



THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE INTERNATIONAL VICE-RECTORATE 2020 – 2027

I. "AN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY" IN AN IMMOBILE WORLD: INTERNATIONALISATION IN THE POST-EPIDEMIC CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic and its implications are by far the greatest challenge currently facing humanity. The impact of the pandemic on our everyday lives triggered major changes in our lifestyles, our daily activities and interpersonal relations.

The effects of the pandemic naturally impacted higher education institutions and, consequently, international cooperation.

The first visible effect was replacing face-to-face activity with online interaction which, in the case of universities was quite a challenge testing their ability to rapidly adapt to this new reality.

All the measures required by the pandemic had a major effect on international cooperation, as it suddenly decreased and sometimes ceased completely.

Therefore, universities had to rethink the way in which they could maintain their international contacts and to redefine their international strategy and operational plans.

One of the first important components of internationalisation is tightly connected to the reforms recently implemented by several countries aiming at a greater transparency and compatibility of their educational systems, either by restructuring their academic structures or by converging the tools used for the recognition and validation of credits obtained in another HEI. In this regard, the most important role was played by the Bologna Declaration which established a set of compatible credit system (the European Credit Transfer System) (ECTS). The Bologna Process is a student-centred transparent system based on the student's workload, and assessing the knowledge and skills they've acquired. This context also led to the development of the Diploma Supplement as a recognition tool used for the implementation of the Recognition Convention of Lisbon in 2005.

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A second form of internationalisation is represented by including international and intercultural dimensions into the curriculum, in the teaching activities, in research and in the extracurricular activities of HEIs in order to help students develop their international skills without having to leave their own country. This form of internationalisation, which emphasizes the contents of study programmes and the way in which information is conveyed to the student, is called „internationalisation at home”, which is essential if we think that the great majority of students does not participate directly in an international mobility. A key-component of internationalisation at home is adapting and making compatible the curricula of HEIs with the same profile regardless the country of the institution.

The third form of internationalisation of the students’ transnational mobility. International mobility is a part of the university’s key policies, whether it refers to sending students and staff abroad, or attracting students, researchers or staff from other universities from abroad. In this regard, a significant part of the international mobility is represented by the Erasmus+ programme, founded in 1987 by the European Commission, its main objective being that to encourage and promote academic mobility of students and staff.

Redefining international cooperation

The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing measures negatively impacted international mobility programmes and the enrolment of international students. Universities had to adapt their instruments and mechanisms of international cooperation to the new reality.

The main objective of our university was to maintain the connection with our international partners and to redefine international cooperation. Thus, we introduced online meetings, online mobility and webinars. These measures automatically led, on an institutional level, to a rapid development of new communication technologies (Zoom, Teams) and to the massive increase of the role of the IT department in the university, and on a personal level, to an increased development in the digital skills of both students and staff.

As a result, on an international level, the university initiated a massive process of digitalisation which included:

- replacing paper-based documents with digital ones,
- reducing the administrative burden for staff and students,
- creating a public infrastructure accessible to all the staff in every department (implementing a digital infrastructure which would facilitate the administrative tasks and the online cooperation of the various departments in the university),

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- implementing tools of digital mobility and combined mobility (blended mobility).

The situation created by COVID-19 is also an opportunity to adapt to the new reality faster by introducing the use of electronic documents and simplifying administrative procedures. And, last but not least, these new means and methods will definitely shorten and simplify the period required by student exchanges.

II. Strategic objectives

Objective #1: increasing our international profile and reputation

The activity of the International Vice-Rectorate will mainly focus on:

- developing existing partnerships, making sure they bring mutual benefits
- developing geographic and thematic networks with our partners
- signing new institutional partnerships with universities, NGOs, and international bodies whose strategic and/or academic priorities coincide with ours
- analysing the benefits of certain cooperation programmes (*joint programmes*) mainly in the field of research and doctoral studies
- promoting and disseminating our international activity using all available means of communication
- facilitating and supporting both national and international events and conferences which would reflect our international activity and attracting *visiting* lecturers, contributing, thus, to increasing the university's reputation and profile.

