

# Challenges and Achievements in the Education in the Gender Perspectives in Security and Defense's Common Module

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**Abstract:** *Military academies and universities in Europe are looking for ways to harmonize military education and training of future officers to increase interoperability of the EU member states' armies. The rich history of the "European Initiative of Exchange of Young Officers, inspired by Erasmus+" is a proof of successful initiatives, as it offers attractive international training, with one of the modules offering training on understanding and implementing gender equality policies in the military environment. This report includes an analysis of the learning content and the results of the feedback from the trainees in the last two editions of the Common Module, organized by the military academies of Italy and Greece.*

**Keywords:** *Gender perspectives, military education, CSDP, Military Erasmus.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The armed forces of NATO and EU member states have increasing commitments due to current conflicts in different parts of the world, which necessitates the application of flexible models in the training of female and male military personnel and the development of capabilities such as: critical thinking and analysis, developed skills for working in a gender-mixed environment, mastery of strategic communication processes and many others. The above and other capabilities and competencies require an interdisciplinary approach in their preparation and development, as well as coordination at various levels to internationally achieve compatibility and applicability.

The education of university graduates in the professional field of Security and Defense is a national commitment that is oriented and increasingly changing according to modern requirements for transparency and compatibility of development of the military systems of the armies of the EU member states. The Sectoral Qualification Framework for the Military Officer Profession (SQF-MILOF), completed in 2020, as part of the Common European Qualification Framework, offers the main guidelines in the content of the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for the qualification of

military experts who are to provide adequate solutions and shared responsibilities in managing threats and conflicts in the 21st century. The framework, developed with the support of the EU Military Committee, provides practical guidance and offers a platform for following standards in military training in order to ensure interoperability and harmonization of the preparation of future military and civilian leaders in the sphere of security and defense. [11]

At the same time, the Sectoral Qualification Framework for the Military Officer profession encourages the exchange of training opportunities offered by different EU Member States and their military educational institutions. Comparative analyses of educational programmes with a view to their cooperation and upgrading allow the creation of a uniform content of academic training courses that are also recognized in other countries. This ensures the exchange of knowledge and skills in the professional field and creates conditions for the development of shared values and common culture in Security and Defence. [2]

In this regard, one of the challenges facing military leaders is their preparation for working in a gender-mixed environment, along with the need to develop skills to implement a gender perspective in peacetime and during missions and operations. Despite the fact that women actively entered the military environment more than 30 years ago and serve in all positions in the Armed Forces, gender stereotypes still exist. The prejudices of military personnel, together with the ignorance of the international framework on women, peace and security, often cause discriminatory attitudes, restrictions on career development and deterioration of the socio-psychological climate in the military teams. In addition, lessons learnt from modern missions and operations reveal the need to train military personnel in international humanitarian law, increase sensitivity to the traditions and customs of the local population, along with respect for their culture and ensure the protection of the most vulnerable groups - women, children and the elderly.

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For this reason, training in the essence of the gender equality policies, the specifics of applying these policies in the professional field of Security and Defense, is a tool for reliable training of military personnel. Education in the effective inclusion of gender perspectives both in daily activities and in planning missions and operations would lead to the creation of a sustainable environment for the development of the potential of each team member, stimulating cohesion and support, as well as the successful implementation of various military tasks.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

It is worth noting the mutual relationship between the sectoral application of the European Qualifications Framework in officer training and the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

As the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy states in the foreword to the 4th edition of the CSDP Handbook, "The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is the global 'business card' of our Union (the European Union – author's note) when it comes to crisis management. A well-functioning CSDP with its missions and operations is crucial for the implementation of our priorities under the Global Strategy, namely security and defence, building the resilience of states and societies, adopting an integrated approach to conflicts and crises, strengthening the joint regional order and establishing a rules-based system of global governance." (Handbook on CSDP, 2021)

In short, the EU CSDP plays a key role in the Union's foreign policy, with its activities and tasks aiming at the development of its own defence capabilities, international crises and conflicts response capabilities, which would contribute to strengthening peace and security. To achieve the aforementioned objectives, the CSDP relies on instruments such as: civilian and military missions and operations; deepening defence cooperation between Member States; financing scientific developments through the European Defence Fund; functioning of an EU Military Staff for coordination at a strategic level. [5] It can be summarized that the EU CSDP should be seen as a complex, combined model of coordination between the individual governments of the member states and supranational integration.

