

Brussels, 19 March 2025

To: The Permanent Representatives of Member States to the European Union

CC: The Permanent Representatives to the Political and Security Committee

Subject: Invitation to the 21st Common Security and Defence Policy High-Level Course 2025-2026 'MICHAIL KOSTARAKOS'

Your Excellencies,

The European Security and Defence College (ESDC) is proud to announce its 21st Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) High-Level Course 2025-2026. The course consists of four residential modules: Brussels (6-10 October 2025); The Hague (10-14 November 2025); Roskilde (23-27 March 2026); and Larnaca (22-26 June 2026).

This edition of the ESDC's CSDP High-Level Course is named after **MICHAIL KOSTARAKOS**, Chief of the Hellenic National Defence General Staff and later Chairman of the European Union Military Committee, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to European security and defence, particularly his leading role in strengthening the CSDP and fostering closer cooperation among Member States' armed forces. His unwavering dedication, strategic vision, and commitment to a stronger and more integrated European defence continue to inspire future generations of security and defence professionals.

The course will address the main policies, developments and trends of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy. It will provide a forum for in-depth debate on current and emerging CSDP issues.

Participants should be senior civilian officials (including diplomats and police officers) or senior military officials from the EU Member States, candidate countries, relevant EU institutions, bodies and agencies, as well as CSDP missions and operations.

The ESDC is committed to fostering an inclusive, diverse, gender-sensitive and anti-discriminatory environment. We therefore strongly encourage you to nominate candidates from groups that are likely to be underrepresented.

On behalf of the EU Member States and the national institutes contributing to the 21st CSDP High-Level Course, you are invited to submit your nominations no later than **30 May 2025**. For further details, please refer to the attached annexes.



FERGAL O'REGAN
Acting Head of the ESDC

Attachments:

Annex 1 – Administrative arrangements

Annex 2 – Curriculum of the 21st CSDP High-Level Course 2025-2026 'MICHAEL KOSTARAKOS'



Administrative arrangements

21st CSDP High-Level Course 2025-2026 'Michail KOSTARAKOS'

PART I. ORGANISATION

Structure of the course

The course is composed of four residential modules held in Brussels, The Hague, Roskilde and Larnaca. Each module lasts 1 week (Monday morning to Friday noon), and focuses on different strategic aspects of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

To ensure that all participants have a common foundational knowledge of CSDP, it is highly recommended that they have previously attended a CSDP Orientation Course. Otherwise, selected applicants will be required to complete a mandatory e-learning introductory module before the first residential session. Each residential module is preceded by a mandatory e-learning phase, with adequate time left between the modules to enable participants to complete the required e-learning.

The course uses the European Security and Defence College's (ESDC) e-learning system, ILIAS, which runs on a platform operated by the ESDC. All course participants must register in the ILIAS system and complete the preparatory e-learning course preceding each residential module.

Participants who fail to complete the introductory e-learning module (if applicable), or the e-learning assignments associated with each residential module by the time the residential module ends will not be invited to participate in the next residential module.

The preparatory **e-learning phase** of the **course starts on Monday, 1 September 2025** for the first residential module. The course **ends with the last residential module on Friday, 26 June 2026** with a graduation ceremony organised in Larnaca, Cyprus.

To attend the course, all participants must hold an **EU 'Confidential' security clearance** by the nomination deadline and ensure that it remains valid for the entire duration of the CSDP High-Level Course, until June 2026.



Module 1 – Brussels

The residential part of the 21st CSDP HLC 2025-2026 'Michail KOSTARAKOS' starts with the module in Brussels, jointly organised by the Belgian Royal Higher Institute for Defence and the Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, from **6 to 10 October 2025**.

The **Royal Higher Institute for Defence (the RHID)** is the reference body of the Belgian Ministry of Defence in the field of security and defence.

The RHID assumes two interlinked roles in supporting the Ministry of Defence and the nation. First, it acts as a 'think tank' on security and defence. It pursues the objectives of deepening and disseminating knowledge by organising conferences, colloquia and seminars as well as publishing papers by researchers. The first module of the CSDP HLC is 'High Studies for Security and Defence'. This module takes the form of residential seminars and visits and provides training in these fields for high-level personnel in both the civil and defence sectors, promoting reflection, debate, and networking among participants. Through national and international partnerships, the RHID has developed an extensive network to exchange ideas and experiences.

