

# Educational strategies for enhancing European Studies teaching in Moldova

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## Table of Contents

Executive summary .....	2
1. The role of European studies and digitalization for the future development of HEIs in Moldova: challenges and opportunities .....	3
2. Overview of European studies at Moldova HEIs.....	4
3. Enhancing European Studies and innovative teaching practices through educational projects: the case study of Best4ME .....	6
3.1. Teacher training at Moldova State University .....	7
3.2 Impact of the training and feedback .....	9
3.3. Implemented changes in the USM curriculum.....	17
3.4. Other activities aimed at enhancing European studies at USM .....	22
4. Conclusions and recommendations .....	23
Appendix .....	25



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## Executive summary

The aim of this report is to highlight the added value produced by the project “Enhancing Moldova's Europeanization through innovative teaching practices” (Best4ME) in terms of the consolidation of innovative teaching practices in the field of European Studies and digitalization of higher education, and their dissemination in the teaching and learning community Moldova State University and – more broadly – within higher educational institutions in Moldova.

BEST4ME has been supported by the Estonian Centre for International Development (ESTDEV) and its activities ran from June 2023 to May 2024. The project – led by the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies of the University of Tartu – directly involved Moldovan universities, lecturers, and stakeholders, and has been locally coordinated by the Moldova State University.

Best4ME's goal was to develop research and teaching expertise in European Studies by involving local teaching staff and management and equipping graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge for future employment in the organizations responsible for implementing societal reforms key to Moldova's European integration (government institutions, administration structures, NGOs).

After providing an overview of the role of European studies and digitalization in shaping the future development of HEIs in Moldova, the report presents a set of practical 'takeaways' from the Best4ME project as an example of tangible and concrete actions to enhance the digitalization of higher education and innovative teaching practices. The primary focus of the report is on lessons learned and experience-based applicable improvements. The report relies on an analysis of survey data collected among the instructors involved in the project activities and first hand experience of trainers and educators leading the training. In the final part of the report, specific recommendations are proposed, along with practical steps to ensure their implementation.



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# 1. The role of European studies and digitalization for the future development of HEIs in Moldova: challenges and opportunities

In the realm of education, as emphasized in Moldova's national strategy (European Moldova)<sup>1</sup> and European Commission's Moldova Report 2023,<sup>2</sup> education plays a crucial role in fostering the growth and fortification of a diverse and resilient democratic society. The integration of European values, integral to the process of Europeanization, serves both as a vehicle for transformation and as an ultimate objective for a well-informed and robust democratic society. Moldova's youth holds significant responsibility in driving such transformative efforts within their country, particularly amidst the ongoing accession process and, upon its successful culmination, as the first generation of Moldovan EU citizens. Furthermore, students' comprehension of EU decision-making processes, values, and principles will, over time, serve as the most effective societal defense against democratic setbacks and external threats to the nation's democratic institutions. Moreover, a thorough and up-to-date understanding of EU decision-making and methodologies among Moldova State University (USM) students presents a pivotal opportunity for their future professional advancement within the country as it undergoes its European transformation.

Along with the development of the European studies curriculum, integration of digital technologies stands poised to significantly impact the quality and accessibility of education in Moldova. Furthermore, it serves as a catalyst for advancing the country's European ambitions and driving further modernization within its higher education sector, closely aligning with the objectives set forth in the European Union's Digital Education Action Plan.<sup>3</sup>

Given the current situation of the higher education institutions in Moldova, as outlined in the national strategy "Education 2030" (in Romanian "Educația 2030"),<sup>4</sup> higher education institutions in the country face challenges such as:

- Predominance of theoretically focused knowledge in the curriculum and insufficient level of practical applied approaches in teaching and learning;

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<sup>1</sup>See National development strategy "European Moldova 2030". President of the Parliament (Igor Grosu, 2022). Accessed at: [https://cancelaria.gov.md/sites/default/files/l\\_315\\_2022\\_snd\\_moldova\\_europeana\\_2030\\_adoptat\\_publicata.pdf](https://cancelaria.gov.md/sites/default/files/l_315_2022_snd_moldova_europeana_2030_adoptat_publicata.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>European Commission (2023). Moldova Report 2023. Accessed at: [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/moldova-report-2023\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/moldova-report-2023_en)

<sup>3</sup>European Commission. Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027). Accessed at: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan>

<sup>4</sup>Development Strategy "Education - 2030". Ministry of Education and Research (2022). Accessed at: <https://particip.gov.md/ro/document/stages/proiectul-strategiei-de-dezvoltare-educatia-2030-si-proiectul-programului-de-implementare-a-strategiei-de-dezvoltare-educatia-2030/9254>



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- Limited experience of curriculum designers and educational technologists to utilize innovative teaching methods (including, intra- and interdisciplinary connections) and their integration in curriculum design;
- Insufficient level of integration of future skills and sustainable development competencies in teaching and learning processes;
- Procedural issues with curriculum approaches, including issues related to the effectiveness of didactic design, which can impact the engagement and understanding of students;
- Insufficient training for educators in digital literacy and digital pedagogy, hindering the effective integration of educational technologies;
- Limited possibilities of the teaching staff to effectively utilize the latest generations of interactive multimedia educational software in teaching practices;
- Lack of mechanisms for evaluating and certifying educators' digital skills and quality assurance mechanisms for ensuring high-quality development of teaching and learning materials.

Addressing these challenges could enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Moldovan HEIs and strengthen the development of European studies competences and their integration in curriculum development.

## 2. Overview of European studies at Moldova HEIs

Moldova has been a full member of the Bologna Process/the European higher education area since 2005. One of the main goals of this process is to foster European studies (ES) and education concerning Europe.

Moldovan universities actively provide ES degrees and courses, which are dispersed among 29 universities – 18 state institutions and 11 private ones.<sup>5</sup> In Moldova, curricula follow the Framework-Plan for higher education<sup>6</sup>, which advises universities to incorporate units/modules on European issues as part of the humanities and social sciences component and are recommended as optional elements. Consequently, universities are expected to integrate course units/modules on European issues into their study programs. These courses cover diverse topics from European economic integration to European Law and educational policies. The aim of the ES component is to cultivate a broad understanding of legal culture, philosophy, political science,

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<sup>5</sup>Cornea, V. The European Studies in Higher Education in Moldova. EU TEMPUS project “Innovating Teaching and Learning of European Studies” (INOTLES). Summary Policy Paper Series, No.2/2017.

<sup>6</sup>Approved by the Ministry of Education on October 22, 2015, *FRAMEWORK-PLAN for higher education studies*.



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sociology, psychology, and economics. ES offerings are available across all Moldovan universities, either as standalone specialties or as part of courses/modules on European issues.<sup>7</sup>

Leading higher education institutions in Moldova which offer degree programs focused on European studies include Moldova State University (USM), the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM), and the Free International University of Moldova (ULIM).