Objective #2: developing a mobile university, with a global conscience

We will focus on developing Erasmus+ study and placement mobility activities by increasing and diversifying the number of students at all study levels. This objective entails:

- stimulating short-term mobility activities that would allow students to participate in traineeship mobility and acquire new practical skills
- developing digital activities with our international partners, mainly in attracting new partners
- increasing doctoral student mobility and implementing joint doctorates with international partners

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- attracting an increasing number of international students and increasing the quality of these students by applying a careful selection based on their academic performance
 - internationalisation of the curriculum by the internationalisation of the academic staff; stimulating the participation of our staff in international seminars and attracting international staff
 - promoting the mobility of administrative staff by enrolling them in staff training activities and workshops abroad, thus enhancing their intercultural skills
 - improving international activity communication and coordination in the university by the effective dissemination of all existing opportunities.

Objective #3: developing research in the context of globalisation

In cooperation with the Vice-Rectorate for Scientific Research, we will mainly focus on international cooperation that focuses on top research fields. This approach will include:

- bilateral partnerships between individual research centres as well as promoting multilateral research networks in some of the areas of excellence
- discovering new opportunities for the exchange of information and knowledge using our international networks
- developing research that has a strong social impact and practical applicability in everyday life.

Objective #4: strengthening involvement at European level

Supporting and developing partnerships with EU member countries is one of the key objectives of internationalisation in our university. This objective can be achieved by using the following methods:

- identifying new partnerships and strengthening existing partnerships with universities, organisations and key networks in Europe
- encouraging Erasmus+ study and placement mobility by increasing flexibility in the recognition and validation of mobility results
- participating in international educational fairs
- increasing the number of publications in top international journals, in cooperation with teaching staff from universities abroad
- membership in European academic associations

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III. Towards a joint agenda in the field of education and culture

Our strategy of internationalisation will continue to focus on adapting to the latest political and sociocultural requirements, striving to have the best students who have international and intercultural skills.

“Victor Babeș” University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Timișoara (UMFVBT) included internationalisation not only in its own strategy, but also in its organisational structure. The International Vice-Rectorate lies under the direct coordination of the Rector of the university, prof. univ. dr. Octavian Crețu, and is managed by the Vice-Rector for Internationalisation, prof. univ. dr. Claudia Borza.

The university will continue its international strategy developed according to the latest societal tendencies which also impact higher education institutions, considering the following factors:

- the demographic trend clearly shows an ageing of the population resulting in the necessity of hiring and integrating a migrant work force from different countries with wholly different cultural identities;
- the latest models of communication, the social media, the “fake news” phenomenon and the increased need to raise the level of information of the population;
- the exacerbation of populism and xenophobia, the risk of violent radicalisation and the necessity of strengthening the feeling of social union and cohesion;
- the increased competitiveness in the academic environment as a response to the world ranking of universities
 - cross-border education becomes an alternative for student mobility;
 - the migration of skilled work force in the context of globalisation,

The new strategic plan aims at identifying the existing opportunities and establish the responsibilities of internationalisation at all institutional levels, both horizontally and vertically.

IV. The mission of the International Vice-Rectorate

The mission of the International Vice-Rectorate automatically derives from the mission of the university, with emphasis on internationalisation, on enhancing internationalisation by encouraging student and staff mobility, strictly observing the requirements of the European Commission regarding institutional strategy:

- our priority mission is to train physicians, dentists and pharmacists capable to provide highly qualified services;

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- maintaining high academic standards by providing a curriculum in keeping with the latest developments in the field of healthcare;
 - training graduates that will be able to function efficiently both in their individual practice and in healthcare institutions which require team work;
 - expanding international cooperation with researchers and academic staff from top universities;
 - encouraging student and staff mobility which enhances the participants' international experience;
 - developing cooperation with foreign partners in the frame of a well-defined international strategy;
 - promoting and supporting student and staff mobility, focusing mainly on participant with fewer opportunities and promoting non-discrimination and inclusion in all the aspects of our activity;
 - recognising the importance of the participation of our staff in individual mobility activities or in strategic partnerships, and increasing the visibility of such activities;
 - analysing the results of internal monitoring of mobility activities and of European and international cooperation and improving our international performance;
 - observing and promoting the principles of non-discrimination, equity, transparency and inclusion as defined in our institutional Charter;
 - ensuring equal and equitable access to international mobility activities to all participants with special emphasis on including participants with fewer opportunities.