Second, in its role as a 'smart hub' and 'honest broker' for scientific and technological research, it is responsible for managing and facilitating the scientific and technological research programme of the Ministry of Defence, including the field of security and defence studies. More than ever, the RHID looks forward to promoting growth in Belgian scientific and technological research in the defence and security domain, restoring and reinforcing the links between government, academia and industry in this regard, and promoting and facilitating Belgium's and Belgian Defence participation in national and international research programmes.

Contact

Brigadier General Bart Laurent (Module leader)

Royal Higher Institute for Defence (RHID)

Email: bart.laurent@mil.be

www.defence-institute.be

EGMONT – The Royal Institute for International Relations is an independent think tank based in Brussels. Its interdisciplinary research is conducted in a spirit of academic freedom. Drawing on the expertise of its own research fellows, as well as that of external specialists, both Belgian and foreign, it provides analysis and policy options that are designed to be as practical as possible.

Benefiting from the role of Brussels in the global arena and from the prestigious setting of the Egmont Palace, the Institute offers an ideal forum for participants to exchange views with other specialists and with a well-informed public made up of representatives from the political, economic and academic spheres, the media and civil society. Conferences, colloquia and seminars nurture the work of the research fellows. The Institute has also developed specialised training activities.

Contact

Prof Dr Sven BISCOP

Director, Europe in the World Programme, Egmont Institute

Email: s.biscop@egmontinstitute.be

www.egmontinstitute.be



Module 2 - The Hague

Module 2 will take place in The Hague from **10 to 14 November 2025** and will be organised by the **Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA)**.

The NLDA offers military education at an academic level, with its courses comparable to those of civilian universities. As the Netherlands' sole military-scientific knowledge and research institute, the NLDA focuses primarily on Defence-oriented research, with numerous experts contributing to advancements in military operations. The Netherlands Institute of Military History, part of the NLDA, specialises in historical scientific research. The academy's unique approach combines (maritime) military education, university-level academic training, and personal development. With a tradition of officer training spanning over 180 years, the NLDA brings a wealth of experience to military education in the Netherlands.

Contact

Riccardo Scalas (Module leader)

Netherlands Defence Academy

Email: rm.scalas.01@mindef.nl

Web: <https://english.defensie.nl/topics/netherlands-defence-academy>



Module 3 – Roskilde

The third module will be hosted by **Roskilde University** from **23 to 27 March 2026**. Founded with the aim of challenging academic traditions and exploring innovative approaches to knowledge creation, Roskilde University (RUC) fosters a project- and problem-oriented learning environment. This methodology emphasises interdisciplinary collaboration to address real-world challenges and generate meaningful results. The Department of Social Sciences and Business (ISE) at Roskilde University is a network partner of the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) and a member of the ESDC Doctoral School on Common Security and Defence Policy.

Contact

Michael Friederich Kluth (Module leader)
Department of Social Sciences and Business
Universitetsvej 1, DK-4000 Roskilde
Email: kluth@ruc.dk
Web: www.ruc.dk



Module 4 - Larnaca

The final residential module of the CSDP HLC 2025-2026 is scheduled to take place in Larnaca, Cyprus, running from **22 to 26 June 2026**. This module will be organised and hosted by the **Cyprus Security and Defence Academy (CSDA)**.

The Cyprus Security and Defence Academy was established in the Ministry of Defence on 10 January 2017. In the same year, the Academy joined the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) Network, and signed memoranda of Cooperation with almost all the universities in Cyprus and two university institutions in Greece. In 2022 it became a full member of the International Military Academic Forum.

The mission of the Academy is to provide training and education on security and defence to enable the Republic of Cyprus to respond to new forms of threat, complex modern military operations and rapid technological developments. It provides training activities and education at national, regional, European and international level. Since its inception, the Academy has organised a number of courses and conferences, and has created an international network through various educational activities, institutional and bilateral meetings of the broader security and defence sector at tactical, strategic and political level.

Contact

Col Symeon ZAMBAS (Module leader)

Head of Cyprus Security and Defence Academy

Email: secdefacademy@mod.gov.cy

www.mod.gov.cy/en

CSDP High-Level Course Director

The Director of the 21st CSDP High-Level Course (HLC) 2025–2026, 'Michail KOSTARAKOS,' is Mr. Fernando MORENO. The CSDP HLC Course Director is responsible for the academic coordination of the residential modules and oversees the programme's content, as prepared by the module leaders.

