

## IMPLEMENTING THE BOLOGNA PROCESS THROUGH EUROPEAN MOBILITIES. A SECURITY-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVE

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<https://doi.org/10.54989/stusec.2026.20.01.08>

### Abstract

*The Bologna Process aims to foster transnational higher education while also developing strong relations between European Universities. This paper focuses on the way that mobilities, regardless of the programme they are affiliated to, help the Bologna Process shape higher education. European Universities are called to start strengthening the internalization of higher education, and I believe that this goal can be achieved with the help of mobilities.*

*Within the research, we have used a questionnaire and a SWOT analysis, which includes a comparison between the Erasmus+ programme and the FORTHEM Alliance. On one hand, the students of Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu who went abroad through the Erasmus+ programme have voiced their opinions on the Bologna Process in my questionnaire. On the other hand, LUBS has been a member of the FORTHEM Alliance since 2021, programme which also offers the chance to experience studying or researching abroad in a short-term mobility.*

**Keywords:** Bologna Process; Erasmus+ Programme; European Universities Initiative; Romanian higher education; student mobilities

### Introduction

According to the document “Education unites us. A vision for the future of education in Romania<sup>3</sup>”, education has and has always had multiple roles for the individual and for society. First of all, the education has significant implications for the economic prosperity of each individual, each community, each nation. At the same time, it remains the main benchmark through which values and traditions are transmitted from generation to generation. Also, education is what ensures stability and social development. A country that invests in education and human capital development undertakes one of the most beneficial strategies for the long-term advancement of society. For this reason, educational and scientific research institutions are considered strategic institutions for the national destiny, and the European education standards can guide these institutions towards achieving educational objectives.

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<sup>3</sup> Ministerul Educației și Cercetării, *Educația ne unește. Viziune asupra viitorului educației în România*, <https://share.google/raTFcvzq0Zkd0OXsq> (05.12.2025)

Contemporary societies are undergoing accelerated technological, social, and economic transformations, requiring education systems to continuously adapt to emerging realities. The challenges brought by this complexity can be countered by revising the traditional notion of “education”, and creating a new way of educating people. The interdependence between the development of society and the progress in education determines the permanent reconfiguration of educational dimensions. A greener, more inclusive and more digital society is becoming a reality more and more rapidly<sup>1</sup>.

This reconfiguration is reflected in the need to create a more complex and united Europe, by establishing and consolidating its intellectual, cultural, social, scientific and technological dimensions. Therefore, the idea that Europe should become a space capable of providing its citizens with the necessary skills to face the challenges of the new millennium, as well as belonging to a common social and cultural space, is becoming more prevalent in our society. The prospects of enlargement, together with the deepening of relations with other European countries, provide even broader dimensions to this reality.

### Security as a Dimension of the EU Educational Policies

The Bologna Process seeks to harmonize European the higher education systems. This objective can be linked to security through the strengthening of social stability; the reduction educational inequalities; the prevention of radicalization through education; the development of a shared European identity. In this regard, education functions as an instrument of societal and democratic security<sup>2</sup>. The Bologna Process promotes: equal access to education, academic mobility, social inclusion, also the development of competencies. All these aspects represent an integrated part within the human security concept and contribute to social economy, economic security, civic resilience, the reduction of social vulnerabilities. It is considered that the vision underpinning the Bologna Process is embedded within the dominant paradigm of the knowledge-based economy and knowledge society. This framing helps explain why the Bologna Process is both intelligible and perceived as legitimate by the actors involved, thereby rendering its expanding set of commitments more readily acceptable<sup>3</sup>.

International education can be conceptualized as a form of “soft security” or “soft power”<sup>4</sup>, in the sense of exerting indirect, non-coercive influence at the global level. Programs such as Erasmus, university exchange schemes, and the recognition of academic qualifications foster inter-state cooperation, contribute to academic diplomacy, and facilitate the reduction of cultural tensions. Following the digitalization of universities, issues such as the protection of academic data, the security of online platforms, the prevention and combatting of academic fraud, and the safeguarding of university IT infrastructure have become increasingly important topics within the Bologna Process framework. Possible linkages include cybersecurity, digital education, and the protection of personal data. Another approach deserved to be taken into account as an interrelation between security and EU

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<sup>1</sup> Lupescu Daniela Claudia, *Dascălul român în context european*, “Lucrările proiectului educațional internațional. Dascălul român în context european”, 2023, p. 6

<sup>2</sup> Iryna Kushir, *The role of Bologna Process in defining Europe*, “European Educational Research Journal”, Vol. 15, No. 6, pp. 664-675, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904116657549>

<sup>3</sup> Pauline Ravinet, *From Voluntary Participation to Monitored Coordination. Why European Countries feel Increasingly Bound by their Commitment to the Bologna Process*, “European Journal of Education, Research, Development and Policy”, Vol. 43, No. 3, 2008, pp. 353-367, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-3435.2008.00359.x>

<sup>4</sup> Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira, Joao Mourato Pinto, *Soft Power in the European Union's Strategic Partnership Diplomacy. The Erasmus Plus Programme*, “The European Union in International Affairs”, 2021, pp. 69-94, DOI: [10.1007/978-3-030-66061-1\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66061-1_4)

educational policies refers to combating disinformation and democratic resilience. Universities reformed under the Bologna Process contribute to the development of critical thinking, media literacy, and the countering of extremism and propaganda. In this context, an interconnection emerges between information security, civic education, and European democracy.

Within the framework of the Bologna Process, the harmonization of professional competencies across Europe could contribute to improve the labour market integration, leading to reduced unemployment, greater workforce adaptability, enhanced economic stability, and strengthened European competitiveness. These developments can be understood as integral components of economic security. The Bologna Process aims to harmonize professional competencies across Europe, facilitating comparability and compatibility of qualifications within the European Higher Education Area. Relevant outcomes in terms of security include reduced unemployment, enhanced adaptability of the workforce, improved economic stability, and increased European competitiveness. These elements are closely linked to the broader concept of economic security<sup>1</sup>. Education, particularly through European university cooperation, constitutes a relevant instrument for conflict prevention and peace consolidation. Within the European Higher Education Area, academic collaboration fosters intercultural dialogue, contributes to the mitigation of extreme forms of nationalism, and supports processes of regional integration. In this regard, the Bologna Process can be understood as a peace-building mechanism, a tool of regional security, and an essential component of European stability<sup>2</sup>.