USM established the Department of International Economic Relations in 1995, under the Faculty of Political Sciences, in response to the growing need to train competencies in International Relations due to the establishment and development of multiple cooperation relations with other countries. This department, considered the country's first of its kind, commenced training specialists in international economic relations.<sup>8</sup> Particularly relevant to the field of European studies, USM offers degrees in "European Studies" and "Diplomatic Studies".

In addition to degree programs, USM established the European Studies Center in 2011 within the Faculty of International Relations, Political, and Administrative Sciences. The center's primary objective is to significantly contribute to the further development of European Studies in Moldova as a vital part of the country's general education and to fulfill European integration objectives. It also aims to enhance the cultural, scientific, and educational development of Moldova and support the country's European integration process, preparing it for future EU accession. Over the years, the center has organized numerous educational, didactic, and scientific activities, including events dedicated to Europe's Day, such as round tables, conferences, seminars, and essay contests on European issues.<sup>9</sup>

ASEM offers Master's programs in "Economic Integration and European Affairs," "European Project Management," and "Economic integration and European Affairs." Since its establishment in 1994, the Academy of Economic Studies has offered an International Relations specialization in Public Administration.<sup>10</sup>

At the private university ULIM, the Faculty of History and International Relations was conceptualized in 1992 when the university was founded, but it was only formally established in 1997. The Political Science specialty was introduced in 2002 in response to societal demands.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Cornea, V. The European Studies in Higher Education in Moldova. EU TEMPUS project "Innovating Teaching and Learning of European Studies" (INOTLES). Summary Policy Paper Series, No.2/2017.

<sup>8</sup>Moldova State University, The Faculty of International Relations, Political Sciences and Public Administration. Accessed at: [https://usm.md/?page\\_id=522&lang=en](https://usm.md/?page_id=522&lang=en)

<sup>9</sup>See Moldova State University - European Studies Center - Republic of Moldova. ENACTED Network. Accessed at: <http://enacted.uaic.ro/usm.htm>

<sup>10</sup>Cornea, V. The European Studies in Higher Education in Moldova. EU TEMPUS project "Innovating Teaching and Learning of European Studies" (INOTLES). Summary Policy Paper Series, No.2/2017.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.



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State University “B.P. Hasdeu” in Cahul has offered a Master’s program in European Integration and Neighborhood Policy since 2006. This program was developed as part of the European project JEP TEMPUS “Master Studies in European Integration and Neighborhood Policy – MEINEPO,” coordinated by the University of Maribor (Slovenia). Moldovan partners, in addition to Cahul University, included the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova and the State University “Al. Russo” in Balti. The project aimed to establish Master’s studies in this field starting from the 2009-2010 academic year.

### 3. Enhancing European Studies and innovative teaching practices through educational projects: the case study of Best4ME

The idea for the project “Enhancing Moldova’s Europeanization through innovative teaching practices” (Best4ME) stems from the strong potential of higher educational institutions in Moldova to play a pivotal role in furthering the country’s EU accession process by building research and teaching expertise in European Studies and preparing graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge for future employment in the organizations responsible for implementing societal reforms (government institutions, administration structures, NGOs). To this end, Moldova State University (USM) has defined its key strategic priorities as increasing the role of the higher education system in Moldova’s European integration process and democratization, strengthening international cooperation with the European Studies academic network, and modernizing teaching related to European Studies in BA and MA university curricula in the social sciences, humanities, and public administration specialties.

The Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies at the University of Tartu (UT), the main coordinator of the project, has strong competencies and expertise to cooperate and assist USM in these areas. Best4ME builds on the results of two recent projects: Jean Monnet Module NEAREU, which created new knowledge, tools, and resources related to Europeanization towards the European Union’s Eastern neighbourhood and candidate countries; and participation in the Jean Monnet Network DESCnet (Network for Developing European Studies in the Caucasus) to enhance the level of European Studies in the Caucasus region. Best4ME also has strong synergies with ongoing activities at the Institute, specifically the recent reform of the European Studies MA curriculum to address the wide range of contemporary challenges to democratic politics and governance in the EU. In 2023, the Institute also established a Jean Monnet Center of Excellence to improve research and teaching in European studies and is currently organizing a dynamic program of events related to EU issues. The Best4ME project aims to extend the reach and multiply the impact of these ongoing activities to the beneficiaries in Moldova.



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The collaboration between USM and UT builds on previous long-term and successful cooperation in the framework of the TradeRun project (2010-2014) and the FP7 IRSES project “EU-PREACC: Possibilities and limits, challenges and obstacles of transferring CEE EU pre-accession best practices and experience to Moldova’s and Georgia’s pre-accession process” (2013-2017). Whereas these previous projects involved academics and teaching staff, Best4ME also targets students to prepare them as future key actors and decision-makers in Moldova’s EU integration and Europeanisation process.

In this respect, the main goals of the Best4ME project are to: 1) build teaching competencies and expand the portfolio of innovative learning experiences at Moldovan HEIs to strengthen educational capacity and apply innovative teaching methods in European Studies by university teaching staff; 2) enhance students’ knowledge and interest in European Studies to motivate them to specialise and gain knowledge and skills to prepare them for future EU-related careers or in public sector job furthering Moldova’s Europeanisation process. As a result of the project, teaching staff from USM will benefit from training designed to expand the portfolio of modern pedagogical approaches for teaching European Studies and innovative techniques for digital education offered in Moldovan universities. Students of international relations, political science, and public administration in Moldova will have the opportunity to participate in online and in-person specialist courses on topics related to European Studies at UT, attend a study trip to Tallinn to experience EU institutions in action, and apply for a scholarship to conduct an independent MA thesis research project on an EU-related topic with mentorship by UT staff. At the end of the project, the findings of the project will be disseminated in a strategy report drafted by UT and USM to relevant stakeholders in Moldova.

In June 2023, Best4ME project received funding from the Estonian Centre for International Development under project agreement - nr 4-1/125-2023. In this respect, the report further lays out some of the lessons learned and good practices.

### 3.1. Teacher training at Moldova State University

Two experts from the University of Tartu – Anna Beitane and Stefano Braghiroli – conducted a two-day in-person training for 20 teaching staff members at Moldova State University. The objective of the training was to enhance European Studies at Moldovan universities by improving competencies in modern teaching techniques and innovative digital approaches.

Stefano Braghiroli focused on EU curriculum development and shared best practices from UT's European Studies curriculum redesign. In particular, he discussed the most recent developments in EU policies and enlargement studies and how to better convey such notions to students. He also introduced local lecturers to interactive teaching techniques, including student-led simulations, role games, and the flipped classroom approach. In addition, he shared the





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experience of curriculum reform of the Master's programme in European Studies undertaken at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies with local teachers and management, and discussed best practices that could be applied in the context of MSU's curricula.

