Virtual Based Research on New Security in Europe

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Executive Summary

The NewSecEU (New Security in Europe) project has five main objectives:

- **To Serve as an Example of Innovative Virtual Collaboration**
  By using Web 2.0 technologies students and professors are able to collaborate on a shared research project, exchanging texts, ideas and data. Students will work asynchronously through the use of tools like blogs, wikis and discussion forums as well as participating in synchronous live chats and video conferences. NewSecEU uses a blended learning approach to support these online discussions with three face-to-face sessions to be held in Dresden, Brussels and Prague, plus a mid-term meeting of each dimensional student group at their dimensional tutor’s home university.

- **To Provide Students with Professional and ICT Skills**
  The student participants in NewSecEU are expected to organise their collaborative research themselves, which will require them to develop their skills in organization, teamwork, ICT and intercultural communication. The opportunity to interact with policymakers and security practitioners will provide students with networking and research opportunities that they would not normally get.

- **To Create a European Network for Contemporary Security Studies**
  By bringing together students, academics and experts from different European Union member states to collaborate in the analysis of the contemporary European security scene, NewSecEU lays the foundations for a new network of security experts able to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western Europe.

- **To Connect Universities and Professionals**
  Universities are often stereotyped as “ivory towers” disconnected from the practical world of politics. However, NewSecEU specifically targets interaction between the policymakers and the academic world, building a bridge between these two important sites of security analysis.

- **To Europeanize Universities**
  The NewSecEU project encourages intensive co-operation in international research teams. This encourages the development of a stronger understanding of European identity in students and teachers alike. In this way, we not only contribute to overcoming national stereotypes but accelerate the process of europeanizing our universities through a network of virtual collaborative research. Collaboration between the partners provides another model for growing collaboration between European Higher Education institutions.
In spite of a delay in starting the project due to the slow negotiation of the final funding agreement, NewSecEU has successfully completed the development phase of the project. Since January 2009 the project team has produced a web-based framework for the collaborative study of European security. This has involved the collection of suitable literature, the development of a common structure for the study programme including the application of Web 2.0 tools and assessment patterns and the formulation of appropriate research questions. Face-to-face workshops were held in Dresden in October 2009 and Brussels in 2010, where students got to meet experts of their relevant field of security studies. The final conference was held in Prague in April 2010, allowing all students to present their policy papers to an international audience and to discussants. Evaluation of the project has been conducted, the report of this evaluation can be found on our website. Dissemination of information about the project, its aims and lessons learned has been provided to the wider profession in the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Belgium. All of these developments have been underpinned by the project management processes of the European Project Center at TU Dresden and the coordination work carried out by Frau Almut Meyer zu Schwabedissen. The two coordination meetings in Dresden and one in Wroclaw allowed the project team to work through issues already discussed online. Seminar meetings also served as partner meetings throughout the duration of the project.

Teaching online and in face-to-face sessions has taken place and students have prepared joined research papers on self-chosen topics. Draft papers have been made available online, papers have then been presented in Prague and been discussed by primarily academic discussants. The input has successfully been reworked into the papers which have been published by the TUD press. Results of the pedagogical research will be published in 2010/11. We firmly believe that this will be an immense success.
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1. Project Objectives

The Quest for excellence in science in the modern world is largely based on specialization and cooperation between different types of partners and, thus, acquiring a broad range of knowledge based on interdisciplinary expertise. One consequence of these developments is the need to adapt traditional methods of teaching to a new and evolving educational reality. One means of achieving this is by bringing different specialists with academic and professional background together as well as making students aware of the needs of work in the modern multimedia based e-environment. This approach came along with the decision of the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 to introduce a new mission for the community: to transform Europe into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world.

Our project addresses both the issue of closer collaboration between the academy and professionals as well as strongly underlining the important process of Europeanization of universities. We believe that it can serve as an example of successful international cooperation for other institutions and can be the basis for future wider collaboration between the universities.