Educational security constitutes a fundamental factor in ensuring and enhancing the quality of the educational process, contributing to the reduction of academic inequalities and the expansion of equitable access to educational resources and knowledge. From a social perspective, it supports the promotion of tolerance, inclusion, and social cohesion, while simultaneously mitigating discrimination and manifestations of extremism at societal level, including within the European context. From an economic standpoint, educational security facilitates the formation of a highly skilled and competitive workforce, increases graduates' employability, and strengthens the transition towards a knowledge and innovation-based economy. Moreover, at the European and international levels, it contributes to the reinforcement of cooperative relations between states, the promotion and consolidation of democratic values, as well as the prevention of conflicts through educational and cultural cooperation.

Over time, internationalisation in higher education has evolved from a largely reactive practice into a proactive strategic priority, shifting from being regarded as an added value to becoming an integral component of institutional policy and practice. In parallel, its scope, focus, and overall conceptualisation have undergone significant transformation. The growing competitiveness of the higher education sector, alongside increasing commercialisation and the expansion of cross-border provision, has placed traditional forms of academic cooperation, such as exchanges and institutional partnerships, under new pressure. At the same time, greater emphasis has been placed on embedding international perspectives within domestic learning environments<sup>3</sup>. As a result, the internationalisation of curricula and of

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Leoni, *Graduate employability and the development of competencies. The incomplete reform of the Bologna Process*, "International Journal of Manpower", Vol. 35, No. 4, 2014, pp. 448-469, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-05-2013-0097>

<sup>2</sup> Iryna Kushir, *Op. cit.*, pp. 664-667

<sup>3</sup> De Wit, Hans, *Globalisation and Internalization of Higher Education*, Universita Oberta de Catalunya, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.7238/rusc.v8i2.1247>

teaching and learning processes, often described as internationalisation at home has gained importance comparable to that of student mobility, whether for full-degree programmes or short-term study experiences integrated into home institutions.

### Conceptual and Legal Framework

The Sorbonne Declaration of 25 May 1998<sup>1</sup> emphasised the central role of universities in developing the European cultural dimension. The Declaration supported the creation of the European Higher Education Area, with the aim of increasing the employability of citizens and promoting and facilitating their mobility.

The Bologna Declaration<sup>2</sup> of 19 June 1999 (which we will approach in more detail in the next chapter) speaks of the importance of increasing the international competitiveness of European higher education.

There are almost 5,000 higher education institutions in Europe, with 17.5 million tertiary students, 1.35 million tertiary teachers and 1.17 million researchers<sup>3</sup>. Following the two Declarations, the European Education Area (EEA), the European Research Area (ERA) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) were created, in order to ensure three main things: better collaboration between all academic entities and academic staff, development of academic research and provision of jobs for highly qualified Europeans.

To ensure its evolution in a changing society, Europe needs more people with high-level skills. EU Member States have set a target for at least 45% of people aged 25 to 34 to obtain a higher education qualification by 2030<sup>4</sup>. In 2023, the percentage was 43%<sup>5</sup>, and in 2024 around 44%<sup>6</sup>. In Romania, the situation is different. According to the *Eurostudent National Report*<sup>7</sup>, 85% of Romanian students want to finish the university they started, exceeding the European average of 78%. However, between 2023 and 2024, the number of young people with higher education was much lower, at around 25%<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, the European dimension is becoming more and more integrated into the educational policies of European states, a dimension that aims to train European citizens with a European conscience and identity<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, education can promote both respect for human rights and the culture of other people, as well as the cultivation of dialogue between nations. At the World Conference of Partners for Higher Education, from June 2003, the current importance of this contribution was underlined: “At no time in human history has

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<sup>1</sup> Sorbone Joint Declaration, Joint Declarations of Harmonisation of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System, Paris, the Sorbone, May 25 1998, [https://ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/1998\\_Sorbonne/61/2/1998\\_Sorbonne\\_Declaration\\_English\\_552612.pdf](https://ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/1998_Sorbonne/61/2/1998_Sorbonne_Declaration_English_552612.pdf) (15.04.2026)

<sup>2</sup> The Bologna Declaration of June 1999, Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education, [https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial\\_declarations/1999\\_Bologna\\_Declaration\\_English\\_553028.pdf](https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/1999_Bologna_Declaration_English_553028.pdf) (15.04.2026)

<sup>3</sup> European Union, *European Education Area*, <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/about-higher-education> (20.12.2025)

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, *Education and Training Monitor*, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor/en/monitor-toolbox/country-page/romania.html> (13.04.2026)

<sup>5</sup> Eurostat, *43% of EU's 25-34-year-olds have tertiary education*, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240527-1?> (13.04.2026)

<sup>6</sup> *Idem*

<sup>7</sup> Raportul Național EUROSTUDENT VIII 2021-2024, *Condițiile de viață și studiu ale studenților*, Editura Institutul de Științe ale Educației, București, 2026

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor/en/monitor-toolbox/country-page/romania.html> (15.04.2026)

<sup>9</sup> Duțu, Alexandru, *Ideea de Europa și evoluția conștiinței*, Editura All, București, 1999, p.100

the well-being of nations been so closely linked to the quality and scope of education systems and higher education institutions”<sup>1</sup>.

The purpose of universities is to provide young people with an education that can help them maintain a balance in their personal lives and the ability to adapt to the dynamics of a constantly changing society. Such training can and should be supported by student mobility in different European universities<sup>2</sup>.