Anna Beitane introduced MSU teaching staff to the EU's Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027) and DigCompEdu framework for the self-assessment of digital skills of educators; gave an overview of new pedagogical formats, which include virtual exchange, blended mobility, and micro-credentials; pedagogical approaches such as problem-based and challenge-based learning; as well as the implementation and facilitation of the flipped-classroom format. Teaching staff were also introduced to the key principles (SAMR model, Bloom's digital taxonomy, ABC design) for selecting the right technology and digital tools for their teaching practices, as well as a list of concrete tools which could be integrated into their teaching practices.

Following the training, participants were expected to revise and update their course syllabi to include new readings and research trends in European Studies and innovative digital teaching approaches. The training included both lectures and more practical and hands-on workshop sessions with the teaching staff, where they had the opportunity to test the proposed teaching methods and apply these approaches. The training program is available in the Appendix.

Participants were requested to complete a pre-training questionnaire<sup>12</sup> in early August 2023 and a post-training questionnaire<sup>13</sup> in early September. It should be pointed out that the pre-training and post-training survey evaluated the level of familiarity with and use of two key components: a) digital tools and innovative teaching practices and b) EU curriculum development and latest research conducted on EU-related topics.

The participants represented various subject programs: European Studies (7), Comparative Politics (1), International Law (2), International Relations (3), Public Policies (1), Political Science (3), and Diplomatic Studies (3). The attendees were mainly from Moldova State University. The respondents held various positions, including lecturers (9), associate professors (8), professors (3), and department heads (1).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Pre-training survey "Teacher training: teaching techniques for EU Studies and innovative digital approaches". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/pNQ499VXQh>

<sup>13</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Post-training survey "Teacher training - Follow-up questionnaire". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/hzD34HeSv5>

<sup>14</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Pre-training survey "Teacher training: teaching techniques for EU Studies and innovative digital approaches". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. The survey contains 21 responses.



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The training participants were particularly interested in learning more about issues such as the efficacy of EU conditionality, intricate details of accession negotiations, and the dynamics of post-accession integration.<sup>15</sup>

## 3.2 Impact of the training and feedback

Before the training, around 33% of the respondents indicated that the topic of teaching techniques for EU studies and innovative digital approaches was new to them (see Figure 1), while the rest of the sample already had some experience; however, according to the survey, no respondents were well-familiar with the topic.<sup>16</sup> Following the Best4ME training, 7 out of 8 respondents answered that their knowledge had increased (see Figure 2).<sup>17</sup>

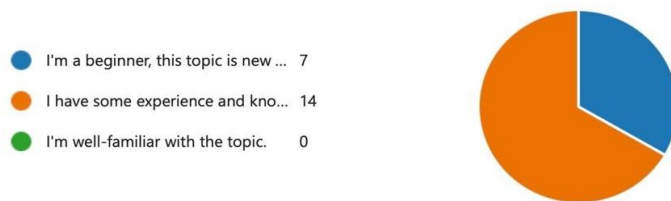


Figure 1. Pre-training Digital Competence Evaluation Question

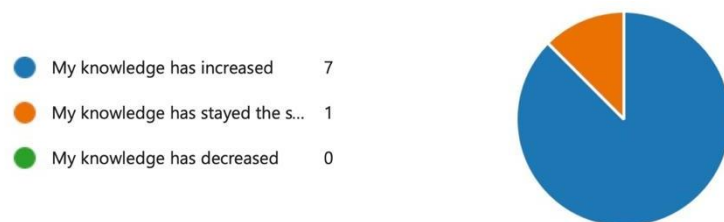


Figure 2. Post-training Digital Competence Evaluation Question

Respondents demonstrated varying levels of familiarity with different teaching methods and modes of delivering teaching. Online teaching was widely familiar, with some respondents being very well-familiar. Notably, respondents had implemented diverse methods in their courses during the COVID-19 pandemic, leveraging platforms like Moodle, Zoom, and e-learning tools.

<sup>15</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Pre-training survey "Teacher training: teaching techniques for EU Studies and innovative digital approaches". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/pNQ499VXQh>

<sup>16</sup>ibid.

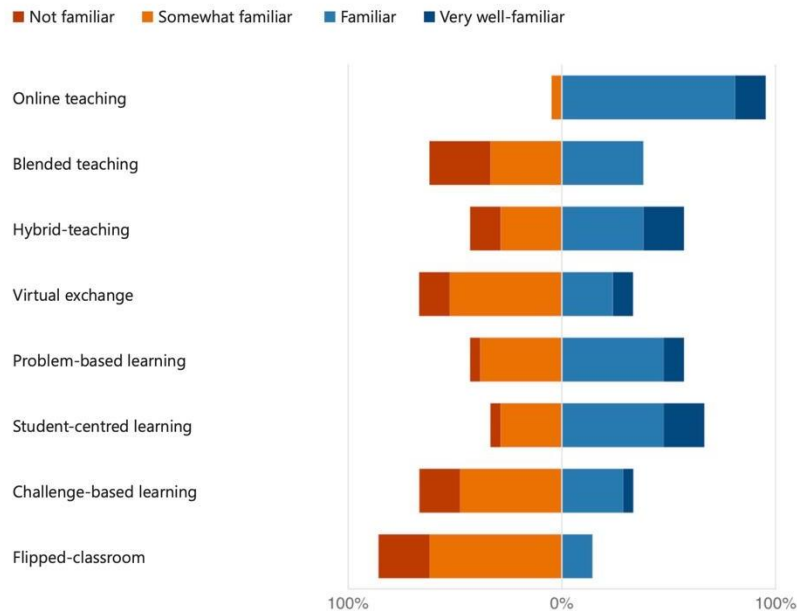
<sup>17</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Post-training survey "Teacher training - Follow-up questionnaire". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/hzD34HeSv5>



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Blended teaching and hybrid teaching were somewhat familiar to many, while virtual exchange, challenge-based learning, and flipped-classroom were less familiar (See Figure 3).<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 3.** Teaching Techniques Knowledge before the BEst4ME training

The training effectively addressed pre-existing knowledge gaps in teaching techniques, as evidenced by the significant increase in familiarity with these methods post-training, illustrated in Figure 4. The post-training survey demonstrates a substantial improvement in participants' knowledge of all the mentioned teaching techniques, indicating the positive impact of the training program. In particular, the most significant improvements can be seen exactly in those areas where the pre-existing knowledge appeared to be the most lacking (i.e. flipped classroom and blended teaching).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Pre-training survey "Teacher training: teaching techniques for EU Studies and innovative digital approaches". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/pNQ499VXQh>

<sup>19</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Post-training survey "Teacher training - Follow-up questionnaire". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/hzD34HeSv5>