Making use of an online platform allows for different teaching approaches to stand together and learn from one another. It also enables teachers and students to benefit from individual areas of expertise between the participating universities. Additionally, it provides students, researchers and experts with an opportunity to compare and communicate different perspectives on security issues, a policy field traditionally structured along national agendas/perspectives.
2. Project Approach

The web-based research seminar on “New Dimensions of Security in Europe” (NewSecEU) aimed at strengthening the link between theory and practice in security studies at a university level by designing a blended research and teaching concept (online basis complemented by periodical face-to-face). The primary working method consisted in bringing together international students to cooperate on sensitive issues of contemporary international politics, by means of an internet platform and face-to-face meetings.

The project put the participating students together in four working groups, each dealing with one specific dimension of security, each tutored by a lecturer/researcher from a participating university. In order to ensure the desired level of cultural exchange among the students, two students from each participating university joined a working group on every one of the four security dimensions in focus. As a result each dimension was made up of 8 students representing all participating.

NewSecEU: research teams
4 security dimensions

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The NewSecEU seminar was divided into two semesters, each organized according to specific teaching priorities. At the beginning of the first semester, students met their tutors at the workshop in Dresden where they received an initial briefing about the seminar, were divided into working groups and attended lectures introducing the field of security studies, including basic theoretical and methodological background. The first semester was designed to guide participating students through theoretical and historical aspects of security studies, specific for each of the four aforementioned dimensions of security. During this period, students were expected to read selected literature and relevant documents, post comments in an online forum, and collectively (within working groups) prepare a paper covering their respective security dimension. Online teaching took place in the OPAL learning platform through which the students communicated with each other and with the tutor, got access to their study materials, prepared their individual and collective outputs, and received the tutor’s feedback on their work.
To receive additional feedback beyond comments from respective working group tutors, students gathered face-to-face for the second time at a **mid-course workshop in Brussels**. Here they had an opportunity to present main findings from their collective papers at a **poster presentation** – first to their colleagues from the other working groups, and subsequently to **experts** from Brussels-based institution and think-tanks. The other purpose of the workshop was to divide the working groups into smaller **working teams of four**. These teams discussed and selected a specific topic within their respective security dimension on which they would work during the following period.

While the main goal of the first semester of the NewSecEU seminar was to educate students through in an interactive online form on the theoretical reflection, history and current state of a specific dimension of security, the second semester was designed to let them utilize the acquired knowledge. Based on the discussion at the mid-course workshop, the working team started working on collective **policy papers** covering eight specific topics relevant for contemporary security studies. The form of a paper with policy recommendation was deliberately chosen to create a link between theory and practice. To enhance this intention, students were provided with contacts to **national experts** from the respective policy fields with whom they were encouraged to consult their preparatory work.

The **preparation of the policy paper** proceeded online through the OPAL platform, using the tools and materials presented to the students during the first semester of the course, including an online forum and a wiki (an online text document that can be edited collaboratively). Thanks to additional project funding, the working teams got an opportunity to meet with their respective tutors in a **mid-semester weekend session**. Here they were able to present the progress in preparing their papers, raise questions, explain the difficulties and challenges they were facing and receive advice from the tutors.

To ensure widest possible audience for the resulting texts, the policy papers were presented by the students at the **final conference in Prague**. Before the conference, the policy papers were sent to Czech and German experts in the field of security studies for a review. These **expert reviews** were subsequently presented alongside the papers within each panel of the conference. Besides them, the conference was attended by Czech academics, members of think-tanks and students from Prague-based universities. This way, NewSecEU students received a triple feedback on their work: from the tutors of their working groups, from the invited experts through their reviews, and from the audience during the Q&A sessions within each of the panels.

