Honore et disciplina – The Centre of Excellence for
Military Medicine in Hungary

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Honour and discipline (or “studies” the word in Latin refers to both meaning), as one can read it on the wall of the Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine (MILMED COE). Hungary has successfully established the local core of this future NATO centre of excellence (COE), as of on the 1st of November the MILMED COE came to existence with the personnel who had been working on its creation for months beforehand. By that time, the centre has already organized its first international conference and had begun to rally supporting countries to join the organization. To really understand the relevance of these facts and events we provide a brief overview of the general concept for COEs and then examine the MILMED COE in detail, including the history of creation so far, the first MOU conference (Memorandum of Understanding), the way ahead and all the experiences we can draw in this recent stage.

The place of COEs in the structure of NATO

The end of the bipolar world order and moreover the 9/11 cataclysm called for a paradigm shift in the NATO establishment, altered the goals, the command structure, the composition of the forces and the abilities. The countries of the Warsaw Pact were forced to reduce their forces in number and equipment as the collapse of their former political and economical system caused a serious recession. Moreover, the red or people’s armies of these states were often treated as a symbol for the grip of Soviet Union and therefore it was a popular action to draw money from them and to reduce their numbers. On the other hand the armies of NATO were supported by strong, welfare economies and were renowned establishments of the society they were protecting and thus more resistant to change. The slowly introduced reforms were accelerated by the attack on the twin towers and eventually were introduced at the level of the whole Alliance. The political decision necessary to execute these changes was made on the NATO Prague Summit by the gathered heads of states and governments.1*

* Officially a centre becomes a “NATO” COE only after accreditation
Maybe the greatest achievement in this area is that the task of supervising NATO’s transformation was placed on the equal level with strategic planning. One of the most important components of transformation is the reform of the command structure which process revised the role of NATO’s headquarters based on their different task rather than location. This resulted in the transformation of Strategic Command Europe to its successor: Allied Command Operations (ACO), which will concentrate – just as its name suggests – on the operational command and planning. A similar course took place with Strategic Command Atlantic as it became the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) that wishes to be the engine of NATO’s transformation and according to the meaning it has been tasked with the control and constant supervision of the process of transformation. Its tasks can be divided into four main areas:

- Defining of strategic concepts, principles and requirements
- Joint concept development
- Future capabilities, R&D
- Training and education

The aim was to unify the control of the present aforementioned capabilities under a single command and thus facilitate new ones. Basically this led to the creation of the so called Centres of Excellence (COE) Concept whose purpose is to solve the occurring problems of transformation theme by theme.

The COEs – along with many other NATO funded organization – were subordinated to ACT,3 but this means a professional supervision rather than traditional military command and by that I mean the representation and assertion of the Alliance’s interests. The close supervision of the ACT is present in every dimension of a COE, like in its creation, accreditation or the actual operation and even the development of the annual Programme of Work (POW). The role of ACT has to be taken very seriously, since it is tasked with the accreditation of all COEs and it supervises the regular (due every two years) inspections of the centres required to keep their accreditation.4

The Centres of Excellence: definitions and principles

The Hungarian specialized literature and press were rather indifferent about this topic so far, therefore I could only find three related documents.5 Just as it happens with new phenomena and concepts there is a considerable confusion even within a narrow group of professionals. It is clear now that all COEs are subordinated to the ACT, but what then is a COE? By definition a COE is a national or multinational organization that serves the transformation of the Alliance with its acknowledged knowledge and experience and it offers an opportunity to improve the quality of military training and
education, furthermore promotes the interoperability between NATO’s nations and gives them the chance to expand their capabilities. All COEs will take part in doctrine development and validation.

Therefore, the aim of the COEs harmonizes with the mission of ACT by creating the opportunity of a two-way knowledge-transfer between the participating nations and between them and the ACT/NATO thus supporting the process of transformation. According to these definitions, a COE is a national or multinational facility that works within a narrow professional area and it creates a well organized environment for the experts of the participating countries for research, sharing of experiences, development and validation of doctrines or other intellectual products. COEs will also be the scene of training according to these developments.