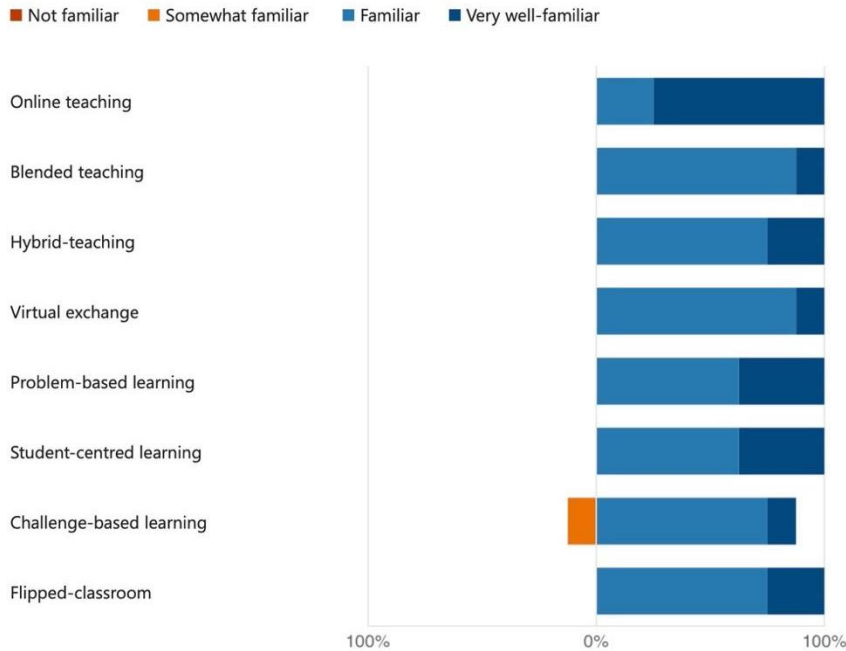


Figure 4. Teaching Techniques Knowledge after the Best4ME training

Another positive dynamic observed in the post-training survey is that all the respondents answered that their knowledge of Europeanization and candidates' integration in the context of the EU enlargement was "very updated." This crucial result emphasizes that the training met its core objectives as in the future lecturers will be equipped to teach and more confidently discuss the most recent developments at the EU-level. <sup>20</sup>

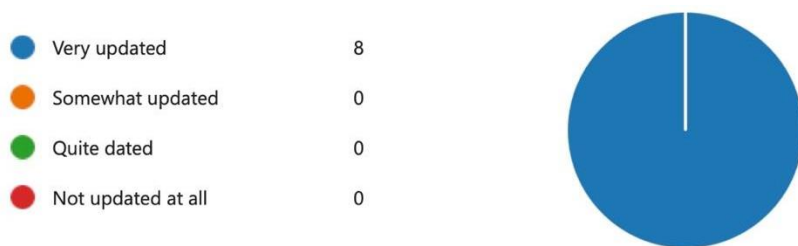


Figure 5. Post-training evaluation of knowledge of Europeanization and candidates' integration in the context of the EU enlargement

Before the training, almost half of the participants stated that they use some form of digital tools, like Moodle and Zoom. However, this is not a habit nor a part of their regular teaching approach

<sup>20</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Post-training survey "Teacher training - Follow-up questionnaire". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/hzD34HeSv5>



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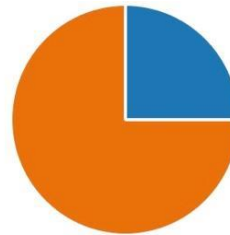
(see Figure 6).<sup>21</sup> In the aftermath of the training, according to the post-survey, 6 out of 8 respondents indicated that despite already using digital tools, they now plan to use them even more (see Figure 7).<sup>22</sup> This seems to highlight the positive impact of exposing teachers to the benefits of integrating a range of different digital tools into their daily teaching practices.

- I am regularly using digital tools... 9
- I am using some digital tools in ... 11
- I am not using any digital tools i... 1
- I am afraid to use any digital to... 0



**Figure 6.** Pre-training use of digital tools in teaching

- I am already regularly using digi... 2
- I am already using some digital ... 6
- So far I have not used any digita... 0
- I still do not plan to use any digi... 0



**Figure 7.** Post-training use of digital tools in teaching

15 out of 21 respondents indicated that the subject they teach is very related to European studies (see Figure 8), highlighting the pervasiveness of EU-related knowledge for many disciplinary areas in the social sciences.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Pre-training survey "Teacher training: teaching techniques for EU Studies and innovative digital approaches". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/pNQ499VXQh>

<sup>22</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Post-training survey "Teacher training - Follow-up questionnaire". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/hzD34HeSv5>

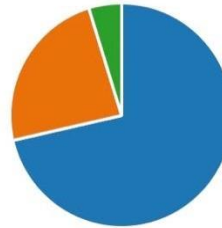
<sup>23</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Pre-training survey "Teacher training: teaching techniques for EU Studies and innovative digital approaches". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/pNQ499VXQh>



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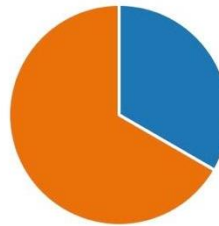
Very related	15
Somewhat related	5
Marginally related	1
Not related at all	0



**Figure 8.** Relevance of the subject teachers teach to European Studies

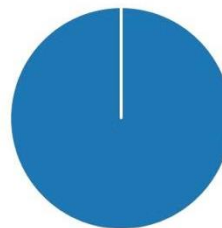
Prior to the training, 14 out of 21 respondents considered themselves “somewhat updated” on Europeanization processes and candidate countries’ integration in the context of the EU enlargement (see Figure 9).<sup>24</sup> Post-training, all participants indicated feeling “very updated” on these topics (see Figure 10).<sup>25</sup>

Very updated	7
Somewhat updated	14
Quite dated	0
Not updated at all	0



**Figure 9.** Pre-training knowledge of Europeanization and candidates’ integration in the context of the EU enlargement

Very updated	8
Somewhat updated	0
Quite dated	0
Not updated at all	0



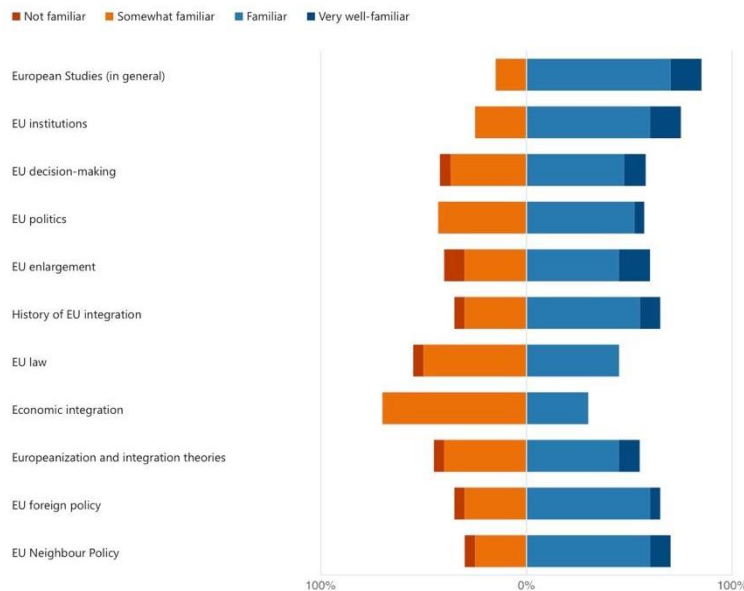
**Figure 10.** Post-training knowledge of Europeanization and candidates’ integration in the context of the EU enlargement