The International Vice-Rectorate is responsible for offering exhaustive information and logistical support regarding the admission process to all international applicants. In keeping with the principle of equal opportunity and non-discrimination, all the information regarding admission is public and posted on our website, giving all applicants equal chances and opportunities.

The International Vice-Rectorate also deals with the Romanian Ministry of Education and with the Romanian embassies or consular services in order to be able to offer support to our international students whenever needed.

Through its role, activities, objectives and its mission, the International Vice-Rectorate aims at offering permanent support both to international undergraduate students and to its graduates enrolled in specialisation, Master and Ph. D. Programmes.

V. CURRENT TENDENCIES

In this sense, we should consider the latest **development tendencies** currently facing Europe:

- permanent digitalisation, automation, use of artificial intelligence and the necessity of keeping up with technological advances;

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- altering one's lifestyle and the impact on the working conditions as well as the need for new skills and abilities;
- modernising the European state and the need to reduce inequality in all the aspects of everyday life.

The outcomes of our international strategy:

1. As far as mobility activities are concerned: increasing the competition for the best students worldwide (the accent shifts from quantity to quality);
2. As far as the curriculum is concerned: a greater accent on developing the students' international and intercultural skills (regardless whether they are our own nationals or international students), and on creating a working and living environment that would meet international and intercultural requirements.

The aspects above involve the following:

- a tighter connection between the curriculum, the teaching-learning process and profession;
- a greater focus on the skills of the teaching staff (language proficiency, up-to-date literature, modern interactive teaching methods, etc);
- perceiving activities not as a means in itself but as tools meant to enhance international and intercultural skills both of students and of the teaching staff;
- proper assessment of the results and of the impact of the activities carried out.

VI. STRATEGIC POINTS FOR DEVELOPING INTERNATIONALISATION

1. Internationalisation should occupy a **central position** within the university mission
2. The development of **international partnerships** as dynamic research and teaching platforms with joint benefits
3. **Globalising the academic process** by making increasing curricular compatibility for all subjects in all departments
4. Stimulating an international environment, mandatory for **research** and creating **centres of excellence**
5. Participating in joint international activities with other universities or organisations **in the country**
6. Increasing the possibilities of **studying abroad** to acquire knowledge which will subsequently result in developing international interaction and cooperation

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7. Continually increasing the number of **international students** in all the study cycles of the university
8. Exploring the potential of a **state-of-the-art information technology** in order to create innovative learning experiences (*e-learning* packages both for outbound and for inbound Erasmus+ students)
9. Introducing dynamic **professional development programmes** that can prepare the entire staff for potential participation in an effective international activity (language courses, specialised training)
10. Developing the necessary **resource basis** that would make the implementation and development of these activities possible.

The implementation of the strategic points

For an effective implementation of the strategic points mentioned above, the following aspects should be considered:

- Internationalisation transforms these structures as the curriculum develops.
- The teaching staff, the students and the study programmes keep diversifying constantly.
- Research increasingly relies on international cooperation.
- National and international partnerships increase and permanently diversify.
- The increasing number of international students and the introduction of programmes entirely taught in a foreign language require the internationalisation of the teaching and administrative staff.
- A greater diversification of courses and specialities for undergraduate and graduate international students.

VII. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION. THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

Academic mobility

Academic mobility represents one of the dominant features of internationalisation in any university. Considered the backbone of academic internationalisation, transnational mobility of students, staff and researchers brings benefits to a large number of the parties involved, including: countries/regions, higher education institutions, the actual participants in these activities. As far as territorial policies are concerned, academic mobility represents both an instrument of public diplomacy and a means of providing work force for deficient labour markets. For higher education institutions,

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the strength of internationalisation strategy greatly lies in the percentage of „mobile” students and staff. As an important indicator in university ranking, mobility greatly contributes to the position and worldwide renown of the university. And last but not least, an international mobility offers participants the possibility of acquiring global skills, increasing their employability and contributing to the development of their professional profile.