Course Director, CSDP High-Level Course

Fernando MORENO

Email: nanomoreno@hotmail.com

Mob: +34 616180137

ESDC Secretariat

Melinda BOA, ESDC Training Manager

Email: Melinda.BOA@eeas.europa.eu

Mob: +32 460 84 57 83 (mobile)

www.esdc.europa.eu

Methodologies

Introductory e-learning module

This module provides a foundational overview of the CFSP/CSDP for participants who have not attended a CSDP Orientation Course. It ensures that all course participants acquire a comparable level of knowledge and understanding of the EU and the key topics related to the CFSP/CSDP. The content is structured into five Autonomous Knowledge Units (AKU's), which are accessible through the ESDC's e-learning system.

Preparatory e-learning phase for each residential module

This phase offers a comprehensive introduction to the CFSP/CSDP and relevant EU policies and concepts specific to each residential module. It ensures that all participants attain a common level of understanding of the EU, its institutional framework, and the role of various EU institutions, bodies and agencies within the CFSP/CSDP.

The preparatory phase comprises four Autonomous Knowledge Units (AKUs), accessible through the ESDC's e-learning system. Each unit requires approximately 2 to 3 working hours of study, depending on the participant's prior knowledge and engagement with CFSP/CSDP topics. This structured approach ensures regular and effective learning, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent residential modules.

For instance, by the end of the e-learning phase for Residential Module 1 in Brussels, participants should be able to:

- Identify the key historical milestones that have shaped the development of the CSDP.
- Explain the main features of the EU Global Strategy.
- Assess the overall functioning of the EU, with a specific focus on the role of EU institutions and CFSP/CSDP-related structures.

This framework enhances participants' preparedness, allowing them to engage more effectively in residential discussions and exercises.

To adequately prepare for the residential modules, participants can tailor their individual study approach based on their professional background, prior knowledge, and the time available. The e-learning platform provides the necessary flexibility to accommodate diverse learning needs.

Completion of the online course and the associated tests is mandatory for all participants as part of the preparation phase.

Residential modules (Brussels, The Hague, Roskilde and Larnaca)

The residential modules combine active, passive, and reflective learning while providing opportunities for networking and the exchange of best practices. Throughout these modules, interactive learning methods are employed, including group sessions, plenary discussions, and direct engagement with key stakeholders working on CFSP/CSDP-

related issues within the EU. The primary focus is on deepening participants' knowledge of the various topics while fostering discussions in a broader strategic context.

The topics and learning methods in each module are carefully aligned with the intended learning outcomes and are further refined by the module leader in close coordination with the dedicated training manager in the ESDC Secretariat.

Whenever appropriate, study trips and site visits are organised to places of strategic interest, ensuring alignment with the course's learning objectives. Additionally, case studies and practical exercises enable participants to bridge theory and practice by examining real-world applications of CSDP-related activities.

Group work in the CSDP High-Level Course

The ESDC employs a blended learning approach that integrates e-learning, lecture-based discussions, panel debates, exercises and group work to enhance participants' understanding of CFSP/CSDP topics.

Group work plays a key role in fostering collaborative learning and knowledge exchange. It provides participants with the opportunity to engage in in-depth discussions, explore different viewpoints, and, where possible, interact with subject-matter experts. Each group is carefully composed to ensure a diverse mix of professional backgrounds and perspectives, enriching the debate and facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

Evaluation

The course is evaluated using the Kirkpatrick model, specifically through Level 1 evaluation, which measures participants' satisfaction with the course via feedback on the residential modules.

At the end of each module, the module leaders submit an evaluation report to the ESDC Secretariat, following approval by the CSDP High-Level Course (HLC) Director. The Course Director is also responsible for drafting the final evaluation report, consolidating input from all residential modules. This report, prepared using the standard ESDC evaluation template, is submitted—with the support of the ESDC Secretariat—to the ESDC Executive Academic Board and the Steering Committee. It includes lessons identified and learned, along with recommendations for improving and further developing the course.

To successfully complete the course, participants must meet all learning objectives, assessed through:

- Active participation in residential modules, including group discussions and practical activities.
- Completion of e-learning phases, including all Autonomous Knowledge Units (AKUs) and mandatory online tests. Participants must achieve a minimum score of 80% in the final test.

However, no formal verification of learning outcomes is conducted. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) score is based solely on participants' workload rather than a formal assessment of acquired competencies.

The ESDC Executive Academic Board considers these factors when determining the awarding of course certificates.

PART. II PARTICIPANTS

Selection

The CSDP High-Level Course (HLC) 2025-2026 is open to participants from all EU Member States, relevant EU institutions, bodies and agencies, CSDP missions and operations, and selected candidate countries.