<sup>24</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Pre-training survey "Teacher training: teaching techniques for EU Studies and innovative digital approaches". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/pNQ499VXQh>

<sup>25</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Post-training survey "Teacher training - Follow-up questionnaire". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/hzD34HeSv5>



To gauge the participants' disciplinary familiarity with European Studies, respondents were asked to assess their knowledge in various components. Figure 11 illustrates the distribution of respondents' self-reported familiarity with different components of European Studies.<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 11.** Disciplinary familiarity with European Studies and their disciplinary components

On the one hand, participants indicated being "very well-familiar" or "familiar" with EU institutions, EU decision-making, European Studies (in general), EU politics, EU Neighbour policy, EU foreign policy, and the history of EU integration. On the other hand, there is an evident lack of familiarity with EU law, economic integration, EU decision-making, and EU Enlargement. As a result, the training devoted particular attention to these areas where knowledge appeared more limited.

Participants initially ranked the relevance of various forms of student engagement in learning European Studies on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being the least relevant and 7 being the most relevant. Group work and role playing were consistently considered highly relevant, with many participants rating them at a maximum of 7. Simulations and games also ranked highly, while the flipped classroom approach showed varying responses, perhaps due to the uncertainty among participants prior the training about what this pedagogical approach entails. Peer review

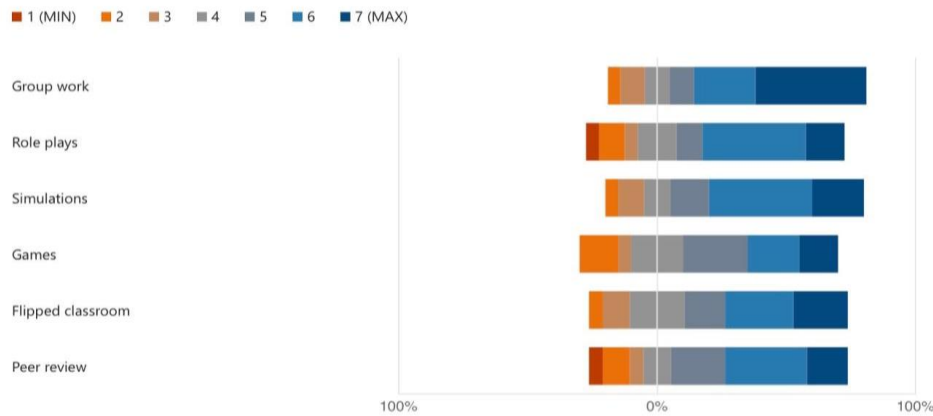
<sup>26</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Pre-training survey "Teacher training: teaching techniques for EU Studies and innovative digital approaches". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/pNQ499VXQh>



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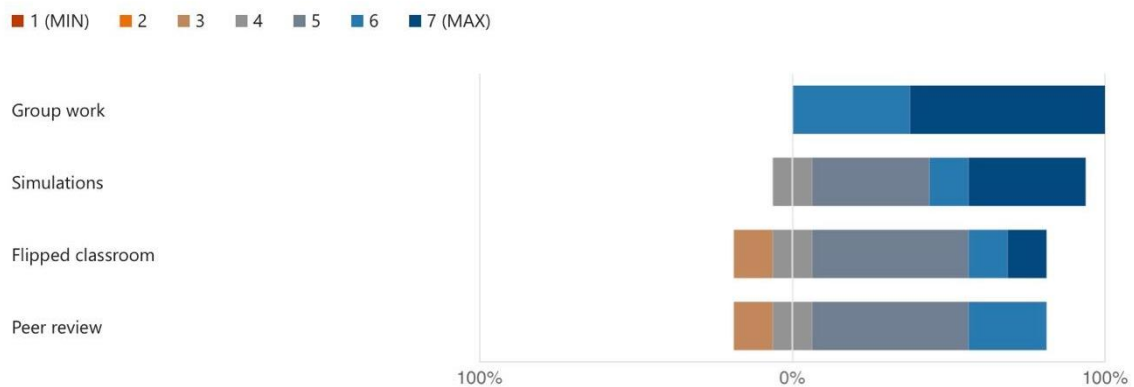


garnered mixed ratings, with some participants finding it less relevant. A visual representation of these rankings is provided in Figure 11.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 12.** Pre-training ranking of students' engagement in the context of learning European Studies

Following the Best4ME training, participants indicated their likelihood of using various forms of student engagement activities in courses on the same 1–7 scale. The majority expressed a high likelihood, with some giving maximum ratings (7) to group work and simulations. The flipped classroom approach showed a more moderate uptake. The results, visually represented in Figure 13, overall highlight a positive post-training shift towards integrating a more diverse and interactive toolbox of teaching methods into courses.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 13.** Post-training ranking of students' engagement in the context of learning European Studies

<sup>27</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Pre-training survey "Teacher training: teaching techniques for EU Studies and innovative digital approaches". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/pNQ499VXQh>

<sup>28</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Post-training survey "Teacher training - Follow-up questionnaire". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/hzD34HeSv5>





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Participants showed keen interest in organizing simulations for didactic purposes. While some have actively organized simulations before, emphasizing the positive outcomes and enhanced levels of student engagement, others expressed interest in running simulations in the future, despite lacking current experience. Challenges, such as the substantial preparation requirements, were noted but were outweighed by the rewarding impact on student learning.<sup>29</sup> This shows that there is fertile ground for more interactivity in the teaching activities at MSU. This is visualized in Figure 14 below.



**Figure 14.** Involvement in the organization of a simulation/game/role play of decision-making for didactic purposes

Responses varied in the open-ended question asking participants to explain the motivation to organize interactive activities in the future. Participants cited reasons like gaining organizational skills, adapting to educational trends, and fostering collaboration. Positive outcomes included increased student motivation and learning. Challenges, including the substantial preparation required, were acknowledged but seen as manageable. Addressing these challenges has been one of the key focuses of the training.

For potential exercises, participants highlighted the relevance of simulating settings such as the Council of the EU, Eastern Partnership, European Parliament, and European Council (see Figure 15).<sup>30</sup> The Eastern Partnership and Neighbourhood Policy has a particular relevance in the Moldovan context.



**Figure 15.** The most relevant settings to simulate in a potential exercise

<sup>29</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Pre-training survey "Teacher training: teaching techniques for EU Studies and innovative digital approaches". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/pNQ499VXQh>

<sup>30</sup>ibid.



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Participants universally found the Best4ME training to be “very useful,” indicating a unanimous positive evaluation of the program (see Figure 16).<sup>31</sup> This appears to be a very promising result when it comes to the long-term impact of our activities.