The analysis continues in the direction of searching for a connection between the EU CSDP and the Sectoral Qualification Framework for the military officer profession, where one can find structural and functional dependencies. If the European Qualification Framework provides the educational level and formation of competencies for future military leaders, then the CSDP offers the political support and operational implementation of the competencies built.

Conceptually, this relationship can be viewed in the sequence: educational base - capability building - conducting missions and operations. Since the EQF is structured in eight reference levels, oriented towards learning outcomes, these same levels cover all types of general qualifications - from basic to advanced. [10] In

the military environment, the comparability of qualifications is specified through the Sectoral Qualifications Framework, which offers a definition of the officer profile in terms of knowledge, skills and competences, which significantly facilitates educational exchange and the recognition of completed training by higher military educational institutions in EU countries. Thus the effect and the desired end state of professional compatibility of military training are achieved.

On the other hand, the CSDP has the political instruments for crisis management of various kinds, the deployment of military and civilian missions, using national military assets. The need to achieve a high degree of interoperability is necessary to realize the collective military capability of the EU and to promote a strategic security culture.

Historically, since its creation, the CSDP has evolved, transformed, expanded, gradually incorporating new initiatives and instruments. As a result of the growing influence of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and subsequent resolutions forming the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, gender equality has been incorporated as an essential component of the contemporary notion of security.

"The EU gender mainstreaming policy in crisis management is based on mainstreaming, i.e. the systematic integration of gender equality into all areas of CSDP, from the planning and implementation of missions and operations to reporting, evaluation, training and lessons learned. The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming policy in CSDP is gender equality, one of the fundamental values of the European Union, underlying in the Treaty on European Union. " (Handbook on CSDP, 2021, p. 139)

In CSDP, gender equality is implemented by applying a gender perspective in all stages of the policy - from planning through implementation to evaluation of missions and operations, which we call gender mainstreaming. The practical implementation or specific operationalization of gender policies within CSDP missions is carried out by appointing gender advisers and experts (gender advisers or gender focal points), conducting gender analyses to assess the impact of decisions on different social groups or the local population, as well as gradually integrating the gender perspective into the operational planning process of operations. [4]

In a number of foundation-laying documents, some of which mentioned above as sources that describe the substantive aspect of gender mainstreaming policies, training is indicated as a key tool. Gender mainstreaming training is part of the preliminary preparation for EU missions and operations, but also a supporting process during and after the participation itself, as capacity building is necessary for the effective implementation of these policies. [3]

The European Security and Defence College (ESDC) is a leading institution in the field of gender equality

policy training for the EU. The autonomous EU structure is committed to promoting peace and stability by offering a range of educational initiatives aimed at civilian, police, military and diplomatic personnel to prepare them for dealing with current security threats. [9] In this regard, various trainings are offered related to the preparation of equality advisors, integration of gender perspectives in CSDP missions and operations, implementation of the main pillars of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in EU policies, as well as training on the recognition and prevention of sexual violence, assault and gender-based violence during conflicts.

Undoubtedly, one of the most successful structures of the ESDC is the "European Initiative for the Exchange of Young Officers, inspired by Erasmus+", also called Military Erasmus for short. The initiative offers a wide range of activities - international semesters, common modules, workshops and meetings, strategic partnership projects, etc., with the aim of achieving harmonization of military training in Europe and increasing the interoperability of the armies of the EU member states. [8] By promoting educational mobility and exchange of students and academic staff from different military academies and universities, the high level of preparation and training of future military leaders is stimulated, as well as the formation of an adequate attitude and understanding of the contemporary challenges facing international security. For more than 15 years, the Initiative has achieved real results through the voluntary participation of European military academies, which are highly appreciated by national and European institutions, as Military Erasmus is the main common tool for the development of mobility with a focus on higher military education. [6]

The Lines of Development are the main directions in the Initiative, which provide educational offers for the different services of Armed Forces and for all professional areas in the Security and Defense sector. In relation to the topic of this report, it should be noted that Line of Development 10 – Gender mainstreaming in the Armed Forces (Line of Development 10 – Gender mainstreaming, <https://www.emilyo.eu/lod-10-gender-mainstreaming>) has been one of the most successfully and rapidly developing ones in the last 5 years. The organizing of annual seminars on the implementation of gender equality policies in the military environment, the implementation of a strategic partnership project with the participation of military academies from Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal and Romania, the organization of training in the Common Module "Gender Perspectives in Security and Defense" in 6 editions are proofs of the interest in including this training in the knowledge and skills of future security experts and military leaders.