A mobility process refers to the possibility for students and university staff to study, respectively work, for a limited period of time, outside the higher education institution of which they are a part, in order to broaden their perspectives regarding their field of study and their position in society. Mobilities can be of two types: internal (held in the country of origin, but at a different university) and external (held abroad)<sup>3</sup>. In order to have an effective implementation of the strategy, coherence of policy priorities and investments at all levels (EU, national, regional and institutional), as well as closer collaboration with and between Member States, higher education institutions and other stakeholders are required. This strategy is supported by several initiatives, the most relevant for this article being “the further expansion of the European Universities Initiative”<sup>4</sup>.

This initiative aims to strengthen strategic partnerships between European universities and to increase the international competitiveness of European higher education. This initiative is mainly financed by the EU, through the Erasmus+ programme. Several universities from Romania (such as The University of Bucharest, Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University, “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, The University of Oradea and “Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iași<sup>5</sup>) are part of this initiative because they are members of different European Alliances.

The initiative aims to create 60 European alliances, which will have to include over 500 universities. The initiative is supported by the Erasmus+ programme, which has a budget of 1.1 billion euros between 2021-2027<sup>6</sup>. The aim is to develop and share a common long-term structural, sustainable and systemic cooperation in the field of education, research and innovation, creating European inter-university campuses where students, staff and researchers from all parts of Europe benefit from mobilities and research together, in different countries and disciplines.

Therefore, a deeper and more sustainable transnational cooperation between higher education institutions is sought, in order to ensure a more efficient implementation of joint educational programs and activities. EU Member States are called upon to establish more

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<sup>1</sup> Responsabilitatea Socială a Universităților - Un Cadru Comun de Referință European. *Raport Final al Proiectului EU-USR*,

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312098629\\_Responsabilitatea\\_Sociala\\_a\\_Universitatilor\\_-\\_Un\\_Cadru\\_Comun\\_de\\_Referinta\\_European\\_Raport\\_Final\\_al\\_Proiectului\\_EU-USR\\_52709-LLP-2012-1-RO-ERASMUS-ESIN](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312098629_Responsabilitatea_Sociala_a_Universitatilor_-_Un_Cadru_Comun_de_Referinta_European_Raport_Final_al_Proiectului_EU-USR_52709-LLP-2012-1-RO-ERASMUS-ESIN), 2015 (27.04.2026)

<sup>2</sup> Mircea Cosma, *Spațiul european al învățământului superior*, “Anuarul Academiei Forțelor Terestre”, No. 2, 2002-2003, p. 1

<sup>3</sup> ANOSR, *Implementarea Procesului Bologna în România: perspectiva studenților*, 2012, p. 45, <https://share.google/ixIKIjXRSV9IMrFuM> (20.12.2025)

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, *Higher Education Initiatives*, <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/about-higher-education> (20.12.2025)

<sup>5</sup> Comisia Europeană, *7 universități din România selectate în cadrul inițiativei privind Universitățile Europene*, [https://romania.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/7-universitati-din-romania-selectate-cadrul-initiativei-privind-universitatile-europene-2022-07-27\\_ro](https://romania.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/7-universitati-din-romania-selectate-cadrul-initiativei-privind-universitatile-europene-2022-07-27_ro) (05.02.2026)

<sup>6</sup> *Idem*

coherent and compatible policies to enable such transnational cooperation, but also to make investments at EU, national, regional and institutional levels in terms of the European Higher Education Area, developed through the Bologna Process, which Romania has joined in 1999.

Undoubtedly, mobility constitutes one of the most prominent lines of action within the Bologna Process. The creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the internationalisation of higher education are objectives that can be achieved through the existence of mobility, thanks to the exchange of visions and good practices and the development of educational reforms, which mobility promotes. It is ideal that the EHEA should contribute, through the collaboration of the ministers responsible for higher education in the Member States, to the consolidation of a European society based on knowledge and innovation, a society in which students and teaching staff have the freedom to choose and participate in the educational process of any other university, without barriers, at least once<sup>1</sup>.

“The Education and Training 2020” strategy reflected the importance given to mobility at European level: 20% of students in each country must benefit of a mobility. The target had had to be reached by 2020, whilst Romania, along with the EHEA member countries, agreed to try and reach this percentage. Unfortunately, most states recorded values below 20%. In Romania, the situation of student mobility in the academic year 2010-2011 showed that only 0.43% of students out of almost one million benefited from mobility outside the country<sup>2</sup>. In 2022, a significant increase in the percentage can be observed: 9% out of approximately 450,000 students participated in mobilities<sup>3</sup>.

The directions that the European Commission will continue to support, with the aim of increasing the adaptation of EU higher education to changes in society, are also relevant<sup>4</sup>:

- improving quality assurance;
- including diversity and inclusion in a European framework;
- developing new STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics) and information and communication technology (ICT) curricula;
- promoting research and innovation through the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT);
- tracking the career paths of graduates, so that higher education outcomes can be compared.

It is recommended that Romania follows the initiatives proposed by the Union, in order to increase the effectiveness of its higher education system, while also collaborating better with other universities from Europe. Romanian universities continue to promote mobility, through the Erasmus+ program, but also through the Alliances of which they are part, so that more and more students can benefit from this experience.

### **Romanian Educational System within the European Standards**

In an increasingly interconnected and diversified world, the education system cannot be left behind. Nowadays, we can say that Romanian education is in the midst of a process of reform and transformation, a process due to the developments that have taken place and are taking place in Romanian society and which are also imposed by the need to align with

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<sup>1</sup> ANOSR, *Implementarea Procesului Bologna în România: perspectiva studenților*, 2012, p. 45, <https://share.google/ixIKIjXRSV9IMrFuM> (20.12.2025)

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Creștere a numărului de studenți cu burse Erasmus în Europa. România trimite mai mulți studenți în străinătate decât primește*, <https://romania.fes.de/ro/e/crestere-a-numarului-de-studenti-cu-burse-erasmus-in-europa-romania-trimite-mai-multi-studenti-in-strainatate-decat-primeste.html> (13.04.2026)

<sup>4</sup> <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/about-higher-education> (20.12.2025)

European Union standards. Through the educational system, the personality of the most important resource, the human being, is shaped. For this reason, the education system must be built in such a way as to provide knowledge and skills comparable to other educational units of the European Union or the world.

