

THE QUALITATIVE DESIGN OF AN INTERNATIONALIZATION FRAMEWORK STRATEGY FOR MILITARY HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT:

International military relations are complexly determined by the strategic and political framework of cooperation, and by the dynamics of diplomatic relations within the volatile geostrategic and geopolitical context, with relevance and impact at the regional, European, and trans-Atlantic levels. In this context, the present paperwork aims to disseminate the most efficient methods and tools through which the military higher education institutions can contribute to the enrichment of international military cooperation policies, directly by stimulating the academic process of internationalization, which is extremely beneficial for promoting higher standards in the harmonized training of military personnel, in line with the updated technical, technological, and operational requirements at the European and international levels. For this purpose, the authors have considered the present importance of the Internationalization process of the Higher Education System, aiming to offer a strategic instrument for conceiving an operational framework in designing the qualitative and quantitative expressions of international actions, as part of the institutional strategic plan and medium and long run perspectives. The article represents in fact, the first step toward a wider research, where the authors are aiming to identify the way in which the internationalization process can bring a competitive advantage on the academic services sector. The examples are brought from the Military Higher Education System, where the academic, training and research services are connected to a higher level of international affairs and diplomacy, the present paperwork configuring the prior analysis of how the internationalization strategy could become a strong vector for international cooperation process.

KEYWORDS:

Internationalization, military education, higher education, international relations, military diplomacy

1. Introduction. Conceptual delimitations concerning the internationalization of higher education

The process of internationalization of education is conceptually defined as the set of operational and strategic actions aimed at

bilaterally opening the academic, training, and research spheres to the international environment, both inbound and outbound, by leveraging external axiological variables within internal practices. From this perspective of research conducted in this

direction, internationalization of education is a complex concept that should not be reduced to merely defining and pursuing a goal in itself, but rather, it should be centred around the quality of higher education.

In this regard, Jane Knight has defined the internationalization of education as, “[...] *a process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of higher education*” (De Witt, 2000). In an updated vision, according to De Wit (2020), internationalization represents “[...] *the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the mission, functions, and delivery mode of secondary or higher educational services, with the aim of enhancing the quality and research for all students and staff, as well as making a significant contribution to society*”. Analysing the theoretical concepts at the national level, it can be synthesized that the internationalization process is perceived based on two main vectors, namely internationalization abroad, and internationalization at home, each of these vectors appealing to specific strategies and policies of promotion and implementation (Petcu et al, 2005).

Academic internationalization is often reduced too abruptly to the international mobility of teaching staff and students, while other important dynamic components with significant impact on the quality of educational and research processes are neglected. Thus, according to the authors’ opinions and considering the practice of the last decade in the dynamics of military institutions of higher education, internationalization is based on three action vectors, significantly influencing institutional development strategies, as follows:

- Inbound internationalization;
- Outbound internationalization;
- Multilateral internationalization.

a. **Inbound internationalization** contains all actions aimed at attracting

international resources (human resources, material, informational) from abroad to the national academic, training, and research sectors, residually or even virtually in terms of domestic resources, on income fluxes policy, through exchanges or other operations such as “joint” (cooperation), “twinning” (transfer), “spinning” (generation/dissemination), “catalyst” (polarization) or “exchange” (mobilities).

b. **Outbound internationalization** encompasses the outgoing dynamics of human, material, and informational resources, from the national territory to abroad, in all educational, training, and research dimensions, through different types of active or proactive actions, in rebound to the “inbound” activities (i.e. joint, twinning, spinning, catalyst or exchanges).

c. **Multilateral internationalization** refers to those processes generated in the international environment that cannot be attributed to a particular partner or to a well-defined space, targeting either joint actions of multicultural cooperation (i.e. organizations, associations, forums, conferences, international events, etc.), or depersonalized interactions in the digital public space, with relevant impact on the image, status, and vision/mission of higher education institutions (digital promotion/communication, depersonalized public expression, etc.).