Each Common module "Gender perspective in Security and Defence" was developed with the assumption that the theoretical sessions, practical sessions such as case studies and role-playing games included in the training program would contribute to raising the awareness of the future military leaders about gender

equality policies and changing their attitudes about the need to include a gender perspective and analysis in the planning of military operations.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This report is a continuation of a previous publication on the topic, related to the results of training in international environment in "Gender Perspectives in Security and Defense" Common Module. The module has been developed by a team of experts from European military academies and has undergone a strict procedure for compliance with the requirements of the Sectoral Qualification Framework for the Officer Profession. The high ratings of the trainees who participated in the first editions of the Common Module, as well as the positive feedback and recommendations from the academic staff participants - lecturers and observers, allowed for the improvement of the content of the offered training on gender equality issues. [1]

The educational content of the Common Module, in which cadets and students from European military academies and universities receive in an international learning environment, is related to competences about the following: [7]

- key concepts of gender, gender equality, gender mainstreaming, gender stereotypes;
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda;
- international framework of gender equality policies - EU Gender Strategy and NATO Action Plan, Governance and Mainstreaming;
- content of gender education in military training environments, good practices and lessons learned related to gender mainstreaming in EU military academies;
- conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence as tactics of modern warfare;
- content of gender analysis and gender diversity analysis in operations and missions;
- inclusion of equality management to achieve operational effectiveness;
- liaison and coordination with external actors in implementing equality policies and training of advisors and experts.

An integral part of the training in each module is the linking of theoretical knowledge with practical discussions, role-play, case studies, syndicate work and presentation of trainees' solutions. The educational framework of the module allows for its tailoring and updating in accordance with the feedback received from the participants, as well as according to the capabilities of the military academy/university - host of the General Module and the expertise of the international team of lecturers providing the training.

In this regard, the survey method, which was developed by the military experts at the European

Security and Defence College, is used as a research method to obtain feedback from training participants. The survey is conducted at the end of each module by providing it online to all trainees, who are invited to answer the questions anonymously. For each Common module, a specific questionnaire is offered, related to the training topics and practical activities performed by the participants.

The survey included 24 questions, which include: demographic characteristics of the participants - gender, country, type of Armed Force; assessment of training achievements; assessment of the content and teaching method of each session of the module; self-assessment of English language skills for an active participation in the working sessions; level of understanding of the English language of the lecturers; assessment of the level of administration of the module and the technical conditions of the host academy; correspondence of the knowledge provided to its importance for the professional life of each trainee; assessment of the overall conduct of the module; level of recommendation to the colleagues of the participants to participate in similar training; assessment of the full engagement of the trainees' attention; assessment of the level of applicability of the knowledge obtained and assessment of the extent to which the content of the training was in line with the expectations of the participants.

The scales used for answering the questions, according to their specificity, are of two types. In one case, specific answers are indicated with variations as follows: not achieved, very limited achievement, only partially achieved, largely achieved, fully achieved, exceeded expectations. In the other case, the rating scale is from 1 to 6, where one denoting the total disagreement with the argument and six means the total agreement. The last question of the survey is an open-ended question, in which participants give their assessment of the overall organization of the Common module in free text and make comments and recommendations for improving its future conducting.

Quantitative methods were applied to process the data obtained, revealing general and specific trends regarding the content of each learning interaction or the level of overall satisfaction with the training. It is assumed that scores between 4 - 4.50 and 6 are evidence of the high level of the included training sessions and of successful learning outcomes as a desired end state.

In the 6 trainings conducted so far in the Common module, organized by various military academies in Europe, an average of 25-40 cadets and students from Europe, USA, Canada and Asia have participated. If we assume that the participants - representatives of various military academies are a representative sample of their Armed Forces, then the inclusion of all trainees in obtaining feedback at the end of the training in the Common module is a general population. This allows for observing trends, drawing careful conclusions and proposing an update of the educational content.