Romania's process of European integration has exerted a direct influence on national educational policies and the higher education system. Educational reform is the expression of the openness which the education system must demonstrate, in order to offer people and communities the opportunity to define themselves as human beings. Romania's accession to the European Union opened the way to the modernization of the education system. The communist model (demagogic, rigid and focused on an industrial society) had to be removed and replaced with what was suitable at the European level (a flexible, dynamic model that can adapt to continuous changes in society). Therefore, the Romanian school system is in a continuous effort to change and adapt to European requirements, the modernization and renewal of the Romanian education system being necessary in order to ensure the quality of the teaching-learning process. Among specialists, there seems to be a consensus of opinions on the idea that the reform of any education system is, if not exclusively, at least mainly, a curricular reform<sup>1</sup>.

The European Union collaborates with higher education institutions and EU member states to support and enable the university sector to adapt to the changing conditions in the world, to thrive and to contribute to Europe's resilience. The cooperation between these entities aims to truly develop the European dimension of higher education based on shared values, with educational excellence and social inclusion as distinctive features. At the same time, it is important to mention that the EU has developed a European strategy for universities, which focuses on achieving four main objectives<sup>2</sup>: providing constant support for universities; strengthening the European dimension in higher education and research; empowering universities as actors of change in the green and digital transitions and strengthening universities as the driver of Europe's role and position as global leader. Beginning in 2005, Romania restructured its higher education system in accordance with the three-cycle model, encompassing undergraduate (Bachelor's/Licence), graduate (Master's), and doctoral (PhD) studies, as established under Law no. 288/2004<sup>3</sup>. In parallel, the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), together with the compulsory issuance of the Diploma Supplement, became standard practice across all universities.

A significant milestone in the modernization of Romanian higher education, particularly in its efforts to integrate more effectively into the European Higher Education Area, was the enactment of Law no. 87/2006<sup>4</sup> concerning quality assurance in education. This legislative framework adopts a comprehensive, system-wide approach, applying to all providers of educational services in Romania. The law establishes a structured framework for quality assurance by outlining key components such as<sup>5</sup>: the methodological foundations for

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandru Crișan, *Curriculum reform in Romania*. Institute for Educational Sciences, București, 1992, p. 2

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, *Higher education initiatives*, <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/about-higher-education> (20.12.2025)

<sup>3</sup> Law No. 288/2004 on the organization of university studies, "Official Gazette, Part I", No. 614 of 7 July 2004

<sup>4</sup> Law No. 87/2006, approving Government Emergency Ordinance No. 75/2005 on quality assurance in education, "Official Gazette, Part I", No. 334 of 13 April 2006

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Curaj, Ligia Deca, Eva Egron Polak, Jamil Salmi (Eds.), *Higher Education Reforms in Romania. Between the Bologna Process and National Challenges*, Springer, 2015, pp. 7-8, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-08054-3

accreditation and quality evaluation in higher education; the procedures and criteria governing external evaluation at both institutional and programme levels; mechanisms for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions; and the institutional structures responsible for overseeing and implementing quality assurance processes.

Romania's accession as a full member of the Bologna Process in 1999 marked an important step toward the standardization of European higher education<sup>1</sup> and the diversification of educational opportunities beyond secondary schooling.

### **Erasmus + and FORTHEM Alliance**

To gain a better understanding of the differences between the Erasmus program and the FORTHEM Alliance, a description before discussing the questionnaire and the SWOT analysis would be welcomed. In this regard, Erasmus+ is the European Union program for education, training, youth and sport. The program is named after the Dutch philosopher Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, one of the European intellectuals of the Renaissance. At the same time, "ERASMUS" is an acronym for "European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students". The program is a key instrument that supports the achievement of the objectives set at European level through the European Education Area, the Digital Education Action Plan, 2021-2027, the EU Youth Strategy, the Skills Agenda for Europe and the European Union Work Plan for Sport<sup>2</sup>. Erasmus+ aims to provide mobility and cooperation opportunities between all actors actively involved in the aforementioned fields, either as individuals or as institutions/organizations.

The 4 priorities of Erasmus+ are: inclusion and diversity, climate change, digital transition and democratic participation.

European Universities are transnational alliances of 8-9 partner countries, located in EU Member States, Erasmus+ countries (including the Western Balkans, starting in 2023) and Bologna Process countries (Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have been allowed to take part in the project as associated partners, starting in 2022)<sup>3</sup>. The alliances are based on innovative teaching and research methods, multilingualism and an interdisciplinary approach to create a common long-term strategy of European universities, preparing future generations.

The FORTHEM Alliance (Fostering Outreach within European Regions, Transnational Higher Education, and Mobility) project was initiated in 2019 as part of the European Universities Initiative. In 2019, the European Commission launched this initiative within the framework of the ERASMUS+ programme, with the aim of supporting the expansion and intensification of cooperation between European universities, both by increasing the number of academic mobilities and by promoting better institutional synergy at all levels (including study and research programmes to administrative strategies and regional engagement).

This alliance is an academic consortium that aims at cooperation between different European regions, transnational higher education and the promotion of European mobilities. The alliance includes 232,000 students, 254 research institutes, 19,000 academics, 17,000

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<sup>1</sup> Radu Mircea Damian, *The Bologna Process as a Reform Initiative in Higher Education in the Balkan Countries: The Case of Romania*, "European Education", Vol. 43, 2011, pp. 56–69, <https://doi.org/10.2753/EUE1056-4934430304>

<sup>2</sup> ANPCDEFP, *Erasmus+. Experiențe de nouitate și noi orizonturi*, <https://www.erasmusplus.ro/erasmus-1> (15.01.2026)

<sup>3</sup> Campus France, *European Universities Alliances*, <https://www.campusfrance.org/en/european-universities-alliances> (15.02.2026)

administrative staff and 200 doctoral programmes. In addition to transnational cooperation, the alliance has set itself, since its inception, strategic objectives of regional development and the promotion of intercultural exchanges. In order to create true regional innovation networks, FORTHEM collaborates not only with higher education institutions, but also with local administration, business entities and societal actors.