On the other hand, considering the ways in which the bilateral or multilateral relations for cooperation are generated and further maintained, the internationalization process can be generated through proactive actions (initiation), reactive actions (response), contextual actions (by adhesion or consensus) or by neutral positioning (by actions of scouting for international cooperation opportunities). These types of activities explain the ways in which the internationalization relations are generated, depicted as follows:

a. **Proactive academic internationalization processes** are generated by institutional vectors of promotion abroad,

on bilateral and multilateral levels, through the preliminary initiation of cooperation processes, on by direct bilateral approaches aimed to set up the cooperation on inter-institutional level, in the case of organizing incoming and outgoing activities/actions through specific programs/projects or by negotiations through specialized services (the bilateral cooperation plan) as military attaches offices abroad.

b. Academic reactive internationalization processes are determined by the authorized response of the institutions in reply to the actions initiated by the international partners, based on the regulated cooperation status at the bilateral or multilateral level, such as in the case of participation in training modules, mobilities for studies/practice/teaching placements, or accessing/implementing research-innovation-development projects/programs. Also, in this category falls the alignment with the international academic or training standards in terms of quality management system, or in line with other evaluation systems.

c. Academic contextual internationalization processes aim to adhere and activate academic institutions in various consortia, forums, international organizations, or academic events, as members or invitees, institutions seek direct involvement in multilateral international dialogue as an active part in promoting military diplomatic interests.

d. Neutral academic internationalization is related to the sum of actions pursued to monitor the academic filed or to scout for international cooperation opportunities, being also considered the active actions for advertising the academic services, through international marketing activities conducted in formal or informal manner.

2. The vision and mission of higher education institutions in formulating internationalization strategies

The strategic process of academic

internationalization has an important impact against the academic development, on medium- and long-term run, leading to a wide range of positive effects with added value, both at the institutional level but also within the national education system, with consequences on social, economic, and cultural dimensions, by:

- promoting the educational and training services and also the scientific research offer on international level, for a superior valorisation of human, material, financial, and informational resources;

- getting a diversified and wider access to the knowledge transfer at the international level;

- aligning the higher education policies with the quality standards recognized at the European and international levels;

- enhancing the quality of study programs and training modules, in compliance with the European and transatlantic practices and standards;

- promoting the European, but also the national values, cultural features, and military traditions at the international level.

The vision of the academic strategic development at the international level aims to define the military higher education institutions as significant providers of educational services and scientific research in the military field or adjacent fields, in both the military and civilian sectors, both in the Black Sea region and in the European context, by cultivating the quality and the academic excellence, leveraging the potential for funding institutional projects from community, regional, or international funds.

The academic internationalization strategy aims to enhance the quality of education and scientific research processes at the international level, in accordance with the goals outlined in the European Commission's *2030 Strategy*, which defines the European Education and Research Area and its imperatives for harmonized development at the community level. The

internationalization strategy particularly relies on broadening and diversifying the portfolio of collaborations with external partners and is supported both by promoting educational offerings in international languages and by participating in various European or international programs and projects, with academic or military themes, as well as by organizing student and teaching staff/instructor/specialist incoming and outgoing mobility/placements.

According to the strategic management principles, each academic

institution should prior foresee the medium and long-run imperatives on development path, from its strategic vision to its assumed mission, as result of assessing of external and internal capabilities, pursuing with specific strategic to reach it on specific committed terms, defined in qualitative and quantitative manner (Ansoff, 2007; Barney, 2006). Then, according to the Figure no. 1 stages, the first step would be to define the academic vision and the mission, in fully relation with pre-determined capabilities from internal and external perspectives.