At this point let us note that the establishment of a strategic command dedicated solely to transformation shows the recognition of the need for constant adaptation and improvement in cooperation. It is a great task to combat recent and future threats with the proper equipments, tactics and professional personnel. However it is even more challenging to realize these developments on the international level. Each and every COE offers a unique and very effective scene for a close cooperation between the allies, since every supporting nation has a more direct control, better accessibility in them than in the Alliance itself. The Centres are not just clever outsourcing of the transformation, but special and effective forums of a professional, multinational and joint problem-solving, a one-of-many manifestation of the new ideas and trends we have in the world of security and defence politics. Basically following the idea of devolution, NATO seeks to solve problems at the proper level and by the nations who are really interested. Therefore the naval doctrines developed by a handful of states with the most formidable fleets will be easily available for smaller maritime powers. Also, a smaller centre that can find a niche in the spectrum of Alliance’s capabilities might be able to provide valuable products for every ally.

As a brief introduction to COEs, in a few paragraphs we will take a look on the basic principles of COE establishment and operation.

**The different roles of participating nations** – The members of the Alliance are welcome to participate in a COE in every aspect (as noted on the following picture). This participation can happen in two ways: a nation can either be a sponsor (sponsoring nation – SN) or a contributor. The sponsoring nation status means a fully enabled membership with the right to delegate a member to the Steering Committee of the centre and thus gaining the right to vote (and to veto) about decisions concerning the centre. In exchange – just as its name shows – such a nation will have to pay the determined amount of the expenditures. On the other hand a contributory nation will
have no financial responsibilities towards the centre and will only take part in its professional activities but of course will not be granted with the right to delegate a member to the Steering Committee and thus will not take part in the decisions concerning the centre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Vehicle</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sponsoring Nation | – Manpower on location  
– Full financial support | Consensus vote in SC on entire POW | Full access to all products | OptMOU    | Only full participation in COE allows full control over the COE operation. |
|                 | For one or multiple projects:  
– manpower and/or  
– financial support | Advice to SC on project | Access to project specific results/ products | Project   | Opt-in/opt-out participation requires SN to retain control over operation as a whole |
| Contributing Nation | – Manpower to support COE operation in general | Advice to COE on project execution | Access to projects and results in accordance with arrangement | MOU between CCD-COE and entity | This is dedicated and coordinated information exchange. |
|                 | – Financial reimbursement for a specific project (not reimbursement for manpower) | Definition of the project for the SOW.  
– Continuous monitoring of the execution | Full benefit from the project. | All terms of the project and support are set out in Technical Arrangement | Projects for the NATO Structure are free of charge. |
| Liaison         | – Support in kind                                                            |                       |                                      |           |                                                                |
| Customer        | – Financial reimbursement for a specific project (not reimbursement for manpower) |                       |                                      |           |                                                                |

The partner states (PfP, MD, ICI or contact) or different local or international organizations can not be the part of the COE organization, still can play important roles in its activities, the preferred form of such co-operation is the project oriented, so-called active liaison participation. In the table we examine the different forms of cooperation with a COE.6

The centre’s personnel can be purely national or multinational, but by experience so far the multinational aspect is a key to success. Also, it is very unlikely that a centre which does not have the gravity and relevance to attract other nations to join to gain accreditation.

No duplication – The centre can not duplicate or contest any capabilities already present in NATO. The centres according to their complementary role, generate new capabilities, furthermore in their collector role they gather and unify capabilities already present but scattered in NATO’s organization.

Funding and finance – Just as the manning this can be a national or multinational issue. These questions are defined precisely in the Memorandum of Understanding.
between the host nation and the sponsoring nations. Usually every supporting nation delegates a Subject Matter Expert (SME) and shares the set percentage of the annual expenses. Furthermore, there can be special, project-related, maintenance or other expenses that have a different cost-share formula outlined in the MOU. An important condition about this topic is that the manning of the centre can not be at the expense of NATO’s military command structure, therefore cannot draw away human resources from NATO and that the wages of the centre’s personnel cannot be funded from the resources assigned to NATO. COEs are not allowed to make profit, and thus can only ask for a subsequent compensation for their products and only to the extent of their upkeep. They are obliged to satisfy NATO’s demands free of charge and usually that is equally true in the case of the sponsoring nations (this is defined in the MOU).

NATO standards – The activities of a COE must be in harmony with the Alliance’s doctrines, rules and standards and also a COE should improve these if needed.