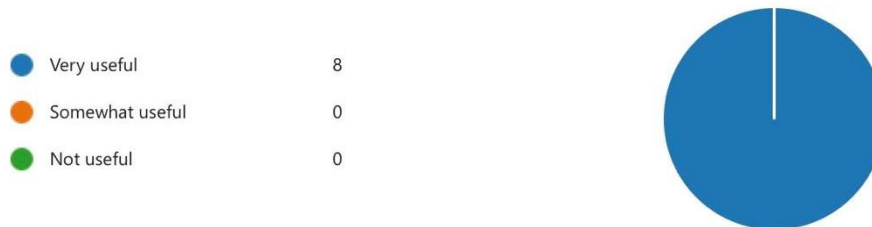


Figure 16. Assessment of Best4ME by participants

All respondents expressed a strong affirmative stance that they they would recommend the Best4ME training to their colleagues in the future (See Figure 17),<sup>32</sup> thereby highlighting the strong potential to continue and further expand the collaboration between UT and MSU to feed forward these positive impacts.



Figure 17. Recommending Best4ME training to colleagues in the future

### 3.3. Implemented changes in the USM curriculum

Following the training delivered in August 2023, lecturers teaching courses in the European Studies MA program at Moldova State University convened for a working meeting to implement innovations in the curriculum based on the best practices learned during the training and key takeaways. Considering that Moldova State University’s curriculum for both BA and MA levels follows a standardized format proposed changes focused on several key aspects. Firstly, courses in the MA program on European Studies were updated and transferred to the Moldova State University Moodle platform ([www.moodle.usm.md](http://www.moodle.usm.md)), making all classes available online (see Image 1).

<sup>31</sup>Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli (2023). Post-training survey "Teacher training - Follow-up questionnaire". Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Accessed at: <https://forms.office.com/e/hzD34HeSv5>

<sup>32</sup>ibid.

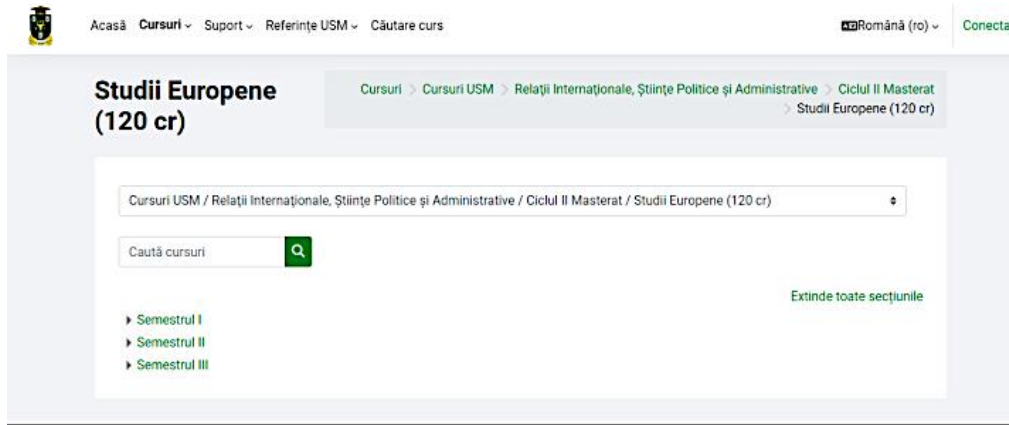


Image 1. Moodle page of "European Studies" curriculum on Moodle of USM

Secondly, a range of changes regarding the teaching methodology and use of new digital instruments were implemented for following courses:

- "Theory and Practice of European Studies" (Teoria și practica studiilor europene) by lecturer Vasilescu Grigore, Dr.Hab., Univ.Prof
- "EU Governance and Policies" (Guvernanța și politicile interne ale UE) by lecturer Sterpu Vladimir, PhD;
- "European Multiculturalism in Conditions of Globalization" by lecturer Stercul Natalia, PhD As.prof;
- "Europeanization and EU Enlargement Conditionality" (Europenizarea și condiționalitatea extinderii UE) by lecturer Morari Cristina, PhD.

Examples of the updated Moodle course pages can be seen in Image 2.

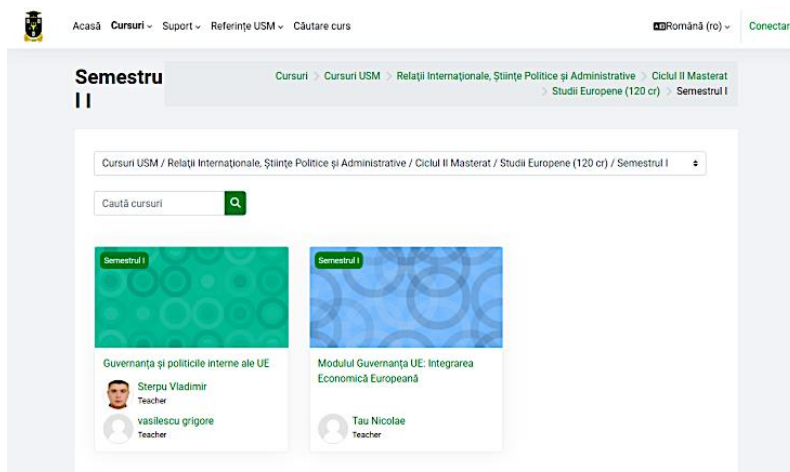


Image 2. Moodle page of "EU Governance and Policies" by lecturer Sterpu Vladimir



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Implemented changes for each course include:

- *Updating the bibliography* and creating a reading folder on the course Moodle;
- *Developing an online course glossary* with key concepts;
- *Creating a final semester project based on a problem-based approach.* This involves producing a final analytical report on a certain topic developed and presented by the entire group. Requirements and instructions are available on the Moodle page of the courses. Students work in groups of 2–3 MA students, conducting problem-based research on their chosen subject dimension. After the group's work is complete, they discuss their outcomes together and develop joint recommendations. The final report is uploaded for evaluation by their course peers on Moodle.
- *Designing online tests for current and final evaluations* for every course on Moodle in order to improve grades by encouraging students to study throughout the semester and motivate attendance, etc.
- *Implementing a broad application of learning through acquisition, collaboration, discussion, and practice,* especially during seminars, a teamwork approach is applied with materials and tasks uploaded to Moodle. As a result, MA students can articulate their ideas, arguments, and questions for colleagues and the lecturer, exchange ideas, and formulate a scientific position. Thus, by adapting their actions to the specific task and receiving constructive feedback, MA students develop their analytical skills.
- *Utilizing learning management systems like Moodle or Microsoft Teams* to improve collaboration with MA students by sending instructions, updates, or reminders, posting assignments, or managing a calendar of activities.
- *Integrating Mentimeter/Kahoot tools into class activities.* At the end of the class, MA students are evaluated through Mentimeter/Kahoot tools, mainly through short quizzes; during seminars, polling or Q&A sessions are applied, along with brainstorming activities. **These tools consolidate foundational knowledge and make the learning environment more interactive.**

Examples from the updated Moodle pages can be seen in Images 3, 4, and 5.