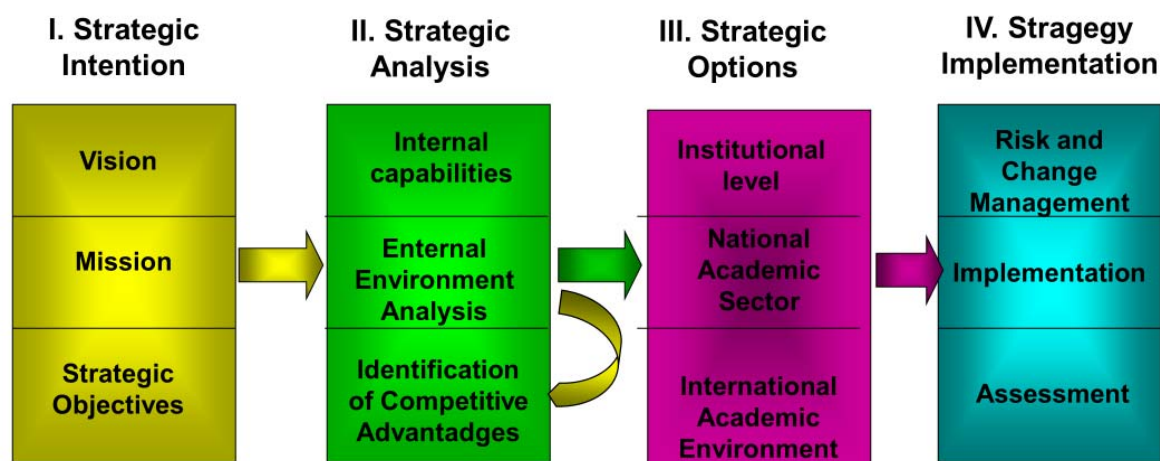


Figure no. 1: *The strategic management process designed for Higher Education*
(Source: Ansoff, 2007; Barney, 2006; Warren, 2008; Wulfen, 2011)

The next step will be to seek, in compliance with the revealed competitive advantages, to identify the most suitable strategies to make the assumed mission operational, depicting the way-to-go, through an institutional strategic development plan for medium run perspective (Grant, 2008). The strategic options will be part of the institutional development plan, and for making this time line operational, the strategic outlines should be further depicted in operational objectives, on short term. For academic sector, this is corresponding to the University Development plan, detailed on annually operational plans, that should be

focused on SMART objectives, under specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bounded expressions (Warren, 2008).

The article main objective is to offer practical tools in designing the internationalization strategic plan and to further provide quantitative indicators for monitoring and assessing the implementation of strategic road-map for international cooperation in field of academic service, considering into an innovative manner, both the strategic management and quality management perspectives.

3. The qualitative and quantitative framework of the internationalization strategy of Military Higher Education Institutions (MHEI)

The internationalization strategy is developed as explained in previous chapter, in compliance with the Strategic Plan for Institutional Development, in line with the Strategy for the Development of Military Education, with the specific legislation of the Romanian higher education, both military and civilian, as well as with the provisions of subsequent acts issued by the relevant ministries (Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, and Communications). The fundamental objective of the internationalization strategy is to value the opportunities identified in the field of education and scientific research, harmonized with the predicted trends in the economic and social spheres, at both national and international levels.

The internationalization strategy must embrace in its structure the principles of institutional transparency, ethics, equity, continuity, diversification, and development towards excellence, with the assumption of the mission to assimilate the values of national and universal culture, based on following essential vectors of internationalization:

1. stimulating cooperation at the regional and international levels aiming to increase the international visibility;

2. stimulating international mobility for staff and students, both incoming and outgoing;

3. developing a diversified portfolio of educational and training programs provided in widely spoken international languages;

4. implementing international programs for military training and practical stages with military partner institutions at the European level;

5. capitalizing the innovation, research and development potential by accessing and implementing joint

actions/projects/programs with international partners, funded from EU, regional, or international funds;

6. increasing the quality of international cooperation activities and diplomatic actions to facilitate the institutional journey towards academic excellence.

These strategic directions should be the major outlines of the institution's strategic development plan, and should be progressively and systematically implemented through annual operational plans, the monitoring process relies on SMART-type indicators, as outlined in the Quality management System (QMS), which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bounded.

In the following part of the present study, the authors have sought the analyse the identified strategic directions, to reveal the most suitable quantitative indicators, based on which, the institution can monitor and quantify the impact and relevance of internationalization variables, as an important pre-requisite for improving the institutional policies in this domain.

