to Ukraine, SOISFT will focus on fostering partnership collaborations with universities in Ukraine and transferring and implementing experience and knowledge in the field of security, defense, and European values, as outlined in the provisions of the Common Security and Defense Policy of the EU. SOISFT will actively cooperate with other national universities and scientific research institutes for the purpose of facilitating the transfer and acquisition of essential knowledge, as well as promoting the integration of the Erasmus+ Programme. The emphasis will be placed on those institutions with which SOISFT cooperated within the framework of the Zagreb Security Forum.

As far as activities related to KA3 Support to policy development and cooperation are concerned, SOISFT will actively cooperate with the NATO alliance and other universities in the field of defense and security in the European Union (by organizing conferences, workshops, panel discussions and other forms of events and activities). The knowledge acquired and shared during these engagements will be actively applied in providing scientific and professional support to inform political decision-makers at the national, European, and NATO alliance levels. In this context, the Institute for Security and Defense Studies will assume a special role as a future scientific research centre at SOISFT.

Strategy, objectives and impact

SOISFT acknowledges the significance of international activities that include mobility programs. In terms of mobility, the key is the European initiative for the exchange of young officers (also cadets and underofficers) (EMILYO, also known as “Military Erasmus”), in which Croatia has actively participated from 2018. Croatia is also on the list of members of the European Security and Defence College (from 2019), which brings together a number of institutions that deal with issues of defense and security at the level of the European Union. Every year, Croatia participates in the EMILYO modules for the cadets’ exchange.

Taking into account the complex security challenges in the 21st century, but also technological progress, modernization and globalization processes that directly affect the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, international cooperation is set as an imperative to catch up with the world. This is precisely why international projects and the exchange of students and teaching and non-teaching staff represent one of the key strategic directions of

the future development strategy of SOISFT. By acquiring the Erasmus Charter in Higher Education and participating in the Erasmus+ Programme, SOISFT intends to achieve a higher level of internationalization, which includes increased visibility, modernization, setting high European standards in the education process in military-defense and security-intelligence sciences and arts, and institutional connection with as many as possible European and world universities dealing with defense and security issues.

In terms of scientific research work, teaching and training, SOISFT plans to utilize various means to encourage teaching and non-teaching staff, scientists and researchers to participate in mobility programs (including the organization of periodic workshops focused on the Erasmus+ Programme, disseminating information through the university's website, posting notices on bulletin boards, sending informative newsletters about the Erasmus+ Programme to both teaching and non-teaching staff, etc.).

The Erasmus+ Programme plays a crucial role in achieving several interconnected and interdependent final goals for SOISFT. Firstly, through mobility initiatives, Erasmus+ facilitates the creation and sustenance of a professional and experienced teaching and non-teaching staff, which is essential for meeting high standards of education. Secondly, the Erasmus+ Programme can contribute to the development of competitive, high-quality students who, upon graduation, will be both theoretically and practically ready to work in the national security system, and their knowledge and innovative ideas are anticipated to enable them to actively participate in enhancing and improving the defense and homeland security system.

In order to modernize and speed up administrative processes and to respect and promote the green practices of the European Union, SOISFT will take all necessary steps to digitize the administrative implementation of mobility in accordance with the technical standards of the European Student Card.

Indicators

To assess and examine the success of the Erasmus+ Programme implementation at SOISFT, various both quantitative and qualitative indicators will be employed, from reports and participant surveys to annual action plans. The number of inter-institutional agreements will indicate the progress achieved for a particular year. SOISFT has set the objective of maximizing the number of inter-institutional agreements annually, aiming for at least a 10% annual increase. Based on the activities to be implemented, it is expected that at least 5 individual mobility programs of both staff and students will be realized in the upcoming year. SOISFT will also develop annual action plans, providing a framework for comparing normative and empirical data. Surveys and reports of incoming and outbound staff and students will be an important indicator of the quality and results of program implementation at individual levels.

The main objectives of SOISFT by 2027 can be divided into the following parts:

1. Opening the university to the world through active promotion of the Erasmus+ program and active participating and initiation of international projects and partnerships;

2. Significant increase in student mobility in all forms (physical, virtual and blended mobility) and staff mobility (teaching and non-teaching staff);
3. Highlighting the recognition, value and importance of education abroad for staff and students;
4. Strengthening inclusiveness and promoting European educational values;
5. Achieving an enviable level of internationalization at home, multilingualism and multiculturalism;
6. Digitalisation of administration, compliance with green practices and creation of an efficient and modern university;
7. Use of European Student Card;
8. Increasing the quality of international projects and partnerships;
9. Sustainability and long-term impact of all projects at the university level.