2020 meant moving everything in the virtual space which definitely brought new ideas and opened new perspectives regarding the academic dialogue and knowledge transfer. The online platform allows the participation of a large number of teachers and students to a certain event and eliminates the expenses deriving from physical travel. At the same time, moving in the virtual environment definitely answers the requirements of the European Union regarding the implementation of a „green” component in the academic activity.

The main objective of the Erasmus+ Office is to increase the number of mobility activities and to facilitate international cooperation.

There is undisputable evidence that the persons who participated in the Erasmus programme adapt much easier to the requirements of the labour market.

That is why one of the main objectives of the International Vice-Rectorate is to increase and develop the Erasmus+ programme.

This objective will be achieved using the following methods:

- Facilitating the involvement and international cooperation within the **academic and research staff**
- Stimulating our students to participate in a study or traineeship mobility
- Increasing the number of international students
- Developing and supporting existing partnerships with other HEIs, research centres or hospitals
- Guaranteeing full recognition of their mobility results to all outbound students. The Diploma Supplement will clearly reflect all the aspects connected to the student’s participation in the mobility.
- Promoting the internationalisation of the administrative staff by encouraging their participation in workshops, staff training activities, educational fairs, language courses, digital programmes (*internationalization at home*).
- Constantly monitoring and offering support to all the participants in a mobility.
- Cooperating with the validation committees and making sure that the results obtained during the mobility are fully recognised.

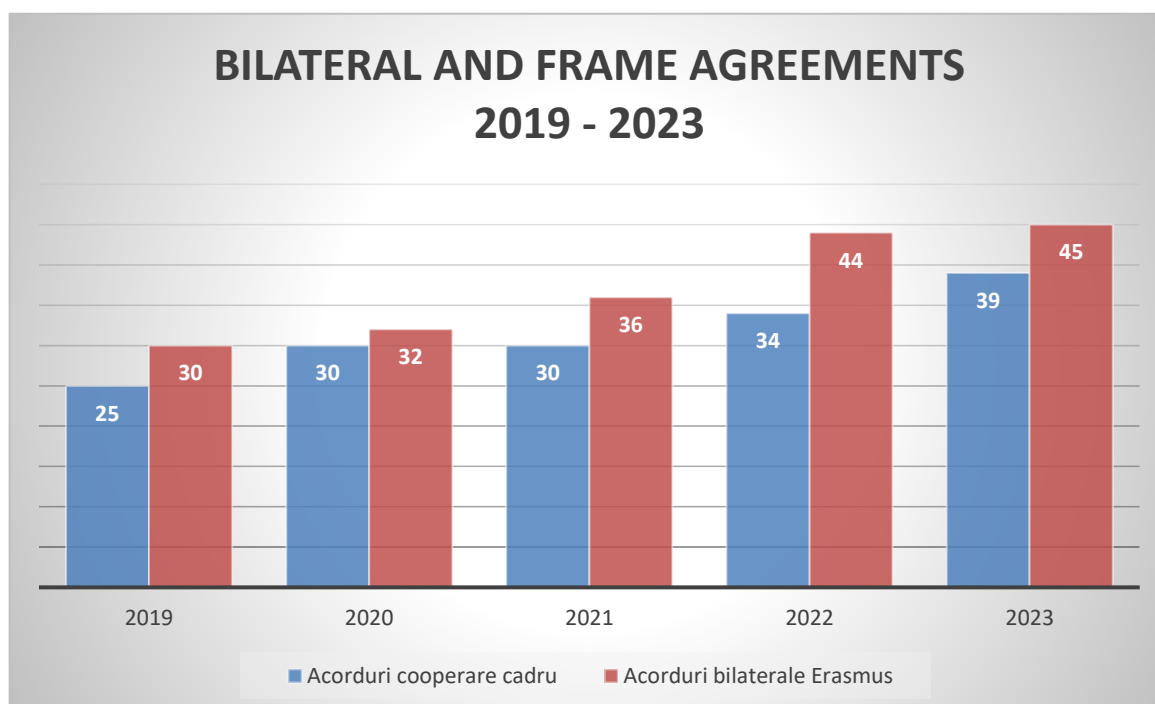
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- **Granting equal opportunities.** Applying the principles of equity and equality, transparency, non-discrimination to all the candidates who apply for a mobility, using objective criteria which are made public on the university website.