3.1. Objective 1 (O1). Stimulating cooperation at the regional and international levels aiming to increase the international visibility is based on the following operational options, marked by specific policies and instruments:

a. Developing the network of international partners within the academic domain and the business environment, aiming to broaden cooperation in the field of education, training, and scientific research by strengthening relationships with traditional European partners, as well as initiating new collaborative relationships with partners from other regions from outside EU focused on SCDP strategic compass (South-Eastern Asia, Indo-Pacific area, Central Africa etc);

b. Maintaining membership status in relevant regional and international organizations in the military or professional

domains that would ensure a higher visibility, soundness and efficient access in the multilateral international dialogue with effects on the military diplomatic endeavour (such as European Security and Defence College – ESDC, International Military Academic Forum – iMAF, European Union Military Academic Conference - EUMAC or, in case of Naval education, IAMU – International Association of Maritime Universities, Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions – BSAMI, European Naval Academies’ Superintendents Conference – ENASC);

c. Increasing visibility of the institution within the network of European military academies, particularly focusing on harmonizing strategies for professional education development through curriculum alignment, aiming for continuous alignment with the European Sectorial Qualification Framework for Military Officers SQF – MILOF;

d. Organizing and coordinating international diplomatic activities, both incoming and outgoing, at a high qualitative level, aiming to contribute to the promotion of the institution’s image, to improve the negotiation capability in wider range of objectives;

e. Organizing international events/seminars/conferences, as local initiative or in partnership with similar institutions, home or abroad, in the military, or professional related fields, involving military or civilian staff and students;

f. Developing promotional materials addressed to the international market, for advertising the institutional academic offer, or implementing online platforms that would facilitate public communication, and managing communication with international partners;

g. Implementing a functional Clients Relationships Management System (CRM) for academic relations, to monitor the quality of the international partners portfolio, as based on a professional scoreboard to be able to adopt the best

decisions in the process of bilateral negotiations (Buttle & Maklan, 2015).

For implementing this strategic line of development seeking for best practices, the authors are suggesting following SMART indicators to be considered within the annual operational plans, absolute values:

- number of international cooperation agreements (absolute expression);

- number of attended activities within international organizations/forums per year (absolute expression);

- number of activities organized within international organizations/forums per year (absolute expression);

- number of incoming and outgoing international representation activities per year (absolute expression);

For a vivid expression reflecting the dynamics of cooperation, the specialized departments may apply the following indicators, proposed by authors as being relevant in practice, according to the case study pursued in the Romanian Naval Academy (Popa, Toma & Cucu, 2020):

- the variance of contracted and validated international partners expressed by the “*Portfolio Expanding Index = (number of new contracted partners)/(total number of partners)*”;

- the index of partner contribution in the activity portfolio expressed by “*Cooperation Index = (number of activities conducted during the year with the partner)/(total number of activities per year)*”;

- the networking index expressed by “*Networking Index = [(number of activities attended during the year)*(total number of network members)]/[(total number of organized events*total number of network members)]*”.

In terms of CRM policy, the academic institutions have to record scoreboards for each partner, in order to invest the right measures for enriching the cooperation with enhanced results. The scoreboard should follow the rules of ABC

method (Kaplan & Bruns, 1987) or using the moving average ranking, to distinguish the priority for each partnership relation based on scoreboard tools (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). Then, for partners ranking, the authors are proposing to monitor the following average cooperation index for each partner, considered a threshold for splitting the priority categories, over or lower than the recorded average:

“Average cooperation index = [(number of activities organized by the partner per year)(total number of attendees for these events per year)]/[(total number of attended per year * total number of attendees per year)]”.*

In this manner, the institutions will be able to state clear and effective policies, in compliance with the priority of each partner and its impact in the overall ranking of internationalization. Then, the priority categories should fall in the following diplomatic attitudes as above explained, but in a very coherent manner on *proactive*, *reactive*, *contextual*, or *neutral* core of actions.

3.2. Objective 2 (O2). Stimulating international mobility for staff and students, both incoming and outgoing through following specific actions, conducted within the academic exchange programs for education, training or teaching framework:

a. Developing the Erasmus+ program by expanding the portfolio of exchanges in the field of education and training with institutions from program countries or from partner countries – continuously scouting is required for new partners from program countries or partner countries with whom to establish inter-institutional cooperation partnerships within the European Commission’s program;

b. Diversifying the partnership for internship programs with European partners in professional field – in case of Naval education, the relation should be focused the Naval Forces structures, shipping

companies, port operators or other economic agents in the naval or maritime field, to access the cadetship onboard mobilities;

c. Developing both study and internship programs offer for incoming students and staff, by either institutionalizing educational offerings in English or by diversifying the course offerings dedicated to incoming mobilities;

d. Promoting institutional policies to stimulate the mobility of teaching staff for regular teaching and training, as part of the annual individual training plan.