Presentation of the policy papers at the conference was not the final step in the students’ work. Based on the expert reviews and conference discussions, students were asked to **update and abridge the policy papers** accordingly to prepare them for a **printed version**. The experts who participated in the Prague conference were asked again to provide a **brief reflection** to accompany the student texts in the edited volume. The resulting publication will serve to demonstrate the potential of a combined, multinational student research effort and to promote the NewSecEU project.
Besides the publication of the collection of student policy papers, the NewSecEU project was presented at the 2nd international conference on education, economics and the society in Paris in July 2010 and the tutors will also form a dedicated panel at a conference in Dresden in October 2010. Furthermore, DMU Leicester will publish a paper reporting on our project, analysing it from a didactic perspective and presenting the results of the evaluation procedure. All these steps should ensure a broad dissemination of the project, including the main lessons learnt and challenges facing a multinational, online-based teaching and research effort.
3. Project Outcomes & Results

Project management
Partnership agreements have finally been signed by all participating institutions during February 2009. This delay was caused mainly by uncertainties concerning the final shape of the project budget. However, even before the signing of the formal agreements, basic rules of communication and cooperation were agreed upon at the first meeting of the project team in Dresden in January 2009. The team decided to use the OPAL platform (see below) not only as the main online teaching and learning tool for the implementation of the project but already during the preparation phase. The team went on to establish specialized folders, forums and wiki-based documents in OPAL through which it coordinates its activities.

At the January 2009 meeting procedures for financial and administrative management of the project were also agreed. In March 2009, team members successfully submitted to the European Project Center at TU Dresden their first internal financial reports; the second set of reports was submitted in August and after that every six month for the duration of the project.

Project’s online communication platforms and presentation
After some debate, the project team decided to rely on the OPAL communication platform¹, which they have used successfully in their previous cooperation, to act as a basic online teaching and learning tool. Access was provided by the project’s coordinating partner, Dresden University of Technology.

In cooperation with the Media Design Centre (MDC) at TU Dresden, a NewSecEU site was set up in OPAL and designed to allow its use both by the project team during the preparation phase and by the students during the phase of implementation.

Besides the project’s OPAL site which uses a secure login, open only for the tutors and future students of the seminar, the project team agreed on the contents and design of a publicly accessible website at www.tu-dresden.de/zis/newseceu. The NewSecEU project logo (designed again by the MDC at TU Dresden) was also chosen by the project team and has been promoted in publicly available outputs of the project. Such as conferences, correspondence with experts, online papers, website, posters, etc.

Seminar design
The organization of the NewSecEU seminar – which was realized during the 2009/2010 academic year – combines methods of online teaching and learning with face-to-face meetings of the students and tutors, and also contacts to experts active in the relevant fields of research.

¹ Please see https://bildungsportal.sachsen.de/opal/auth/1%3A-1%3A0%3A0%3A0/01_Willkommen/01_Was_ist_OPAL/Einfuehrung_OPAL.html for more details on OPAL.
The content of the seminar includes four dimensions of European security, each demonstrated on a specific case for which one of the team members is responsible: environmental security (on the case of energy security – TU Dresden), military security (ESDP as an external crisis management tool – Charles University in Prague), political security (European Neighbourhood Policy – University of Wrocław) and societal security (the issue of migration – De Montfort University in Leicester).

During their first meetings, the team members agreed on an overall structure of the seminar which was divided into six blocs (26 teaching weeks in total). During each of the blocs (and, indeed, each of the weeks) students, formed into multinational working groups, have perform online tasks that have been assigned to them by each of the tutors within the specific security dimension. For this purpose, the team members have uploaded into OPAL literature and documents which have thus been available to the students in an electronic form. They have also prepared an initial questionnaire/test through which the students will be introduced to the seminar before their first face-to-face meeting. Finally, each of the tutors has uploaded into OPAL a “storyboard” (i.e. a set of research questions and organizational tasks) which guided the students through the seminar. At the end of the seminar, students’ working groups have produced a policy paper on a topic within their particular security dimension.