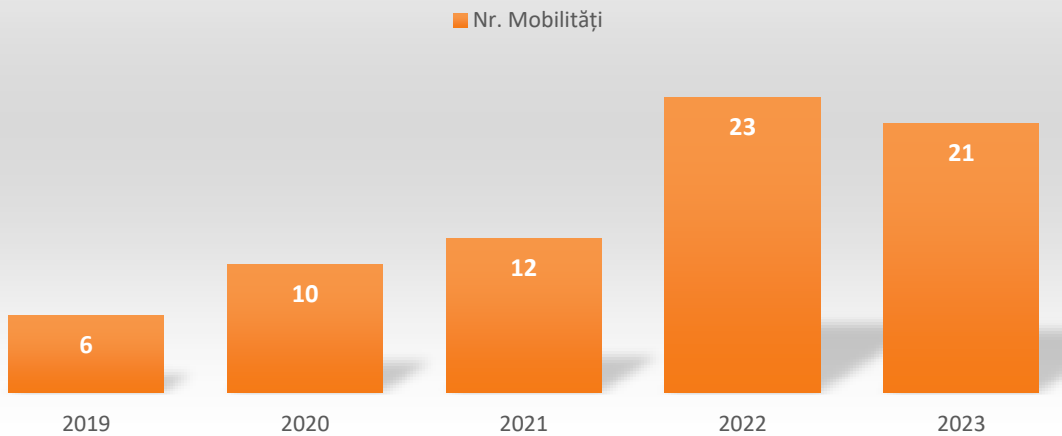


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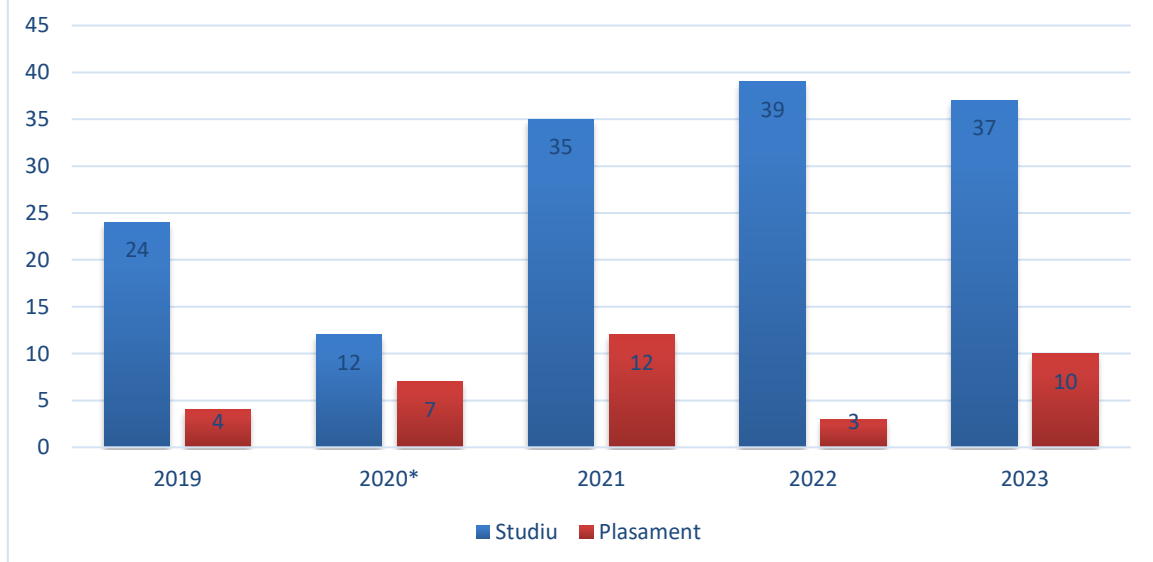
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TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF MOBILITY 2019 - 2023