For implementing this strategic line of development, the authors are suggesting the following SMART indicators to be assessed within the annual operational plans, in absolute or comparative values, with yearly referential:

–number of partnerships established for international Erasmus+ mobilities;

–number of approved outgoing exchanges for study (SMS)/placements (SMP)/teaching (STA)/training (STT), per partner;

–number of incoming students for studies/placements per year;

–number of incoming teaching staff/specialists for teaching/training per year;

–number of outgoing students for studies/practice per year;

–number of outgoing teaching staff/specialists for teaching/training per year;

–total approved and spent budget (net amount and percentage) per year;

–total Erasmus+ budget for studies and practice/total effective students (annual funding per student);

–total Erasmus+ budget for teaching and training/total effective staff (annual funding per teaching staff);

–number of courses in English offered to foreign students through the Erasmus+ catalogue.

Alternatively, seeking for a dynamic perspective, the authors are recommending

to monitor in the partners' scoreboard the following indicators:

–the variance of exchanges expressed by the “*Exchange Expanding Index = (number of exchanges conducted with the partner per current year)/(total number of exchanges per previous year)*” – to be calculated and monitored for each category of exchange (SMS, SMP, STA, STT), distinctively for incoming and outgoing exchanges, in case of each partner;

–the index of partner's contribution in the exchange programs portfolio expressed by “*Exchange Index = (number of exchanges conducted during the year with the partner)/(total number of exchanges per year)*” – to be calculated and monitored for each category of exchange program (SMS, SMP, STA, STT), distinctively for incoming and outgoing exchanges, in case of each partner;

–the budget consistency expressed by the “*Exchange Budgeting Index = (budget per current year)/(budget per previous year)*” – to be calculated and monitored for each category of exchange (SMS, SMP, STA, STT), distinctively for financing the incoming and outgoing exchanges;

–the budget variance expressed by the “*Budgeting Variance Index = [(budget per current year)-(budget per previous year)/(total budget per previous year)]*” – to be calculated and monitored for each category of exchange (SMS, SMP, STA, STT), distinctively for incoming and outgoing exchanges, if the case even for each partner;

–*Exchange Access Index* that will be calculated as the average amount allocated for each participant in mobility program during the year (i.e. total amount spent for exchanges over the number of participants), offering information of the access index in terms of the intensity of mobilities total number of participants in exchanges;

–the intensity of exchange programs should be calculated as “*Mobility Intensity Ratio = total number of participants in mobility programs/ total number of*

academic community members”, offering information about the intensity of exchange program and must be calculated for each type of mobility, both incoming and outgoing.

In addition to the quantitative indicators as above expressed, qualitative indicators may be used to measure the level of cooperation effectiveness, applying the following indicators suggested by the authors from the practice:

– *Participants' Satisfaction Index* (Scale of 1-100) – would reflect the participants' expectations level - this requires a combination of conformity KPI to the established requirements, producing satisfaction and real needs fulfilment - it will be determined by the end of each mobility, based on online questionnaire, of which results will be continuously monitored;

– *Students' Satisfaction Index* is an index comprising hard measures of students' behaviour and soft measures of students' opinions or feelings - the is weighted based on how important each value is in determining students' overall satisfaction – as proposal in practice, the index could include variable such as unsatisfactory perceptions about administrative issues (30%), financing availability (15%), evaluations results (15%), supervisor evolution grade (20%) or complaints rate (20%).

3.3. Objective 3 (O3). Developing a diversified portfolio of educational and training programs provided in widely spoken international languages through the following specific actions:

a. Developing a diverse and consistent portfolio of academic or vocational study programs for education or training, fully taught in international languages, aiming to address to the international students either to enhance the academic exchanges or to attract students from abroad;

b. Provide specialized training for academic staff to enhance their ability for teaching in international languages and to the international students, into a multicultural perspective;

c. Developing teaching materials edited in English or in other international languages (i.e. learning resources, textboxes, seminar/laboratory booklets, etc) or, as appropriate, introducing gradually particular lessons with terminology in English for different topics;

d. Identifying, developing, and accrediting bachelor, different study programs on the level of bachelor, master, doctoral, or adult education, in partnership, joint or co-tutorship with similar universities/institutions in Europe;

e. Developing professional training courses in joint with universities, training centers or international institutions/companies in different domains, from military to civilian specialties.

f. Digitalization of academic services by enhancing the potential of distance learning services, offering academic and training course through ADL platforms, to facilitate the short-term training/specialization programs for international clients (students, specialists, experts) and .