The selection of participants is the responsibility of the sending parties. Candidates should be senior officials engaged in strategic aspects of the CSDP with demonstrated leadership potential, particularly in the CFSP/CSDP-related fields. The course aims to maintain a well-balanced mixture of civilian and military participants, including professionals from diplomatic and law enforcement backgrounds. Additionally, Member States may nominate academics, representatives of non-governmental organisations, and members of the business community with relevant expertise.

The ESDC promotes an inclusive and diverse learning environment, ensuring equal opportunities for all participants. Upholding the highest standards of non-discrimination, it fosters a professional atmosphere where respect and fairness prevail across all activities.

Security clearance

All participants must hold an EU security clearance at the 'Confidential' level. At the time of nomination (30 May 2025), they should either possess the required clearance or have their clearance process sufficiently advanced to ensure issuance of the certificate by mid-July 2025 at the latest. The clearance must remain valid for the entire duration of the CSDP HLC, up to and including June 2026.

Representatives from candidate countries may participate only if a security agreement with the EU is in place at the start of the course and they hold a valid security clearance.

Nomination

EU Member States and EU institutions, bodies, and agencies are invited to nominate up to two participants each. Nominators must use personal email accounts rather than functional or generic mailboxes when submitting nominations via ENLIST. Member States are encouraged to ensure representation from all three major CSDP pillars at the national level—diplomacy, defence, and internal affairs. Additionally, senior personnel from CSDP missions and operations are strongly encouraged to apply.

If additional nominations are submitted beyond the initial allocation, participant selection will be based on remaining capacity and follow a predefined priority order established by ENLIST nominators.

Applications must be submitted by designated nominators through the ESDC's secure registration system (ENLIST) no later than 30 May 2025. Registration will only be considered final once confirmed by the ESDC Secretariat. Selected participants will receive confirmation by 13 June 2025 at the latest.

Registration

Upon confirmation, course participants must complete the following steps:

Personal Data Submission: Participants must enter their personal information in the ENLIST system as soon as possible, using the login credentials automatically provided upon confirmation.

Security Clearance Submission: Participants must submit proof of an EU security clearance at the 'Confidential' level or higher. A copy of the valid clearance or a corresponding certificate should be sent by the participant or the relevant security officer to the EEAS Security Accreditation Office at EEAS-SECURITY-CLEARANCE@eeas.europa.eu, with the ESDC's dedicated mailbox (esdc-hlc@eeas.europa.eu) in copy, no later than 18 July 2025. The email should clearly state that the document is intended for participation in the 21st CSDP HLC 2025-2026.

Access to E-Learning Platform: The ESDC Secretariat will provide confirmed participants with login credentials for the ESDC e-learning platform (ILIAS) in due course.

Communication: All communication between participants, course directors, and the ESDC Secretariat will take place via email and the ILIAS platform. Participants are encouraged to configure their ILIAS accounts to receive course-related notifications via the 'HLC Forum' feature.

Withdrawals: Once the registration period has closed and participants have been confirmed any withdrawal from the course must be officially communicated by the appointing authority to the ESDC Secretariat and, for information, to the national delegate at the ESDC Steering Committee.

Attendance

Full participation in the course is mandatory, including both the e-learning phases and the four residential modules. Participants are expected to be available for the entire duration of the course.

During the residential modules, participants may be invited to contribute to panels and discussions alongside experts supporting the course. These sessions provide an opportunity to engage in knowledge-sharing and professional exchanges.

Contributions based on personal or institutional experience on relevant topics are highly valued and encouraged, enriching discussions and fostering a deeper understanding of key CSDP-related issues.

Language

The course follows the CSDP language arrangement, with English and French as the official working languages throughout the entire High-Level Course (HLC). No interpretation services will be provided.

Participants are not required to provide proof of language proficiency or submit a language certificate as a prerequisite for acceptance into the course.

Additional info

For any information or support requests, course participants should contact the ESDC Secretariat's Training Manager, Ms Melinda Boa, via email at esdc-hlc@eeas.europa.eu

The ESDC Secretariat does not handle or cover costs related to international travel, local transportation, accommodation, or meals. These expenses must be covered by the sending authorities, unless explicitly stated otherwise in the programme or the module's administrative instructions.

To enhance networking and community building, participants may be encouraged—where feasible and in coordination with the relevant module leader—to book accommodation in a designated hotel during residential modules. Additionally, participants are invited to fully engage in networking opportunities, including group work and social events, to strengthen professional connections throughout the course.

Certificate of attendance

Full availability for the course is an explicit selection criterion. Each participant must be able to attend all four residential modules and complete all e-learning phases in their entirety.

Upon successful completion of both the e-learning and residential phases, participants will be awarded a certificate signed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.