Clear relationships – Clear relationships are to be established between sponsoring nations and the appropriate Strategic Commands (ACT, ACO) through MOUs and Technical Arrangements (TAs).

Furthermore the COEs – as compulsory accreditation criteria – have to meet the following requirements:

Security issues: NATO standards apply regarding the staff, visitors and classified materials. The COE is responsible for the installation, operation and maintenance of proper security measures.

Product development and capabilities – It is vital to stress that basically no COE can develop solely national capabilities as these projects must have joint and multinational perspective. Of course we can not expect every COE – considering the scarcity of resources in manpower and other resources – to engage equally in the operational (for the ACO) and the transformational (for ACT) aspect of product development. The precise spectrum of capabilities and professional areas of a COE is set during the concept-building phase, but are subject to change as sponsoring nations join the centre and also by the annual programme of work.

Education and training: When ordered by any NATO-related organization, it is coordinated by the ACT and thus these courses and other events have to be in accordance with the NATO’s regarding training and education regulations.

Accessibility, customer support: NATO nations and entities have assured customer access to COE services and support. A COE may sell products for organizations outside the Alliance, but this must not interfere with any orders from within the organization. The priority of clients is the following: ACT – NATO organizations – NATO nations – Other (PfP, international organizations, etc.).
Lines of communication: Basically, the COE maintains an open line of communication with the SCs and NATO organizations but for the everyday tasks it is vital to establish appropriate number of CRONOS/MINERVA terminals. The open line VTC capability is an accreditation criterion, and also it is strongly desired to have a protected line for this purpose.

Recognized knowledge – All COEs must employ credible subject matter experts (SME) with the appropriate qualifications. Since the working language is English, the personnel occupying officer positions (SMEs) is required to use the language in an advanced level. Since COEs represent “excellence” both in their name and activity the aforementioned high requirements are absolutely justified, but it is rather hard principle to enforce these principles, especially when dealing with the SNs, since it is their privilege to delegate whoever they choose to. The FN can only indicate the requirements for a position, but has no further influence.

Other requirements: Besides the aforementioned criteria and rules there is an immense amount of further regulations and rules regarding the COEs operation that are set in different MOUs (Operational and Functional), bilateral agreements and Technical Agreements. One of such rules is the fact that the COE is commanded by a Steering Committee assembled from the representatives of the SCs. This Committee has the authority to approve the budget, the Programme of Work (POW) and with the help of the COE director, it decides the most important questions.

COE establishment process in practice

The classic case when a COE can be established is the following: a NATO member nation has a high-quality capability that is offered for NATO (fully or partially). This has to be followed “just” by the approval of the concept (by ACT), the persuasion of the possible SCs to join and to develop the exact principles of their participation (MOUs and TAs) and of course the process of accreditation (ACT, NAC), with the centre already operating. The accredited centre then applies for the activation as an IMO (International Military Organization). Generally speaking this form of establishment is common in the senior NATO member countries.

Considering the more recent member nations the process usually takes place like this: the FN initiates informal talks with the respective, higher level, professional committee (like COMEDS or SNLC). The aim of these arrangements is to identify the proper professional area in general and the capabilities to offer for the Alliance, that are also feasible and needed by NATO. After this, the Framework Nation contacts the ACT with the concept and the letter of approval from the aforementioned committee. The
ACT’s responsible body, the TNCC (Transformation Network Coordination Cell) analyses the concept and does its “reality check”:

- Does NATO really need the offered capabilities?
- Is the Framework Nation capable of realizing these capabilities?

If the FN succeeds in persuasion of the ACT, from this moment it should follow the process we explained in relation with senior NATO members. As we will see regarding the NATO Military-medical Centre of Excellence, this whole procedure requires lengthy and very thorough arrangements with the highest-level medical board of the Alliance, the COMEDS (Committee of the Chief of Medical Services in NATO), however the efforts are starting to pay back.

At this point, we have to note, that NATO never openly refuses a concept, since the non-viable ideas will perish without multinational support mostly before reaching the accreditation phase or during the accreditation itself.

As a summary of this topic, we included a general timeline for the process establishing a COE in general, based on the experience of the TNCC. Please note, that as the picture suggests, these processes are often overlapping and are happening simultaneously. For example, the concept of a COE is accepted by ACT as the first major step of the establishment; however, the concept is subject to changes by the other participating nations and might only be finalized with the MOUs.