For this strategic line of development, the following indicators are to be monitored in absolute or comparative values, on yearly basis, within the operational plans:

- number of accredited international programs;

- number of international partnership programs;

- number of teaching materials fully delivered in international languages;

- number of courses presenting specialized topics with terminology in international languages;

- number of teaching staff with certified competencies in international languages.

For a dynamic perspective, the institutions may use the following indicators:

- the level of opening the addressability of internal learning resources could be calculated based on “*Internationalization Rank of Learning Resources = total of courses taught in Foreign languages/ total number of academic course in curriculum*”, offering information about the rank of addressability of academic resources, and must be calculated for each study program offered by the institution;

- the language proficiency of the academic staff is also important and could be revealed based on “*Staff Proficiency Rate = total of Foreign languages proficient teachers/ total number of teachers*”, that must be calculated for each study program offered by the institution.

3.4. Objective 4 (O4). Implementing international programs for military training and practical stages in joint with partner institutions on European and international levels, following the next lines of development:

a. Participating in training activities or training modules organized by international partners (EU, NATO or PfP actions), such as training stages onboard military ships, leadership modules, practical and theoretical training modules, training camps, training stages or specialized training;

b. Stimulating the EMILYO mobility program (European Initiative for the Exchange of Young Officers inspired by Erasmus program, <http://emilyo.eu>) and diversifying the exchanges of military students or staff for studies/ practice/ teaching or training, financed by Erasmus+ program, including through the implementation of international common semesters under the auspices of European Security and Defence College;

c. Attending military or civilian sports competitions to develop and consolidate the sport culture and the military ethos, with European and international impact;

d. Enhancing the training potential in joint programs, using the Armed Forces facilities and training capabilities, for a smoother insertion of future graduates in the military structures – as example, the onboard cadetship stages for Naval Forces that would contribute for developing and diversifying the international cooperation even on diplomatic level;

e. Organizing training modules and academic activities for military students from partner academies, such as tactical training modules, simulator training stages, professional training stages and sports competitions or scientific/cultural events;

f. Developing the portfolio of continuous development courses for military personnel/experts and inviting specialists/trainees from allied countries to attend career/specialization courses organized at national level, including under the aegis of the European Security and Defence College;

g. Involvement in implementing the NATO-DEEP program (*NATO Defence Education Enhancement Programme*) or other programs implemented by the allied forces, to ensure the training and military education providing activities for students in partner countries (especially Ukraine, Moldavia and Georgia);

h. Identifying international partners outside EU or NATO countries with academic or training needs for military cadets to create a global synergy of the educational offer in strategic areas targeted by EU or by the national authorities (i.e. according to CSDP strategic compass, <https://www.strategic-compass-european-union.com>);

For this strategic line of development, simple measuring indicators are proposed, quantifiable within the annual operational plan, with absolute or comparative values to be considered:

- number of incoming activities/modules organized at institutional level per year;

- number of incoming military students per year;

- number of outgoing military students per year.

3.5. Objective 5 (O5). Capitalizing the innovation, research, and development potential by accessing and implementing joint actions/projects/programs with international partners, funded from EU, regional, or international funds, following the next strategic lines of development:

- a. Accessing structural instruments provided through operational programs, co-financed from structural funds or other regional or community funds (i.e. Human Capital Program, Competitiveness Program, Regional Program etc);

- b. Accessing projects/programs financed from regional/international funds, as well as diversifying the project proposals initiatives financed from European education and research programs;

- c. Exploiting international cooperation relations to create scientific research networks in joint with international partners, to facilitate the access toward the European research & innovation programs (especially for those ones, financed by the European Commission, Horizon 2030 program or European Defence Funds);

- d. Accessing European programs financed from the European Defence Fund or other resources related to the defense and public order sector, in partnership with similar institutions at the European level (i.e. PESCO initiative).