The process of online teaching and learning has been punctuated by four face-to-face meetings: an introductory session in Dresden (October 22-25, 2009), a mid-course workshop in Brussels (January 26-29, 2010), a mid-term meeting in dimensional groups at the respective tutor’s home university, and a final conference in Prague (April 7-10, 2010). During the introductory session in Dresden, students have been introduced to the design, theoretical background and practical features of the whole seminar. Additionally, specific team building activities have provided students with a team spirit to carry them through the following weeks of online cooperation. The workshop in Brussels served as a face-to-face evaluation opportunity for the students and also allowed them to meet Brussels-based experts and EU professionals relevant for their specific field of study. Finally, at the conference in Prague, students have presented the results of their research to a broad audience alongside the experts who participated. Outcomes of the students’ research have been presented in a jointly written policy paper as well as in individual posters, which were shown at the conference.

Three project members (TU Dresden, De Montfort University in Leicester, Charles University Prague) have primarily disseminated the results and findings as well as lessons learned at various conferences dealing with didactic questions in academic teaching. TU Dresden has also disseminated the project at different security policy related conferences and meetings.

**Seminar organization**

Members of the project team have not only worked out and prepared the details of the seminar content but also discussed and made decisions regarding the organization of the specific seminar events. Specific venues could be organized for the three aforementioned face-to-face meetings in Dresden (city hall), Brussels (European Commission and European Parliament), and Prague (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The latter unfortunately had to be cancelled due to strict security regulations.
regarding the signing of the START treaty between Russia and the USA in Prague at the time of the conference.

Communication with experts who might participate at the various occasions of the seminar has started early in the project. This was good, so experts could arrange their schedule accordingly, but it also had a downside to it: since students have not quite decided what research question to focus on and experts tended to cancel the appointment at late notice. National experts seemed to be more easily accessible.

**Evaluation**

During their final preparatory meeting in Dresden in July 2009, team members were presented and agreed to evaluation procedures developed and presented by partners from De Montfort University in Leicester. Evaluation has taken place for the whole duration of the seminar, using various evaluation tools (online questionnaires, video diaries, chat, e-mail, etc. The evaluation report has been uploaded onto the NewSecEU website.
4. Partnerships

The current consortium is based on previous experience of cooperation between partners. Since 2004 Technische Universitaet Dresden (TUD), Charles University in Prague and Wroclaw University have been cooperating in a joint course based on a blended learning scheme. After the presentation of the course run by the three universities, called ForPol Online, at the American Political Science Association’s conference on Teaching and Learning in Washington, a new partner, De Montfort University, Leicester (DMU) joined the consortium, strengthening it with its presence.

Due to issues recognized during the previous collaboration and with a strong desire to bring the social sciences closer to real life, 13 external partners were invited to cooperate along with the universities mentioned above. The list comprises experts in security studies from NATO, the Czech Foreign Ministry etc.

The division of work packages is based on previous experiences, expertise and interest of the partners together with the principle of equal participation. Because the TUD has the widest experience in project coordination and has a well developed infrastructure for coordinating such activities (European Project Center), it became the leading partner and takes care of the coordination and management of the project and setting up communications (WP 1), while other partners concentrate on delivering results and contribute to the interim and final reports.

As all of the partners have previous experience in online teaching and cooperation, the creation of online seminar content/storyboard is highly divided with Wroclaw University (WP2) in the lead. While the knowledge is spread equally, the role of the online platform OPAL, provided to the consortium through TU Dresden, is critical for the development of the Virtual Research Seminar (WP3). It is administered by TU Dresden. All other university partners contribute and consult on the development of the online environment and the external website design. By the same reason the implementation of the Online Research Seminar (WP4) is managed by TUD, while such activities as the selection of students, the supervision of respective security dimensions, contact and coordination with external experts and support in the preparation and realization of the intermediate meeting in Brussels are spread equally among all four universities. The concept of the Conference in Prague is based on longtime cooperation between Charles University and the Foreign Ministry of the Czech Republic, therefore the biggest load of work linked to the conference is on the Czech side (WP5). Experience with evaluation at DMU Leicester is unique among partners and therefore the concept and administration of evaluation of the seminar is conducted by this university (WP6) with participation of all partners. Also the publication of the results of evaluation in an academic journal specialized in e-learning will be done by DMU, while the whole work package (WP7) is coordinated by TUD and realized by all partners according to the chosen dimension of security.