The FORTHEM University Alliance aims to unite a new generation of creative minds, able to cooperate across cultures, borders and disciplines, in order to jointly address societal challenges and the skills shortages facing Europe. FORTHEM is a network of multidisciplinary public universities from the following countries:

- Finland (Jyväskylän Yliopisto);
- France (Université Bourgogne Europe);
- Germany (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz);
- Italy (Università degli Studi di Palermo);
- Latvia (Latvijas Universitāte);
- Norway (Universitetet i Agder);
- Poland (Uniwersytet Opolski);
- Romania (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu);
- Spain (Universitat de València).

Therefore, thanks to the Erasmus+ programme, the European Commission, together with national authorities, higher education institutions, students and other stakeholders, have set in motion a more intensive and structured cooperation among European higher education institutions. University Alliances also represent the future higher education, promoting closer cooperation between the member universities.

### **Study Case. Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu**

The purpose of universities is to provide young people with an education that can help maintain balance in their personal lives, as well as the ability to adapt to the dynamics of a constantly changing society. Such training can and must be supported by student mobility in different European universities<sup>1</sup>. Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (LBUS) understands the importance of cooperation through mobility. LBUS offers students mobility within the Erasmus+ program, as well as short-term individual or collective mobility through the FORTHEM University Alliance. The Report which follows internalisation in ULBS from 2024<sup>2</sup> demonstrates that mobility remains a priority for LBUS. In the year 2024, 171 students have participated in mobilities abroad.

In the context of an increasingly dynamic international university environment, the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu remains at the forefront of events by adhering to the European values of education and research. In this regard, an essential role is played by the over 100 partnerships concluded with universities in Europe<sup>3</sup>, the streamlining of the application of the Bologna system and the European credit transfer system, and the development of the student mobility programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Mircea Cosma, *Spațiul european al învățământului superior*, “Anuarul Academiei Forțelor Terestre”, No.2, 2002-2003, p. 1

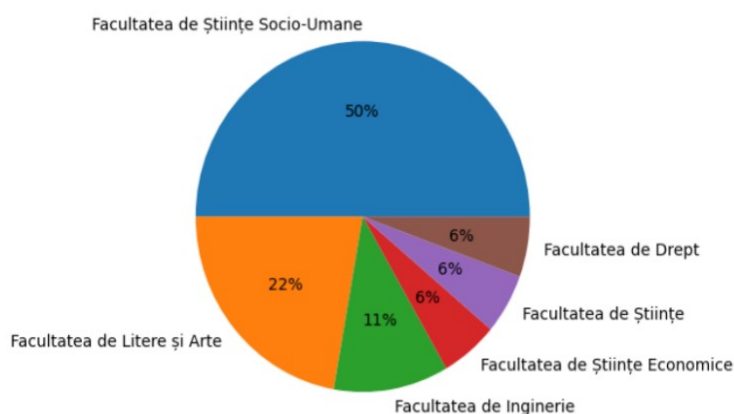
<sup>2</sup> Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, *Raport privind Activitatea de Cercetare, Inovare și Internaționalizare desfășurată la Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu*, 2024, p. 29-24 [https://senat.ulbsibiu.ro/wp-content/uploads/300125/4\\_Raport%20prorector%20cercetare%20privind%20actv%20desf%20in%20anul%202024\\_Senat\\_ian2025.pdf](https://senat.ulbsibiu.ro/wp-content/uploads/300125/4_Raport%20prorector%20cercetare%20privind%20actv%20desf%20in%20anul%202024_Senat_ian2025.pdf) (13.04.2026)

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*

The official website of ULBS<sup>1</sup> mentions the responsibility that the institution has taken on to align itself with the Bologna Process. I decided to apply a questionnaire to several students from Sibiu to observe how they perceive the connection between the Bologna Process and the Erasmus+ programme. I have also conducted a SWOT analysis, because I wanted to analyse which program would withstand the constant changes worldwide while promoting the internalisation of higher education.

The questionnaire has helped us get in contact with the students of LBUS. Since mobilities play an important part in the Bologna Process, the questionnaire was meant to show us if the students who studied abroad through Erasmus know anything about the Bologna Process. The questionnaire was applied to a sample of 20 people, aged between 20-26. There are three answers that are invalid. Three students who did not participate in any Erasmus mobilities answered the questionnaire, even though it was mentioned that only people who participated in Erasmus mobilities should take part in the survey. The exclusion of their answers did not influence the distribution of results.

At the moment, 17 out of 20 are studying at the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, while 3 are graduates of this university (Figure 1). The students are enrolled in 6 different faculties (Law, Economics, Engineering, Letters and Arts, Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities).

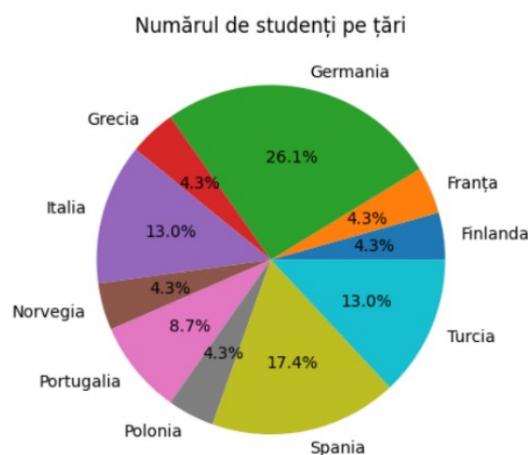


**Figure 1.** Faculties within the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu<sup>2</sup>

The countries in which the respondents studied are the following (Figure 2): Finland (1 student), France (1 student), Germany (6 students), Greece (1 student), Italy (3 students), Norway (1 student), Portugal (2 students), Poland (1 student), Spain (4), Turkey (3). Some of these respondents participated in Erasmus+ mobility twice, but in different countries. 12 people spent a semester in one of the countries listed above, and the rest spent a year each. As can be seen, Germany remains the most desired destination when it comes to studying abroad.