The research question in this report is related to the hypothesis that updating the learning content of the module in each edition as a result of the feedback received from the participants in the previous edition leads to an improvement in the perception of the content of the included topics through the proposed new questions and discussions, a variety of practical pedagogical methods and enhances the involvement of the trainees in the educational impact. In turn, this would lead to higher satisfaction of the participants in the training and to motivation for the teaching team to constantly expand and change the content of the module in order to more fully achieve the learning outcomes.

The Italian Army School, part of the University of Turin, Italy, hosted the 5th edition of the Common Module "Gender Perspectives in Security and Defence" in October 2025. As shown in Fig. 1, the module was attended by 47 civilian students and cadets from military academies and civilian universities from Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Poland and Romania, of whom 20 were women (43%) and 27 were men (57%). The cadets represented all branches of the Armed Forces (Army, Air Force, Navy), and 12 of the participants were students in the professional field of "Security and Defence" from Italy and Romania.

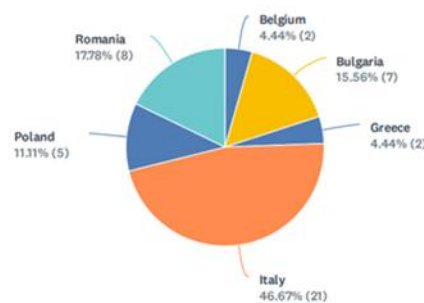


Fig. 1. Participants by country in the Common Module "Gender Perspectives in Security and Defense", Turin, 2025

The international team of lecturers included 8 lecturers from military academies and universities in Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal and Poland. The lecturers and instructors had academic as well as mission and operational experience, and with their competences in the field of implementing gender equality policies in military training, contributed to the quality of the theoretical and practical sessions. In addition to the basic and mandatory lectures for the module on understanding gender in a physical and social context, resolution 1325 "On Women, Peace and Security", international documents and policies for implementing and managing gender equality as a factor of security. The module program included discussions and case studies on the following topics:

- gender mainstreaming in the CSDP architecture – tools and implementation process;

- gender perspective, messages and reflection in communication in military environments;

- sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict environments.

The trainees were also introduced to the results of the research from the Strategic Partnership Project “Gender Research in Military Environments”, as well as to the Italian version of the “National Action Plan under UN Security Council Resolution 1325”.

Each Common Module is subject to control and analysis by the European Security and Defence College regarding the results of the training. In this regard, all trainees are required to fill out an online questionnaire at the end of the module and give an assessment of all aspects of the organization and conduct of the module, such as: comprehensibility and accessibility of the content of the lectures and practical sessions, improvement of the level of English proficiency, usefulness of the training and further application, organizational and technical support from the host academy, recommendations for improving the next iterations of the module, etc.

This paper presents part of the results obtained, which feedback from the trainees is necessary for the overall assessment of all components in the organization and the conduct of the international training.

Q4 Evaluate the achievement based on learning outcomes as defined in the respective course Curriculum. The participant at the end of the course should be able to:

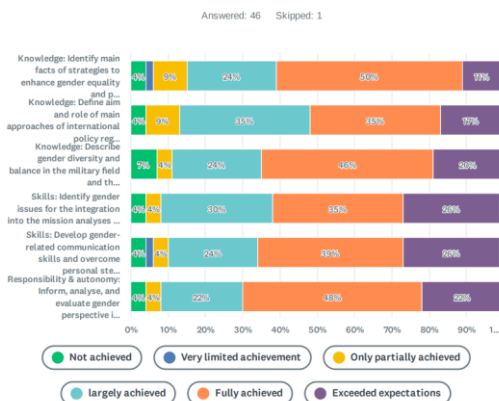


Fig. 2. Response of participants in the General Module regarding the assessment of learning outcomes

Fig. 2 presents the participants' summarized assessments of their achievements based on the learning outcomes as set out in the relevant course curriculum.

Regarding the knowledge of identifying the main facts of strategies for improving gender and equality, 50% of the participants stated that the training had fully achieved its objectives, and for 11% of the cadets and students, participation in the module had exceeded their expectations.

Regarding the question related to the ability to define the purpose and role of the main approaches of international policy for implementing equality, 35% of the participants believe the training results had been fully achieved, another 35% say they are greatly achieved and 17% say they have exceeded their expectations.