![General timeline](image-url)
I. KOPCSÓ: Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine in Hungary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (and Location)</th>
<th>Accredited?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Center for Analysis &amp; Simulation for the Preparation of Air Operations (CASPOA)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian Military Cooperation (CIMIC) COE (Germany &amp; the Netherlands)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold Weather Operations (CWO) COE (Norway)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Joint Operations from the Sea (CJOS) COE (U.S.)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command &amp; Control (C2) COE (The Netherlands)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confined and Shallow Waters (CSW) COE (Germany)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Cyber Defense (CCD) COE (Estonia)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter Improvised Explosive Devices (CIED) COE (Spain)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense Against Terrorism (DAT) COE (Turkey)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) COE (Slovakia)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Intelligence (HUMINT) COE (Romania)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Air Power Competence Center (JAPCC) COE (Germany)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiation, &amp; Nuclear Defence (JCBRN Defence) COE (Cz)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COE for Military Medicine (MED) COE (Hungary)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Engineering (MILENG) COE (Germany)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain Warfare (MW) COE (Slovenia)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Mine Warfare (EGUERMIN) COE (Belgium &amp; the Netherlands)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Based on our experiences this is a very ambitious plan of action that can only be complied with a coherent and satisfactory national and international support and coordination and without any unexpected setback.

As a closure of our topic so far, we can observe the list of accredited centres and also the ones to be established.10

**Hungary’s place in the COE network, the MILMED COE**

Considering all the described criteria and rules, it might be hard to understand why Hungary tries to establish the Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine. Basically, the initiate is the outcome of four important factors in a fortunate constellation:

1. First of all, there was a well-articulated need for such an organization from NATO. Hungary has delegated many talented medical officers to NATO’s command structure and agencies, who could realize the need for an organization in a timely manner and whose vocation was essential in our case. They were able to identify the niche areas of NATO’s medical system and matched it with our capabilities. Undoubtedly, the support from COMEDS and ACT is basically the essence of every single Hungarian medical officer’s efforts so far.

2. Second, we enjoy the full support of the Hungarian medical service, which treats this project as a top priority. Also – probably as the result from a deliberate human resource management – there is a dedicated and agile team that has been assembled to make our plans happen.
3. Third, we have the skills and the credibility to complete such endeavour: we have experienced and recognized experts, officers familiar with the know-how of the Alliance, and the support of the State Health Centre and the HDF ‘Dr György Radó’ Honvéd Medical Centre. In addition the centre will co-operate in any possible ways with PfP nations, civilian experts and international organizations to complete its mission. Moreover, we have already been provided with the location and infrastructure for the centre.

4. And last, we have the full support of the Hungarian military and political leadership as well, who have recognized the importance of our endeavour. All the emerging difficulties came naturally from the novelty of the organization and have been dealt with swiftly.

The MILMED COE’s timeline so far is a textbook example for COE establishment. Although, the timeline provided by ACT indicates a general “more than a year” period, our approximately two-year plan is a rather short one. Time required for the thorough preparation of the concept resulted in a great success of the 1st MOU conference in Hungary, where 23 nations were present and thus giving us a reasonably solid basis for further actions. On the given picture we can examine the organizational setup for the MILMED COE and that sets the date for accreditation in 2009. This is a real and deliberate projection and we have assets and initiative to complete it.

This centre is the very first NATO Centre of Excellence in Hungary. Therefore, it is quite obvious that it holds a great importance: we, as the officers and employees of the centre will accomplish its mission and expect to gain further recognition for the HDF and for our country.
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Figure 3. MILMED COE organizational plan

References

2. MCM-236-03: MC Concept for Centres of Excellence, 4 Dec 03; http://transnet.act.nato.int/WISE/TNCC/CentresofE/Documents/MCM236MCCO
3. MC 324/1.
4. Alexander Schott: Centres Of Excellence, Development and Timeline, NATO ACT, 7-10.0
6. Alexander Schott: The legal aspects of NATO Centres of Excellence, October 2008 (presentation)
7. Note: the centre’s personnel are not NATO personnel.
8. IMSM-0416-04: NATO Centres of Excellence Accreditation Criteria, 11 Jun 04