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of Political Studies



The screenshot shows the Moodle course overview page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: 'Acasă', 'Tablou de bord', 'Cursurile mele', 'Cursuri', 'Suport', 'Referințe USM', and 'Căutare curs'. Below this is a green header with 'Curs', 'Setări', 'Participanți', 'Note', 'Rapoarte', and 'Mai mult'. The main content area is titled 'Europeanizarea și condiționalitatea extinderii UE (eng.)'. Under the 'General' section, there is a detailed description of the course: 'The discipline Europeanization and EU Enlargement Conditionality is a specialized course designed for MA students from the international relations specialty, European Studies specialization Cycle II, 1st year. The objective of the course is to familiarize MA students with both theoretical and practical aspects of the EU enlargement policy and impact of Europeanization in new, old and potential EU member states. The course aims to provide students with an informed understanding of different EU mechanisms and strategies in relation to the EU accession policy, but also enables them to apply learned material by analyzing concrete empirical cases of the effects of Europeanization. It also provides opportunity for analysis of broader problems of European integration, and examining the nature, dynamics and influence of different EU enlargement rounds on development of EU institutions and decision-making processes. The language of teaching is English.' Below the text are several buttons: 'Curriculum', 'Glossary', 'READING', 'Lecturer's articles', and 'Exam Subjects'. On the right side, there is a 'Calendar' widget showing the month of January 2024 with a grid of days.

Image 3. Course overview and general section of "Europeanization and EU Enlargement Conditionality" course on Moodle by lecturer Morari Cristina

The screenshot shows the 'READING' section of the Moodle course. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: 'Acasă', 'Tablou de bord', 'Cursurile mele', 'Cursuri', 'Suport', 'Referințe USM', and 'Căutare curs'. Below this is a green header with 'Dosar', 'Setări', and 'Mai mult'. The main content area is titled 'READING' and includes a 'EUEC > READING' breadcrumb. There are two buttons: 'Editează' and 'Descarcă folderul'. Below these is a list of PDF files:

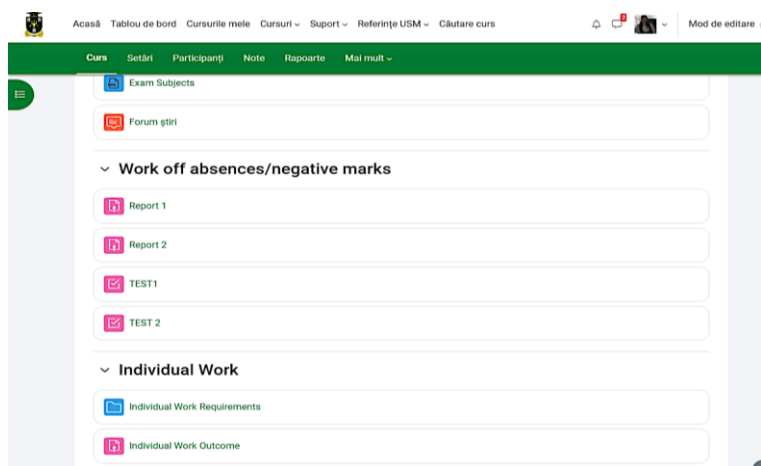
- [Book of Grabbe-The EU's Transformative Power \(2006\).pdf](#)
- [Conditionality in the EU.pdf](#)
- [Different mechanisms of Europeanization.pdf](#)
- [EU-Conditionality-An-Effective-Means-for-Policy-Reform.pdf](#)
- [logic-of-eu-enlargement.pdf](#)
- [ЕВРОПЕИЗАЦИЯ.pdf](#)
- [Применение ЕС политики обусловленности.pdf](#)

At the bottom, there is a navigation bar with 'Previous activity' (Curriculum) and 'următoarea activitate' (Lecturer's articles).

Image 4. Updated readings of "Europeanization and EU Enlargement Conditionality" course on Moodle by lecturer Morari Cristina



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of Political Studies



**Image 5.** Tests and project sections of “Europeanization and EU Enlargement Conditionality” course on Moodle by lecturer Morari Cristina

Finally, it should be emphasized that two new subjects with a distinct format– semester projects – have been introduced. These courses include “EU in the International Relations System” (UE în sistemul relațiilor internaționale) (lectured by Beniuc L., PhD, Associate Professor) and “European Social Strategies” (Strategii europene sociale) (taught by Valentina Teosa, Dr. Hab., University Professor). These semester projects deviate significantly from the classical model of the MSU curriculum. They entail a essential reduction in theoretical studies, emphasizing active student-centered learning based on individual research tasks. Additionally, these disciplines involve seminars conducted in small groups to discuss research results, with group research serving as laboratory work on the chosen research subject. An example of the new research project format developed by Professor V. Teosa can be seen in the table below (Table 1):

## II. STAGES AND INDICATIVE DISTRIBUTION OF HOURS

Nr. d/o	Content Units	Hours		
		Seminars	Laboratories	Individual work
1.	Analysis of the problems identified in the labour market	4	4	16
2.	Creation of working groups	4	4	16
3.	Theoretical foundation (Testing 1)	2	2	8
4.	Monitoring the documentation process	8	8	32
5.	Presentation of preliminary results (Testing 2)	2	2	8
6.	Finalization of the semester project	6	6	24
7.	Presentation and evaluation of the final product of the Semester Project	4	4	16
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>120</b>

\* According to Anexe 1

**Table 1** Teosa, V. Course syllabus “European Social Strategies.” Moldova State University. Faculty of International Relations, Political and Administrative Sciences.



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As a result of the training, lecturers have enhanced their digital abilities by learning how to integrate new digital tools into classroom activities and make the course content more **attractive** and practical. This new teaching methodology enables both lecturers and MA students to fully explore, analyze, and apply the acquired knowledge, thereby developing the necessary skills for professional development.

### 3.4. Other activities aimed at enhancing European studies at USM

A **cycle of EU-related online seminars** was organized within the framework of the Best4ME project and targeted MA students and advanced BA students from MSU. The interactive webinars were conducted by UT in-house staff and covered relevant topics such as EU enlargement, neighbourhood policy, and foreign and security policy. Students were exposed to the most updated trends and developments and had the possibility to interact with UT lecturers and experience different ways of teaching and learning.

An intensive **study week** to discuss Moldova's Europeanization and the challenges of EU enlargement was organized in Estonia, involving ten students and three staff members from MSU. The activities combined in-class learning and out-of-class activities, bridging practical and academic learning. From Monday to Thursday, Moldovan students discussed with UT in-house staff a range of relevant topics, including dilemmas of the EU foreign policy, ideas and understanding of Europe, bordering and de-bordering in the Eastern Neighbourhood, Estonia's transition and digital transformation, and feminist activism in the post-Soviet space. On Friday and Saturday, the group moved to Tallinn where students and lecturers met stakeholders and decision-makers and visited the Estonian Parliament, the Foreign Ministry, the Estonian School of Diplomacy, and the Tallinn's Europe House.