The remaining questions concerning the knowledge gained about gender diversity and balance in the military field; the identification of gender issues and their analysis when integrated into missions, the development of gender-related communication skills and overcoming stereotypes regarding gender and their social roles, etc., have received similar answers as the ones mentioned above. The high evaluation scores received, predominantly in the values from "achieved to a large extent" to "exceeded my expectations", are evidence of the very good preparation offered to the trainees. It is not surprising that the participants gave a very good rating for the overall implementation of the module - 4.9 on a six-point scale, and the average value of the trainees' assessment that they understood how to apply the information learned during the module in the future - 5.14, is another indicator of the desired results achieved.

Young people, representatives of Generation Z, are extremely sensitive to the topics discussed in the module and readily share their recommendations for its improvement, related to: improving the preliminary online preparation for the module; more effective time allocation; more practical activities in working groups and other issues of a domestic or organizational nature.

The general feedback assessments by the trainees participating in the Common Module "Gender Perspectives in Security and Defense", held at the Italian Military School, can be grouped around the following statements:

- "Very interesting lectures, which I consider extremely important from the point of view of future participation in CSDP missions and operational activity.";
- "I did not have high expectations at the beginning, but I am happy that I took this course because it made me explore important topics that I had never analyzed in such depth before and which I consider to be of paramount importance.";
- "It was a great experience with a lot of useful things to learn."

The next edition of the Common Module “Gender Perspectives in Security and Defense” as part of the Military Erasmus educational initiatives was held in February 2026, hosted by the Hellenic Air Force Academy and the Hellenic Military Nursing Academy in Athens, Greece. The participants were 32 cadets and 2 students from Greece, Cyprus, Portugal and Romania, 21 of whom were women and 13 were men. The trainees represented military academies of the Land Forces, the Air Force, the Gendarmerie, the Academy of the Ministry of Interior and civilian universities. The lecturers were 8 professors from Bulgaria, Greece and Portugal, as well as equality experts from the General Staff of the Hellenic Army.

The organizers from the Hellenic Military Academies also proposed new lecture topics to be included in the instructional content, related to understanding the gender perspective and the application of equality policies in

peacetime and conflict management processes, in accordance with the CSDP recommendations. The new topics offered knowledge and practical role-plays and case studies in the field of:

- the essence of collective security and peacekeeping mandates: legal, operational dimensions and gender perspective;
- CSDP missions and operations - gender language in mission mandates;
- gender diversity and sexual harassment;
- artificial intelligence - is it gender neutral? Gender stereotypes portrayed through artificial intelligence;
- strategic communication, psychological operations and gender narratives;
- gender-sensitive decision-making in peace and security support operations.

The very good preparation of the lecturers as well as the correct choices of pedagogical approaches received an extremely high rating from the trainees at the end of the module when evaluating all aspects of the training provided, as it can be seen in Fig. 3.

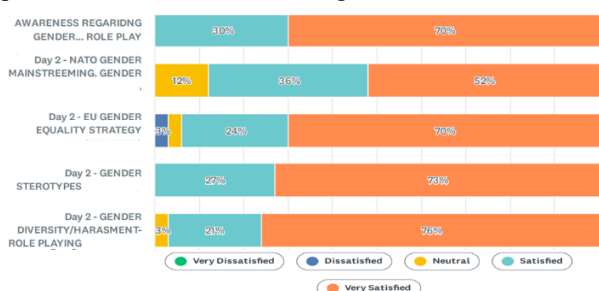


Fig.3. Responses from the Common Module participants in Greece regarding the evaluation of the content of the different topics and the pedagogical method for teaching them

A careful analysis of the feedback received gives a reason for satisfaction with the results achieved, as an average of 50 to 70% of the trainees share their complete satisfaction with the received training and the way the specific information has been presented. The remaining 25 to 35% of the trainees are also satisfied with the knowledge gained, which is a good certificate for the inclusion of new interesting and hot topics, tailored to the management of equality in current realities and technological challenges.