For this strategic development line, the following quantitative indicators are proposed to be monitored in the operational plans:

- number of applications for projects/programs submitted and declared eligible per year;

- number of projects financed or under implementation;

- total financing amounts for projects implementation per year.

For a dynamic counting of the project accessing effectiveness, the institutions may use the following indicators:

–the level of financing effectiveness may be calculated based on “*Project Budgeting Share = Total budget for projects/Total budget*”, offering information about the project financing source as share from the total institutional budget;

–the success rate for development program accessing, calculated as “*Successful Rate of Accessing = Total number of awarded project/ Total number of project proposals*”;

–the institutional proficiency in attracting financing sources for innovation-research-development may be expressed by calculating “*The Project Proficiency Rate = Total budget awarded for projects/ Total number of academic staff*”, this indicator being feasible to be applied on institutional level as key performance indicator for project accessing proficiency.

3.6. Objective 6 (O6). Increasing the quality of international cooperation activities to facilitate the institutional journey towards academic excellence can be reflected as concluding strategic direction, through following lines of action:

a. Developing and implementing transparent operational procedures at the institutional level for all international cooperation processes – minimum outlines for regular processes as exchange grants awarding (SMS, SMP, STA, STT), international missions’ arrangements, project proposal and project implementations rules and regulations;

b. Implementing the ISO9001/2015 quality standard, including risk management, in the field of international programs and international affairs at the institutional level;

c. Documenting international representation and cooperation mobilities;

d. Monitoring the satisfaction level of participants in international mobilities.

For this strategic development line, the following measurement indicators IO1 are proposed, quantifiable within annual operational plans:

–number of procedures/regulations implemented/updated per year;

–satisfaction level of international mobilities participants (%) – survey for satisfaction must be conceived and applied continuously for a coherent qualitative assessment of international affairs effectiveness in relation with the beneficiary perceptions.

4. Conclusions

As revealed by the above study undertaken by the authors, the internationalization strategy for military higher education institutions, beyond its importance reflected in the quality processes improvement and institutional soundness enhancement, constitutes an important imperative for academic development and a relevant vector of military diplomacy, based on the following contributory dimensions:

–military education is a significant component of military training, representing a polarizing vector of actions and processes in connection with international military cooperation, involving a large and varied volume of activities provided in support or in relation with the Ministry of National Defence policies and strategies (e.g. cooperation activities, bilateral relations, international military affairs), majorly contributing as operational variable in the military cooperation plan;

–the military education system underlies the process of developing and harmonizing professional and leadership competencies in human resources, educating and training the armed forces personnel, but in harmonized manner, in correlation with Euro-Atlantic standards and best practices framework, shaping the profile of an effective military resource,

integrated within the operational allied structures;

- higher education institutions significantly contribute for promoting the image of Romanian Armed Forces, in all its services, both in the military and in social or cultural civilian environments;

- the offer of military education institutions, in terms of education, training and scientific research, represents an important asset for negotiation portfolio in support of bilateral and multilateral military dialogue;

- the academic exchange programs for students (SMS, SMP), as well as for teaching staff (STA, STT), conducted based on Erasmus+ program or under other European Commission instruments or other initiatives as EMILYO, may facilitate the intercultural interaction in a multinational context, representing a dynamic factor in international military cooperation, actively involving military diplomatic structures and the cooperation synergies with a significant added value for European Union, or for NATO alliance strategies and policies.

Thus, it can be concluded that military higher education institutions are part of the set of international

representation tools actively involved in international cooperation processes at political and strategic levels, with an impact on military diplomatic initiatives. The internationalization strategy of the higher education institution is a starting point in the actional side of military diplomacy. Through the internationalization strategy, recommended action directions are identified and implemented conducting toward institutional consolidation and visibility and academic impact enhancement, at regional and international levels, for a higher valorisation of development opportunities and innovation into a competitive environment. Using the experiential knowledge, the authors have aimed to offer few practical instruments in designing the right strategies for internationalization for military higher education system, suggesting several consistent indicators that could be applied to have a sustainable quantitative and qualitative image internationalization process, as one of the most important academic domains, strongly connected to the education and scientific research domains.

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