Overall, these seminars and the study trip exposed participants to innovative European Studies pedagogies and digital and interactive learning methods and teaching tools. By working in small groups, students exchanged ideas, experiences, and learned from each other. They presented their group work and received valuable feedback from both Skytte and MSU staff.

Within the framework of the BEST4ME project, five students from MSU have received financial support – in the form of **targeted scholarships** – to conduct their research, data collection, and access relevant publications and databases as part of their thesis writing process. The students are writing theses on EU-related topics and all the projects have all a strong connection to Moldova's path towards European integration. They are therefore likely to have a tangible impact also in terms of policy recommendations and policy shaping process. In addition to their MSU supervisors, the five students also profit from the support of a **dedicated UT in-house**



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of Political Studies



**advisor** who can contribute to further improve the quality of the work and the relevance of its results.

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

Looking at the quantitative indicators of the teacher training program, it could be argued that the Best4ME project managed to a) increase the level of awareness and knowledge of at least 20 educators at Moldova State University about the EU accession process and innovative teaching methods; b) at least 4 courses in the “European Studies” or “Diplomatic Studies” curricula have been substantially updated and revised in light of the newly acquired knowledge; the follow-up questionnaire after the training shows that a substantial number of lecturers have also integrated new digital tools into their teaching practices after the training.

Evaluating the main feedback from the pre-and post-training forms, it could be argued that the teacher training delivered by experts from UT has yielded positive outcomes for enhancing the competencies of the teaching staff at USM. More precisely, the survey has demonstrated that the training has produced a significant impact on the participants’ knowledge, skills, and readiness to integrate digital tools into their teaching practices.

Looking at the results of the survey, it could be stated that the training **successfully addressed the initial gaps in digital competence**, with a notable increase in knowledge post-training. Participants demonstrated an enhanced familiarity with various teaching methods and modes of delivery, showcasing the project’s effectiveness in broadening their pedagogical skill set.

The results of the survey also highlight the positive impact of the training in terms of **bridging theory and practice** by introducing local university teachers to new didactic approaches and professional skills, also through experiential group interaction and workshop activities adopting a “learning-by-doing” approach.

In addition, the way in which the training was conducted and the involvement of teachers with different backgrounds and degrees of seniority has facilitated **cross-generational and cross-disciplinary exchanges** of knowledge and teaching practices. These are likely to last far beyond the conclusion of the project and to deliver long-term positive change as early career scholars progress in their career.

Moreover, the post-training evaluations revealed **a substantial improvement in participants’ knowledge of Europeanization and candidates’ integration** in the context of EU enlargement. All respondents reported feeling “very updated” on these important topics, aligning with the project objectives outlined in the introduction. This development underscores the project’s success in providing relevant and up-to-date information to educators, ensuring that they are well-equipped to navigate complex subjects within European Studies.





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of Political Studies



It is also important to point out that the rankings of levels of student engagement reflected a ***positive shift post-training, with educators expressing a high likelihood of incorporating interactive methods*** such as group work and simulations into their courses. The participants' interest in organizing simulations for didactic purposes and their willingness to overcome challenges demonstrate a commitment to enhancing the learning experience for students.

In addition, exposing educators to interactions with foreign colleagues has favoured the ***internalization of alternative ways of teaching and approaching didactics***, promoted a diversity of approaches, and opportunities for mutual experience-sharing and enrichment. It is also likely to develop lasting ties and connections.

All in all, the evaluation indicates that the project has met the participants' expectations. Best4ME has successfully equipped educators with the knowledge and skills to navigate the complexities of teaching European Studies through enhancing knowledge of the latest developments in the field and supporting the integration of innovative digital tools into BA and MA courses. The positive outcomes observed in this evaluation provide a strong foundation for the continued success and refinement of similar teacher training initiatives in the future. As a note of consideration for the future planning of similar teacher training, it might be useful to include more time for consultations with individual lecturers to discuss concrete plans and needs for the course updates. Having access to the USM Moodle platform in advance of the training might have also enabled the recommendations from the UT trainers to be more targeted to the specific needs of individual instructors.



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## Appendix

**Teacher training at Moldova State University**  
***Teaching techniques for European Studies and innovative digital approaches for facilitating learning***

### Program

**Venue:** Moldova State University, Building 4, room 222.

**August 23**

**9:30 - 10:00** - Registration and coffee break

**10:00 - 11:00 Official opening of the ESTDEV project: Welcome words of MSU & UT representatives and institutional guests, moderator Ejov Cr.:**

- Rector of Moldova State University
- MFAEI Moldova
- Ministry of Education and Science
- Estonian Honorary Consul
- EU Delegation to the Republic of Moldova
- Dean of Faculty of International Relations, Political and Administrative Science, Moldova State University
- Project coordinators: University of Tartu and Moldova State University

**11:00 - 13:00 European Studies teaching track: *Theorizing enlargement (Dr. Stefano Braghioli, Associate Professor of European Studies, University of Tartu)***

- 11:00 - 12:00 Logic of EU enlargement: actors and factors that matter & examples from the past
- 12:00 - 12:15 Break
- 12:15 - 13:00 Seminar - Learning by doing: Simulations of EU decision-making

**13:00 - 14:00 - Lunch**



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**14:00 - 16:00 Digitalization track: Introduction to digitalization strategies in higher education (Ms. Anna Beitane, Manager of Online Learning and Continuing Education Projects, University of Tartu)**

- 14:00 - 15:00 Introduction to digitalization strategies for higher education. Didactics of online and blended teaching approaches.
- 15:00 - 15:15 - Break
- 15:15 - 16:00 - Workshop: digital competences of educators (DigCompEdu) & innovative teaching methods.

**August 24**

**9:30 - 10:00** Registration and coffee break

**10:00 - 12:00 European Studies teaching track: From theory to practice: integrating innovative teaching practices in European studies curriculum (Dr. Stefano Braghiroli, Associate Professor of European Studies, University of Tartu)**

- 10:00 - 11:00 Increasing students' engagement through interactive learning: sharing experience of flipped classroom and student-led teaching in European Studies teaching practices at J. Skytte Institute
- 11:00 - 11:15 Break
- 11:15 - 12:00 - Teaching European Studies to meet today's needs: Lessons and trends from the reform of UT's European Studies curriculum

**12:00 - 13:00 - Lunch**

**13:00 - 15:00 Digitalization track: Integration of digital tools and methods in the classroom (Ms. Anna Beitane, Manager of Online Learning and Continuing Education Projects, University of Tartu)**

- 13:00 - 14:00 Integration of digital tools and methods in the classroom. Constructive alignment.
- 14:00 - 14:15 - Break
- 14:15 - 15:00 Workshop: group work on revising European studies and Diplomatic Studies course syllabi. Consultations with UT staff. (Anna Beitane, Stefano Braghiroli)

**15:00 - 15:30 Wrapping up and follow up activities**