The language of communication is English, the most accessible to all partners and widely used in the scientific area of the project (political sciences, e-learning). In order to ensure effective communication, three kinds of communication methods have been applied: online platform OPAL – the main platform of the teaching process and also tool for effective cooperation among partners, consist of files storage area, archives, discussion forum and wiki, is supported with e-mail communication and regular meetings of the partners in the preparation period on a three months basis.
All results and archives can be viewed on the OPAL platform and the external web page of the project www.tu-dresden.de/zis/newseceu.

The specific international constellation of NewSecEU will promote identification with EU neighbours, in the sensitive field of security politics. Enabling advanced students to experience and reflect upon different academic and political cultures, while being encouraged to negotiate and formulate a common policy paper and thus a solution for political/cultural difference in an environment that is characterised by the necessity to come to common solutions and find common goals.

Here the special composition of the consortium is particularly challenging and beneficial. Combining Eastern and Western states of the EU, with very different historical backgrounds as well as diverting threat perspectives that are among others geographically induced.

Apart from the afore mentioned external partners and experts, NewSecEU has also cooperated with the city of Dresden, organising a public lecture by a former German ambassador in the town hall of Dresden on contemporary issues of security in Europe and by contributing to the official reunification event (20 year anniversary of German reunification) in October 2010, where three partners (Technische Universitaet Dresden, Charles University Prague, De Montfort University Leicester) held presentations on ideas surrounding NewSecEU and international cooperation between the participating countries. The conference website is accessible under: www.dresden.de/wandel.
5. Plans for the Future

Dissemination

In November 2010, a printed collection of student policy papers, supplemented with comments from the tutors and external experts will be published in Dresden. The book will then be sent to participating academic institutions, think-tanks based in the four participating countries and in Brussels, and to other institutions active in the field of security policy, including governmental bodies, national parliaments and NGOs.

Following the participation of two of the NewSecEU tutors at the 2nd Paris International Conference on Education, Economy and Society in July 2010, the team of NewSecEU tutors has presented the project at a dedicated panel of an international conference in Dresden, taking place from October 1-3, 2010. The presentation focused on the chances and challenges of international cooperative teaching, coordinating multinational student working groups online, and preparing students for work in the age of globalization. On a related topic, the partner at De Montfort University has held presentations at the UACES conference in Bruges and at the 3rd Teaching and Learning Conference of the PSA in Leicester in September 2010.

Follow-up activities

The universities making up the NewSecEU academic team have filed an application for funding with the Robert-Bosch-Stiftung for an Easter school (a seminar workshop modelled on the summer school-format) Stability and Growth – Economic Security in Europe to be organized in spring 2011 at TU Dresden. The workshop will focus on aspects of economic security in Europe is to be held at the Technische Universtitaet Dresden and will bring together an internationally composed group of advanced students from various disciplines (mostly from Economics, Political Science and Law). Opportunities for cooperation and problem solving in the field of economic security towards such challenges will be discussed between students, researchers and experts from various national contexts and several fields of study and practice. The Easter school should enhance the opportunity to offer similar seminars and workshops in the future.

Beyond the Easter school, NewSecEU participants agreed on two possible courses of further action. The first possibility is a project based on the EU Tempus programme which would build on the NewSecEU experience and know-how and expand it to additional partners from non-member countries associated to the EU (e.g. Croatia, Russia, Turkey or Ukraine). Another option is the creation of a joint degree programme in the field of International Relations/Security Studies at an M.A. or Ph.D. level. The discussions among the partners will be concluded by the end of the year 2010, and specific steps will be undertaken afterwards to keep the NewSecEU network alive and develop it further.