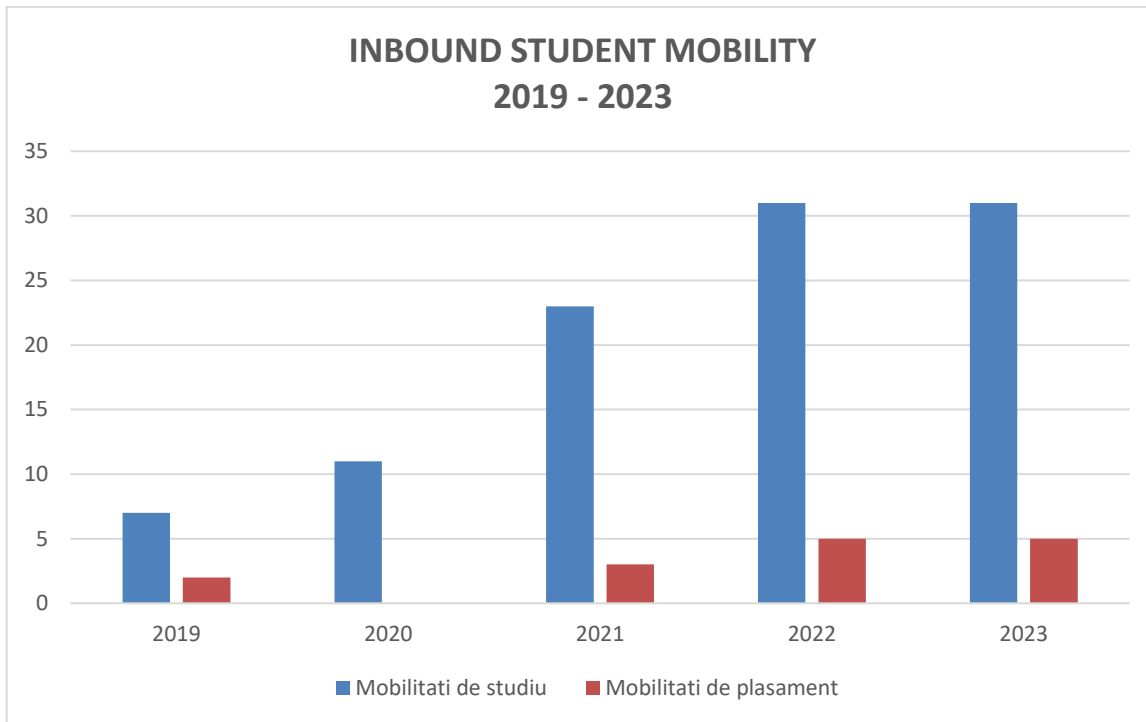
MOBILITY OF OUTBOUND STUDENTS 2019 - 2023



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VIII. KEY-PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Increasing the number of international students as well as the level of student satisfaction
- Increasing the performance level of both students and staff
- Increasing the number of graduates with higher chances to access the labour market both nationally and internationally
- Placing the university on a better position in the international ranking of universities
- Enhancing the external visibility of the university
- Increasing the number of Erasmus+ students
- Increasing the number of teaching and administrative staff who participate in an Erasmus+ mobility.

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IX. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Internationalisation in a new perspective

In the current context, *internationalisation at home*, which was already included in the former international strategy of the university, will require including international experience in one's home teaching environment. Integrating international and intercultural components in the curriculum and in the teaching-learning process will lead to eliminating potential inequalities generated by the impossibility to participate in a mobility, mainly due to financial reasons.

A long-term perspective of a post-pandemic internationalisation strategy has to include a more equitable perspective of internationalisation, which automatically places a greater importance on internationalisation at home.

An ideal perspective for 2024 would be a Europe where learning, study and research will no longer be bound by borders. Europe should become a continent in which studying, working or doing research in another Member State will become standard practice, and where all citizens will be able to master at least two languages besides their mother tongue. A continent whose citizens will proudly proclaim themselves as EUROPEAN citizens, heirs of Europe's cultural heritage and diversity.

This still ideal vision will become reality only through a concerted effort of all the parties involved which are determined to work towards a common agenda based on the idea of cooperation, trust, mutual recognition, exchange of good practices, mobility and development achieved using the following tools:

- the international recognition of the learning outcomes and skills in higher education;
- modernising and developing the curriculum;
- stimulating foreign language proficiency;
- creating European universities which could cooperate without being hindered by borders;
- improving education, professional training and lifelong learning;
- digitalising education;
- offering more support to the teaching staff;
- guarding the cultural heritage and acquiring and keeping a European identity and culture.

Prof. Univ. Dr. Claudia BORZA

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