

Minutes of the 15th European Union Military Secondary Schools Forum (EUMSSF) Meeting Held in Nyíregyháza, Hungary on 4 September 2024

Introduction:

The 15th meeting of the European Union Military Secondary Schools Forum (EUMSSF) was held on 4 September 2024 in Nyíregyháza, Hungary, hosted by the Károly Kratochvil Military Secondary School and Student Hostel under the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The meeting, chaired by Lt.Col. Symeon Zambas, brought together representatives from military secondary schools members of this Forum (Annex A), providing a platform for discussion on key areas of security and defence education at the secondary school level.

Opening Remarks:

The event was officially opened by **Dr. János Czermann**, Deputy State Secretary for Strategy and HR Policy. In his address, Dr. Czermann emphasised Hungary's strong commitment to enhancing its national defence education system, underscoring that homeland security is a core national responsibility. He outlined Hungary's efforts to establish a modern, efficient defence force, with the foundation being a comprehensive defence education programme to be implemented in secondary schools across Hungary, led by military instructors.

Dr. Czermann also highlighted the significance of the EUMSSF as a platform for collaboration, where shared understanding and solutions to common challenges can be developed. He expressed his hope that more schools would join the Forum and concluded by wishing the participants a productive and successful meeting.

Welcome address:

Major András Fekete, Director of the Károly Kratochvil Military Secondary School, warmly welcomed the Chair of the EUMSSF and all participants in attendance. He provided a detailed explanation of Hungary's national defence education system, which is structured across three levels:



Basic Level: Targeted at high schools and technical institutions, this level introduces basic military subjects, offering students their first exposure to military life.

Level 2: This is offered in a select number of technical schools and covers specialised subjects such as logistics, IT, communications, and others. It is integrated into a 5-year educational programme.

Level 3: The classic military education provided through military academies, where students are fully trained for a career in the military.

Major Fekete concluded by explaining the various schools and dormitories associated with the Károly Kratochvil Military Secondary School.

Lt. Col. Symeon Zambas, Chair of the EUMSSF, expressed his gratitude to the Deputy State Secretary for hosting the Forum under the Hungarian Presidency of the EU Council and for personally opening the meeting. He then provided an overview of the Forum's progress since its launch in 2019, highlighting its key objectives and accomplishments. Lt. Col. Zambas stressed that the Forum was established to address a knowledge gap in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and emphasised the importance of focusing on secondary education to bridge this divide. Key efforts include fostering partnerships and sharing best practices among member schools, offering courses on EU history and core values, educating students about EU institutions, and organising literacy initiatives such as the Writing Essay Olympiad—all aimed at fostering a common security and defence culture.

Agenda and Key Decisions:

The agenda (Annex B), previously circulated, was approved without changes. During Any Other Business (AOB), two prospective new member schools were introduced to the Forum, and the Chair informed participants about the 5th International Forum for Peace, Security, and Prosperity, scheduled for 16-19 March 2025 in Italy (Palermo, Sicily). The following key topics were discussed:

- 1. Prolongation of the EUMSSF Configuration:** The Chair reviewed the work accomplished during the past academic year and presented a PowerPoint (Annex C) outlining the proposal for the prolongation of the Forum's mandate which will be submitted at the upcoming EAB meeting on 12 September. The participants unanimously supported the prolongation process to ensure the Forum's objectives and ongoing efforts continue without interruption.

2. **3rd Essay Writing Olympiad:** The Forum was updated on the status of the 3rd Essay Writing Olympiad. Participants who were not present at the previous meeting requested additional details regarding the rules and topics of the competition. As outlined in the rules (Annex D), the essay competition is open to students in their **penultimate year** of school.

The ESDC Secretariat also reminded participants of the need to nominate **two evaluators** per school for this competition.

A **webinar** for students and teachers regarding the competition has been scheduled for **15 October at 16:00 (CET)**.

3. **'Train the Trainers' Course:** The Chair raised the topic of organising a new 'Train the Trainers' course, seeking to assess the interest and need for such a programme this academic year. Participants discussed potential scheduling options, and it was agreed to include this question in an upcoming questionnaire, which will be sent electronically to Member participants along with other information updates.
4. **Curriculum Review:** The EU History and Core Values course curriculum was discussed, taking into account feedback from the previous group of students. While the curriculum itself does not require revisions, it was suggested that the course could benefit from a lighter schedule, spread more evenly over the 5-day week.
5. **Erasmus Initiative:** Daniela Schonauer from the Romanian Military High School "Dimitrie Cantemir" presented a proposal for a K2 project, which could involve up to five different member schools. The project would focus on sustainability and the environment, with the suggestion that another school, possibly the Belgian one, could present it to increase the chances of selection. Ms. Schonauer will share additional details to encourage other schools to participate. This initiative would be especially beneficial for schools that are not yet Erasmus Accredited, as it offers an opportunity to pave the way towards achieving that goal.

Maria Penedos also relayed a request from Kiili Gymnasium in Estonia for a short-term exchange of 15 students and 3 teachers during the current academic year, inviting member participants to express interest in hosting the group.

- 6. Way Forward and Future Agenda:** The next meeting is scheduled for **11 December** in **Romania** and will be graciously hosted by Colegiul National Militar "Tudor Vladimirescu", in Craiova. Agenda items for the meeting will be requested through the previously mentioned electronic form, which will be sent to participants in the coming days.
- 7. Any other business (AOB):** Maria Penedos, ESDC training manager, presented the two potential new members (Annex E), "The Wolf Security Training School", from Poland and the "Kiili Gymnasium" from Estonia. If the latter didn't raise any doubts on its membership to the Forum, the former raised some questions. Despite its expertise in professional security training and services—including courses on various aspects of security and risk management, some of which have been provided to current Forum members—questions have arisen regarding whether The Wolf Security Training School operates as a school or simply as a training centre. This distinction may be important, as the Forum's Rules of Procedure do not clearly address such cases. Further clarification is needed regarding its connection to the public military secondary school in Poland. Additionally, securing political backing from the Polish Steering Committee delegate may be crucial in evaluating this membership proposal. The Chair also announced the scheduling of the 5th International Forum for Peace, Security, and Prosperity, which is expected to take place from 16-19 March 2025 in Palermo, Italy (Annex F). The theme of the Forum will be "Human Security in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) World: Navigating Challenges, Building Resilience."

Conclusion:

The 15th EUMSSF formal meeting concluded, but the day offered ample networking opportunities and informal exchanges, where new ideas were shared and discussed. Most of these informal outcomes will be included in the aforementioned electronic form for follow-up. Participants also had the opportunity to visit the Training Centre of the Defence Sports Association, where they observed military training activities and witnessed the signing of a Cooperation Agreement between the Károly Kratochvil Military Secondary Schools and the Sports Association. Later, they toured the dormitory, interacted with boarding students, and received detailed information about students' academic and military training experiences, as well as the challenges of military secondary education in Hungary.



Annexes:

1. Annex A: Participants List
2. Annex B: Annotated Agenda
3. Annex C: EUMSSF State-of-Play 2023-2024
4. Annex D: Regulation on how to author & evaluate Essays for the 2024-2025 Essay Writing Competition
5. Annex E: Presentation of Wolf Security Training School, Poland and Kiili Gymnasium, Estonia
6. Annex F: Draft agenda of the 5th International Forum for Peace, Security, and Prosperity. March 2025