<sup>1</sup> Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, *Realizări*, <https://www.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/despre/despre-ulbs/realizari/> (13.04.2026)

<sup>2</sup> Authors' research



**Figure 2.** Number of students/countries<sup>1</sup>

The questionnaire consists of two sections: the first section has questions related to the students' experience abroad, correlated to the Bologna Process, and the second contains socio-demographic questions. The questions they had to answer were the following:

- Do you know what the Bologna System entails?
- If you know what the Bologna System entails, can you list/describe its main advantages?
- Would you Did you benefit from information regarding the Bologna System during your Erasmus+ mobility period?
- Do you think that the Bologna System is applied in the country where you studied within the Erasmus+ program?
- Do you think that the Bologna System is applied in Romania?

In terms of their answers, the majority voted that they knew what the Bologna System entails. Since they stated that they knew what this system entails, they also brought their personal touch to the second question, with the majority listing the transferable credits (ECTS) as its main advantage. Other advantages listed included: access to study mobilities such as ERASMUS+, and international recognition of studies. Only one person stated that the Bologna System has “many negative points”, but did not elaborate on this statement.

Most respondents claim that they benefited from information about the Bologna System during their mobility period. They also claim that the Bologna System is applied in the country where they studied, and most believe that the Bologna System is also applied in Romania.

Studies attest that the most favourable results of the impact of the program are recorded in students coming from countries in Southeastern Europe and from partner countries<sup>2</sup>, as well as from countries where the gross domestic product is low, regardless of the economic situation in the host country. Relating these studies to the questionnaire I applied, it can be seen that Romanian students felt a positive impact of the experience offered

<sup>1</sup> *Idem*

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, *Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study. Final Report, European Union, Luxembourg*, 2019, p. 103, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/94d97f5c-7ae2-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1>

by the Erasmus+ program, believing that the Bologna System helps to strengthen relations between European universities (Figure 3-7).

1. Știți ce presupune Sistemul Bologna?

23 de răspunsuri

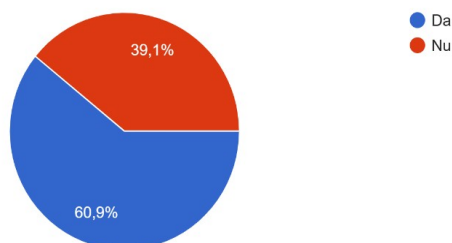


Figure 3. Q1 – Do you know what Bologna System entails?<sup>1</sup>

Distribuția avantajelor Sistemului Bologna

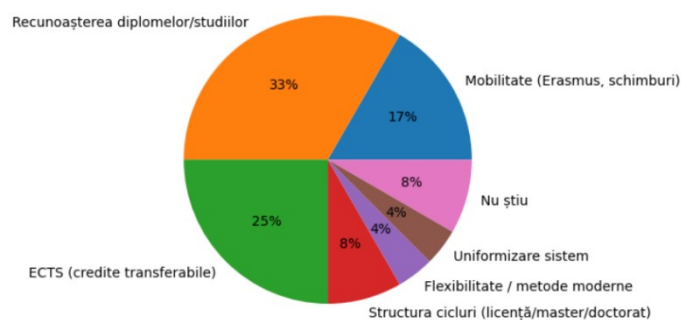


Figure 4. The allocation of benefits within the Bologna Process<sup>2</sup>

3. Ați beneficiat în perioada dumneavoastră de mobilitate Erasmus+ de informații privind Sistemul Bologna?

23 de răspunsuri

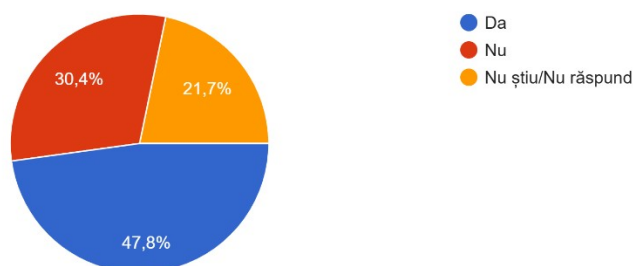
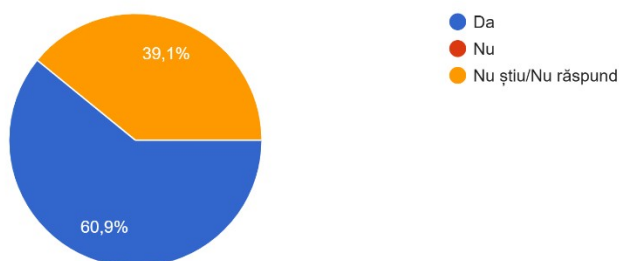


Figure 5. Q2 -During your Erasmus+ mobility, did you receive information about the Bologna Process?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Author’s processing based on questionnaire data

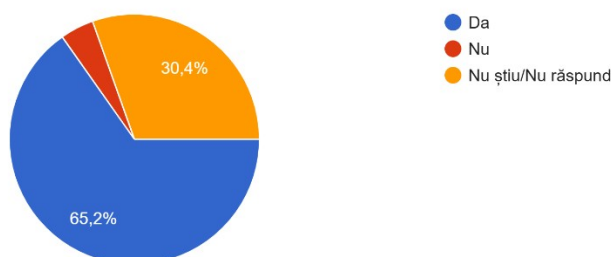
<sup>2</sup> *Idem*

4. Credeți că Sistemul Bologna este aplicat în țara în care ați studiat în cadrul programului Erasmus+?  
Erasmus+?  
23 de răspunsuri



**Figure 6.** Q3 - Do you consider that the Bologna Process is effectively applied in the country where you studied within the Erasmus programme? <sup>1</sup>

5. Credeți că Sistemul Bologna este aplicat în România?  
23 de răspunsuri



**Figure 7.** Q4 - Do you consider that Romania applies the Bologna Process in practice? <sup>2</sup>

The SWOT analysis we have conducted follows Erasmus+ and FORTHEM individually, then follows a general conclusion.

