



“GEORGI BENKOVSKI” BULGARIAN AIR FORCE ACADEMY

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Erasmus Policy Statement

I. Rationale and Focus

The Bulgarian Air Force Academy was re-established as a separate academic institution on the 1st January 2020. The history of the aviation, air force and space education and training in Bulgaria dates back to 1914 when the First Bulgarian Aviation School was founded. However, due to the downsizing of the Bulgarian armed forces in 2002, the school changed into an Aviation Faculty, an integral part of the National Military University in Bulgaria. Nevertheless throughout the years we have always provided a strong education foundation, technical knowledge and skills in multiple areas of aeronautical and piloting studies. The Aviation Faculty was an active participant in the Erasmus+ program; as a result we became a reputable member of a network of aviation institutions and military academies which share the same European vision and values.

The Bulgarian Air Force Academy (BAFA) is committed to providing high-quality academic aviation education to cadets and civilian students and assisting them to earn their bachelor, master or doctoral degree. Theory and practice go hand in hand in all military and civilian specialties. The mission of BAFA is to educate and inspire cadets to become agile and capable leaders of knowledge, character and discipline; to teach young people to respect the state and its allies, to strive for integrity, dignity, and courage, following the example of our ancestors; to train future officers to defend the national interests, to adhere to the European values and strengthen the international peace and stability. BAFA also aims to contribute to the improvement of the interoperability between EU countries and to promote the European security and defence culture.

Aviation itself makes the world more connected, more accessible, and more open. The Bulgarian Air Force Academy supports the strategy of the European higher education, follows the principles of the Bologna process and Lisbon treaty in education, research, knowledge and skills transfer and will continue to implement them. Our vision is to develop further responsible education, innovative interdisciplinary research and effective internationalization so that our cadets and students become members of a successful cross-border education system. We believe that the Charter is an integral part to the realisation of our academy's plans and aspirations.

The establishment of the “European initiative for the exchange of young officers inspired by Erasmus” (EMILYO) in 2008 promoted the internationalization of the military higher education institutions. BAFA intends to continue the pathway which we started as an Aviation Faculty, a part of the National Military University, and to sign new bilateral agreements with our previous EU partners with whom we had fruitful and rewarding Erasmus+ student and teacher exchanges till the end of 2019. Cadets' mobilities today are the bridge to their future interoperability. The big achievement is the personal and professional development of each cadet who has taken the international challenge – during their mobility they acquire new knowledge about the structure, role and policy of the EU security and defence as well as in their own professional specialization; moreover, they gain practical professional and/or military skills.

Multilateralism in the present-day defence and security is on one hand a necessity and on the other hand a challenge for the military institutions. In order to be able to address common threats and remain flexible in international missions, air force personnel need a common goal, shared vision, common security and defence culture, good teamwork and efficient transnational collaboration. We believe that the Erasmus charter is the first step to multilateralism.

BAFA has a geographical priority in Europe and the Balkans, but we remain open to new opportunities in various corners of the world. We encourage teacher or student initiatives and projects, cooperation with relevant businesses and

communities, and promotion of good practice in all aspects of our international strategy. Our students from various religious, ethnic or disadvantaged groups are encouraged to undertake mobility abroad as we are well aware that this helps them not only acquire professional knowledge and skills but also develop their intercultural competences such as respect to other nations and open-mindedness, self-assurance, flexibility, willingness to take risks.

In all our international activities we recognise the importance of monitoring and evaluation, of benchmarking with peers, in order to inform and influence our future practice and policy.

In a nutshell, in the next 2021-2027 period, BAFA aims to develop a sustainable network of international partners in the fields of aviation education and research; actively promote partnerships with universities as well as public or private organizations functioning in the security and defence sector and support the exchange of good practice; provide maximum number of students and academic staff with a comprehensive international educational experiences: short-term and long-term mobilities for studies, traineeships or teaching; welcome both civilian and military students, teachers and researchers from all over the world, thus celebrating diversity in culture and perspective; improve the quality and relevance of higher education by engaging in all Erasmus+ actions; link education, research and business by finding various opportunities for collaborative activities; facilitate the initiative of students and their active participation in international exchanges and projects; expand BAFA's research and study facilities through the use of European and local funds; respect all principles set by the Erasmus+ program and the EU Commission.

It is beyond any doubt that it takes a lot of commitment in order to build strong professional relations, to enhance cooperation among partner universities and to promote European security and defense culture. We hope that the efforts we put in today will give results in the future when our students join the aviation global market and our cadets become the military leaders of tomorrow.

II. Policy pathways

Internationalization is a part of the core thinking of modern higher military education and a vital part of the overall strategy for sustainable development of BAFA. BAFA's primary objectives in this direction are to contribute to the European academic and research work goals, particularly in the field of aviation; to promote EU security and defence culture; to strengthen the interoperability of the armed forces; to facilitate the shared EU approaches to education and training of civilian students and cadets. Outgoing mobility of staff and students, incoming staff and students mobility, collaborative projects and activities, cooperation for innovation and modernization, summer schools and thematic workshops will be an integral part of the academic framework of our institution. Following the principles of equality, inclusion and non-discrimination, we will build a robust and transparent system, promoting the activities supported by Erasmus+ and the military Erasmus (EMILYO). It will be visible on the bulletin boards near the Erasmus offices and on our website: from the selection procedures and partner-universities to the outcomes of the mobilities and their follow-up activities. The ability of BAFA academic/non-academic staff and students to work together with their EU and non-EU counterparts has become a determining factor in preparing and conducting complex multinational military operations.

III. Policy impact

BAFA believes that our strong internationalization strategy will provide appropriate conditions for the utilization of Erasmus+. As a successor of the Aviation Faculty, we will sign bilateral agreements with our trustworthy old partners immediately after receiving the new Charter but we will also look for opportunities to enlarge our partnership network within the military and civilian world. The internationalization of education has already been integrated as a goal into the institutional policy and strategies for the modernisation of teaching and learning. From the beginning of 2021 we will systemize and offer academic

courses or study programmes in English. BAFA is considering ways to create special procedures for accreditation of joint degree programmes or at least 1 semester joint degree course of study, which would ease the process of Europeanization and would remove an important obstacle to the proliferation of these programmes. This target can be reached in due time. BAFA is ready to offer intensive courses and exams in English according to the military NATO standard agreement STANAG 6001, as well as various air force courses and encourage partner military institutions to offer such courses. Being a part of the European military system, these courses will be recognized as part of the curricular requirements at home institutions. BAFA is ready to send cadets to participate in the Common Security and Defence Modules and recognize their ECTS and by the end of 2020 it will consider offering such common modules (EMILYO program). BAFA is in the process of developing distance learning and teaching opportunities and in 2022 it can offer international research collaboration and blended mobility. BAFA teachers can work in groups or individually with foreign exchange students on their thesis. BAFA will develop a mentor and tutor support system for incoming Erasmus students who will also be provided with very reasonable lodging and daily meals on campus. BAFA will develop mechanisms through which outgoing Erasmus students get ready for their traineeships of studies with the help of the Erasmus office. Academic staff and advisors will follow up with returning students to discuss possible ways to further develop the knowledge acquired by way of a thesis or other type of work. We will offer outgoing students mentorship assistance before and after the exchange. In the early stages BAFA will look for research institutions and industry for the purposes of student exchanges for training, academic field work, joint research projects, recruiting visiting lecturers, etc. However, all in all everything starts with building a transparent system for outgoing and incoming students with easily and immediately accessible information on how selection and study is organized.