The overall assessment of the results obtained from the training conducted at the Hellenic Military Academy of Nursing, according to the feedback received, is very high, which is due to the effective pedagogical approaches, as well as the attractiveness of the mandatory and of the new topics included, taking into account the specifics of the General Module. (Fig. 4)

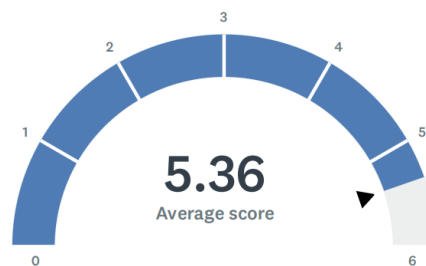


Fig. 4. Responses of participants regarding the overall quality assessment of the Common Module in Greece

It is worth noting here that the overall evaluation of the module in Greece is higher than the feedback received on the same question from the participants in the Common Module held in Italy, which is 4.86. Despite the very good evaluations of the various elements of the module implementation by the Italian Army School, as indicated in the previous analyses in the report, taking into account the participants' comments to improve the module content has led to an increase in the positive evaluations. This evidence confirms the hypothesis set out in the research question that the analysis of the feedback from participants in any educational initiative is a reliable tool for the content of the education and training, and its relevance and applicability.

The trainees who successfully completed the gender related training and received sufficient information about the applicability of their knowledge in future professional practice say that they would definitely recommend this module to their colleagues – 97%. In addition to the positive feedback from the trainees, the participants are always encouraged to share elements that they did not like or other ideas to optimize the learning interaction. It is striking that the recommendations regarding the availability of more practical scenarios and conducting seminars/games are extremely similar to the recommendations of the participants in the General Module in Italy. This is not surprising, given the similar characteristics and values of the generation that mainly represents student youth in Europe, a generation which seeks dynamics, diversity and needs to be always convinced of the usefulness of the knowledge received, aiming to turn this knowledge into skills and develop into competencies.

The overall impression from the responses to the 24 questions in the survey, related to the evaluation of all aspects of the proposed training, reveals the high level of satisfaction of the participants from different countries. More than 90% of the shared opinions of the trainees are in a positive light regarding the usefulness of the knowledge gained, as well as the good assessment of the need for such training in a military environment. (Fig. 5)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Personally I was more than satisfied from this Common Module, I look forward to the next one.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 2/20/2026 |
| It was a great and unique expert                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 2/20/2026 |
| I would participate again                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 2/20/2026 |
| Thank you for the amazing experience and the insight we gained as long as the new meets with expertised officers and students from other academies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 2/20/2026 |
| During this course, I gained a deeper understanding of how gender perspectives directly impact operational effectiveness. I learned that ignoring gender can create intelligence gaps and increase security risks. Integrating gender perspectives is not about politics or ideology — it is about making missions more successful, more trusted, and better informed. The course also strengthened my sense of responsibility as a future officer. Even at a junior level, I can help identify blind spots and promote more inclusive and effective operations. | 2/20/2026 |
| Very good                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 2/20/2026 |
| module was very interesting, the group was top and the teachers very interactive                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 2/20/2026 |

Fig. 5. The feedback of the course's overall organization of the Common Module in Athens, Greece

Although some of the trainees demonstrated some distrust at the beginning of the module, even discomfort from discussing topics related to equality and gender stereotypes, their open behavior at the end of the training and the free interpretation of specific policies are evidence of successful interactions with the trainers. In addition, the positive feedback together with the recommendations of young people for improving the next editions of the module engage the creators of training content with a constant analysis of changes in policies for implementing equality in the military environment, the study of good practices, taking into account generational differences and other factors influencing the achievement of the desired knowledge, skills and competencies in the field of gender mainstreaming.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be summarized that the feedback received from cadets and students from all over Europe who successfully completed their training in the Common Module "Gender Perspectives in Security and Defense", offered by the European Initiative, showed the relevance of gender education. The very good grades are an indicator of the high degree of achievement of the training results in implementing equality policies in the military environment, which would contribute to building a qualitative competence profile of future officers.

The feedback analyses have a direct link to the answer to the question of how relevant is education in gender equality policies in the field of Security and Defence to the challenge of overcoming gender stereotypes and integrating a gender perspective into military activities in peacetime and during conflicts. The data show that education, combined with adequate practical and applied methods, is an important resource for promoting

understanding of gender equality policies and influences the increase of the operational capacity of the Armed Forces.

The complex interdisciplinary relationship between the various thematic areas that relate to and influence gender perceptions needs to be specified and directed towards proper incorporation into the security system. This leads to the conclusion that gender equality is not an incidental element in CSDP, but should be perceived as a structurally integrated component of this policy. Strategic documents related to the gender equality policies are operationalized through the relevant mechanisms, offering diverse training and preparation for the officers for an effective management of military formations, taking into account the needs of both sexes and developing their talents.

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