Besides the multilateral effort, bilateral consultations were started between the Charles University and the University of Wroclaw on possible cooperation in training and supervising Ph.D. candidates in political science and international relations. An initial information on the capacities in this field has been exchanged, and both parties
agreed to seek funding for this project through the 7th Framework Programme’s Initial Training action. If the negotiations and application for funding are successful, the cooperation should commence in the academic year 2011/2012.
6. Contribution to EU policies

The work concluded during the NewSecEU project has successfully contributed to several key EU policies, objectives and priorities. These include:

**Lisbon Education and Training Indicators**

*Inward and outward mobility of teachers and students within the LLP programme (LIS-H26 and LIS-H27)* The placing of collaboration at the heart of the teaching and learning experience during the NewSecEU project meant that mobility of both teachers and students was crucial to achieving project objectives. During the design phase of NewSecEU staff from the four consortium members met for three coordination meetings. During the seminar itself teachers and students travelled to four workshop sessions, which allowed them to experience the environments of different countries and universities in both Western and Eastern Europe. These meetings were facilitated by collaborative preparation online in advance via the OPAL system. Shorter intensive periods of mobility proved popular with students and are accessible to a wider range of students than traditional longer periods of study abroad.

**Lisbon Key Competencies**

*Communication in Mother Tongues and Foreign Languages (KC1 and 2)* All the staff and students faced challenges in communication, both in spoken and written language. For many working in English involved understanding complex texts and ideas in a foreign language. For English first language speakers, they learned about the challenges of working with people for whom English is a second language. The fact that the students successfully completed the project demonstrated how the project helped them to overcome these challenges.

*Digital Competence (KC4)* Both the staff and students participating in NewSecEU have developed their use of Information Society Technologies (IST). Much of the work preparing and implementing the course took place virtually, using Web 2.0 technologies for communication and co-operation between tutors. Students used technologies not only to learn about theories and issues in the study of contemporary European security, but also to develop effective virtual working networks to produce collaborative research papers. This gave them an excellent insight into the advantages and challenges of online collaborative work.

*Learning to Learn (KC5)* During NewSecEU students had to develop their core skills in the self-management of learning: time management, autonomy, discipline, perseverance and information management. The project also placed considerable emphasis on helping students to refine their skills in project management and collaboration. Students were able to reflect on their skills development through reflective exercises at the workshops and via the assessment and evaluation processes.

*Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences (KC6.1)* The cross-border collaborative working practices encouraged during NewSecEU and the diverse
nature of the student bodies at the participating institutions reflect the culturally diverse nature of contemporary Europe. Both teachers and students have become more aware of the impact that differences in historical, cultural and educational experience can have on cooperation and learning. Thus, we have developed the communication and negotiation skills necessary to operate effectively in a collaborative international group project as well as a sound understanding of the intercultural dimension of the European Union.

LLP Horizontal Policies

A. **Promoting an awareness of the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity within Europe, as well as of the need to combat racism, prejudice and xenophobia**

Because of its collaborative focus, NewSecEU confronts issues of cultural and linguistic diversity head on. The work of the two research groups on societal security focused on issues surrounding the securitization of asylum policy and minority rights. Not only did these projects allow the participating students to gain a deep understanding of issues of prejudice and xenophobia, but also to share their insights with a wider audience via the Prague Conference and the published papers.

**Complementarity with other policies**

One of the key goals of the European Union in the *Education and Training 2010 Work Programme* was to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. This will require a step change in both the quality and extent of Europe’s education and training. Following the economic crisis of 2008-2010 this goal requires greater collaboration amongst institutions across the European Higher Education Area in order to multiply the impact of national and European investment in Higher Education. NewSecEU demonstrates one way in which education can be adapted from a national to a European level through a blended learning approach combining face-to-face and virtual interaction. It has allowed staff to develop deep relations based on trust and mutual respect and to have a greater understanding of the different modalities of national education system. This will enable us to develop and sustain the links built up between our institutions in the future.

NewSecEU also helped the students to develop their skills in intercultural communication, collaboration, project management, and the production of policy-relevant research that will make them attractive to potential employers. By experiencing the process of managing their own international research project, the students have had a practical opportunity to learn about the related issues and to refine their working practices.