### Erasmus+ Programme

#### A. Strengths:

1. The program's notoriety and prestige.

Having its origins in the 1980s, the Erasmus program is accessed by millions of Europeans every year, from high school students to university students and academics.

2. The longer periods of abroad studying.

In addition to short-term mobilities, Erasmus+ offers study grants for longer periods, such as a semester (6 months) or even a year (12 months).

3. The diversified network of partner universities.

<sup>3</sup> Author's processing based on questionnaire data

<sup>1</sup> *Idem*

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*

Erasmus+ provides mobilities within Europe, but also mobilities outside the European continent, depending on the agreements concluded between the respective university and countries such as Japan, South Korea, Canada, etc.

#### **B. Weaknesses:**

1. Excessive bureaucracy.

The selection process, as well as the preparation of travel documents (once the person has been accepted), can be difficult and lengthy.

2. Limited offer of courses.

For some fields of study, the list of partner universities can be quite limited, which also restricts the diversity of the courses the students can choose.

#### **C. Opportunities**

1. Academic and professional development.

Erasmus+ also provides internship programs, which help students gain practical experience in the field which they are studying.

2. Networking.

Erasmus+ mobility and internship beneficiaries come into contact with other students, teachers, employers and other opportunities which help them develop personally and professionally

#### **D. Threats**

1. Grants are not enough.

Due to the increased costs in certain countries, especially in Western Europe, the grants offered by the EU are not enough, and students have to support themselves financially. For this reason, some students give up the idea of benefiting of Erasmus+ mobilities.

2. Differences between education systems.

Although students receive a list of institutions that have specializations compatible with their field of study, they may have problems with the exams at their home university, once they return to their country of origin.

3. Inequity instead of accessibility.

Due to the enormous costs involved in carrying out the program's actions, the Erasmus experience cannot represent a generalized phenomenon within student experiences, being more a mark of elitism sponsored by the European Commission and less of egalitarianism. The possibility of participating in an Erasmus experience is directly dependent on the country of origin, the financial contributions of national governments, subsidies and even the financial support offered by the family to the student willing to participate in such an experience.

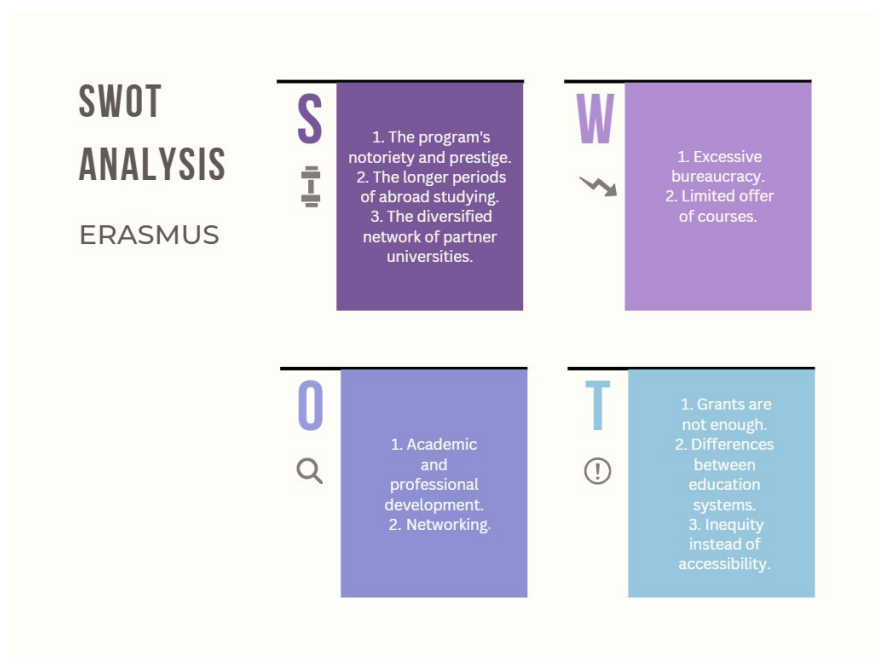


Figure 8. Erasmus Swot Analysis<sup>1</sup>

## FORTHEM Alliance

### A. Strengths

1. Small network of universities.

The fact that the Alliance has only 9 member universities contributes to closer collaboration between them and facilitates the rapid exchange of information.

2. Integration of Alliance programs can be faster.

Member Universities can come up with different hybrid/on campus courses and activities easier.

### B. Weaknesses

1. Only 2 mobilities per study cycle.

The student is entitled to only two mobilities per study cycle, unlike Erasmus, where the student can combine long and short mobilities, for a maximum of 12 months.

2. Possible poor organization.

Some events which should be held by all universities, such as Democracy Week, are held only in a few of the member universities.

### C. Opportunities

1. Development of personal projects.

People interested in research have the opportunity to spend up to 5 days at one of the partner universities and research with mentors from abroad.

2. Closer interactions, not just academic ones.

FORTHEM mobilities are dedicated to smaller groups of students and focus on activities such as labs, interdisciplinary projects and workshops.

### D. Threats

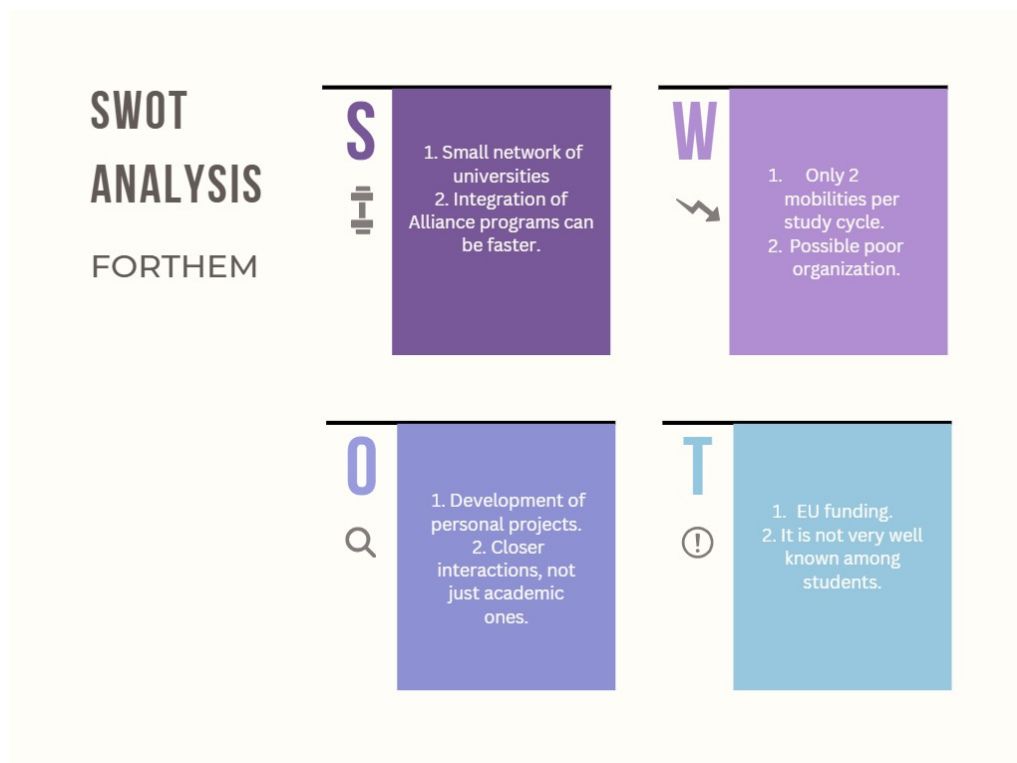
1. EU funding.

The alliances are relatively new and dependent on EU funding.

<sup>1</sup> Author's processing based on questionnaire data

2. It is not very well known among students.

Because it is not promoted enough among students, the opportunities offered by FORTHEM are not accessed to the maximum.



**Figure 9.** FORTHEM Swot Analysis

## Conclusions

This analysis concludes that Erasmus+ functions as a widely accessible programme, whereas FORTHEM operates as an innovative and experimental model within European higher education. The mobilities offered by Erasmus+ remain an important landmark of the student experience, but we should not ignore the emerging opportunities regarding exchange of information and academics. Although it offers a limited number of destinations, the FORTHEM Alliance focuses on quality, not quantity, offering a wide range of events for students, university teachers and researchers. The FORTHEM Alliance (if we were to extrapolate, FORTHEM alongside other university alliances) represents the future in terms of the internationalization of the higher education system.

The real involvement of universities in diversifying students' learning experiences and supporting them in accessing various external mobility programs from a financial point of view and beyond remains an important objective to be achieved by universities. Emphasis should also be placed on internal mobilities, in order to facilitate their access by those who wish to do so.

Thus, we would state that Erasmus+ needs a reorganization to adapt to the new realities of the world we live in, and the FORTHEM Alliance needs to be promoted more among students. In order for these objectives to be achieved, I believe that it is important to have cooperation between partner entities; to draw up strategic plans related to the needs of people accessing such opportunities and to start pilot programs. The lack of resources, the lack of evaluation systems, excessive formalism and bureaucracy, as well as the deficient

institutional support for students hinder the fulfilment and efficiency of these mobility programs.

In conclusion, Erasmus+ has played a crucial role in the systematic transformation and restructuring of higher education systems across Europe. The states that have benefitted the most from this programme remain the former communist bloc states. As it can be seen from the strategy of LBUS, Erasmus+ represents a main goal when it comes to internationalisation. At the same time, Romanian students that are enrolled at LBUS take part in mobilities, while most of them are also aware of the way that the Bologna Process works. The exchange of students between universities enhances the process of internationalization, while helping these institutions align more with the Bologna Process. The Erasmus program is a fundamental instrument in the direction of the internationalization of higher education systems in Europe, but universities must focus on different alternatives for academic mobilities. Erasmus, alongside European Alliances, can help the member states of the Bologna Process cooperate more effectively in the future.

The Bologna Process, together with Erasmus+ mobilities and the broader internationalisation of higher education in the European Union, can be understood as a multidimensional framework that integrates educational, social, economic, and political security objectives. While primarily designed to harmonise higher education systems and ensure comparability of qualifications within the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna Process also functions as a strategic instrument for strengthening social cohesion, reducing educational inequalities, and fostering inclusive and resilient societies. In this sense, education becomes a key component of human and societal security, contributing to the prevention of radicalisation and the consolidation of a shared European identity.

Erasmus+ and other mobility schemes further reinforce this dimension by operating as mechanisms of academic diplomacy and soft power, promoting intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and cooperation between European states. These processes support European integration and contribute to regional stability and peacebuilding. At the same time, the digital transformation of higher education introduces new security challenges, including cybersecurity, data protection, and academic integrity, which are increasingly embedded within the Bologna framework. From an economic perspective, the harmonisation of competencies enhances labour market adaptability, employability, and competitiveness, thereby reinforcing economic security. Additionally, universities contribute to democratic resilience through the development of critical thinking and media literacy, supporting resistance to disinformation and extremism.

Overall, these interconnected processes position higher education as a central pillar of a secure, cohesive, and knowledge-based European society.

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