



Ukrainian-Slovak relations in the context of ensuring food security

Ukrajinsko-slovenské vzťahy v kontexte zabezpečovania potravinovej bezpečnosti

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Abstract:

The article addresses the features of Ukrainian-Slovak relations in the period of the establishment of the countries' independencies. It analyzes the exports of commodities and agricultural and food products from Ukraine to Slovakia. The dynamics of the change in the parameters of agricultural export in martial law is assessed. Slovakia's position among the EU countries in terms of agricultural exports from Ukraine is specified. The ways to support Ukrainian agriculture for the EU countries and Slovakia in martial law and to secure the participation of Ukrainian companies in the implementation of investment projects related to the development of export logistics infrastructure are outlined. The article offers prospective directions in the development of Ukrainian-Slovak relations in terms of agricultural export logistics in conditions of the seaport blockade and cross-border cooperation in the framework of existing joint programs. Special attention is paid to the need to introduce alternative logistic routes for agricultural export from Ukraine to Slovakia using the capacities of rail, road, and river transport, multimodal and intermodal shipping, and the creation of modern logistics hubs. The opportunities to attract the EU institutional assistance through Slovakia are examined in the framework of maintaining the food security and support of Ukraine's agriculture. The need for further development of Ukrainian-Slovak relations in terms of ensuring food security and fostering agricultural exports by inclusion of other EU countries in the logistics chain is emphasized.

Keywords: export, agriculture, logistics, transport, food security, Ukraine, Slovakia, European Union.



Abstrakt:

Článok sa zaoberá črtami ukrajinsko-slovenských vzťahov v období vzniku samostatnosti krajín. Analyzuje export komodít a poľnohospodárskych a potravinárskych produktov z Ukrajiny na Slovensko. Hodnotí sa dynamika zmeny parametrov poľnohospodárskeho exportu v stannom práve. Spresňuje sa postavenie Slovenska medzi krajinami EÚ z hľadiska exportu poľnohospodárskych produktov z Ukrajiny. Načrtnuté sú spôsoby podpory ukrajinského poľnohospodárstva pre krajiny EÚ a SR v stannom práve a zabezpečenie účasti ukrajinských firiem na realizácii investičných projektov súvisiacich s rozvojom exportnej logistickej infraštruktúry. Článok ponúka perspektívne smery rozvoja ukrajinsko-slovenských vzťahov z hľadiska poľnohospodárskej exportnej logistiky v podmienkach blokády námorných prístavov a cezhraničnej spolupráce v rámci existujúcich spoločných programov. Osobitná pozornosť je venovaná potrebe zavedenia alternatívnych logistických trás pre export poľnohospodárskych produktov z Ukrajiny na Slovensko s využitím kapacít železničnej, cestnej a riečnej dopravy, multimodálnej a intermodálnej lodnej dopravy a vytvorení moderných logistických uzlov. V rámci udržania potravinovej bezpečnosti a podpory ukrajinského poľnohospodárstva sa skúmajú možnosti získania inštitucionálnej pomoci EÚ cez Slovensko. Zdôrazňuje sa potreba ďalšieho rozvoja ukrajinsko-slovenských vzťahov z hľadiska zabezpečenia potravinovej bezpečnosti a podpory agroexportu začlenením ďalších krajín EÚ do logistického reťazca.

Kľúčové slová: riziko, analýza rizík, metodika, údaje

Introduction

Ukraine and Slovakia have a long-standing friendly partnership that has developed under the impact of a range of geopolitical transformations in Europe after the end of the Cold War. Enjoying the common history, geographical proximity, and general complementarity of national economies, Ukrainian-Slovak relations are of pragmatic and balanced nature. The partnership is based on mutual interests in security, economy, and energy. Slovakia and Ukraine are new states, which have been implementing structural and sectoral reforms directed at the creation of public institutions, the introduction of economic development programs, and the implementation of cross-border projects and initiatives in foreign policy since gaining their independencies.

The changes caused by the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and trends in the development of bilateral relations in new institutional and geopolitical conditions have played an essential role in the forming of modern Ukrainian-Slovak relations. They have manifested themselves in the harmonization and modernization of the partnership's legal framework, the development of trade and economic cooperation, the securing of the irreversibility of Ukraine's course toward European integration, and the maintenance of Slovakia's political-diplomatic solidarity and economic support in conditions of Russian military aggression.

The development of diplomatic relations between Ukraine and Slovakia in the context of Russian military aggression shows that Slovakia consistently supports Ukraine and its assistance has political, military, economic, and humanitarian components. Slovakia's support is visible in the issue of territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine manifested in joint statements/declarations of the EU, UN, and OSCE. Slovakia consistently supports Ukraine's aspirations for European

integration. Namely, it actively fostered the signing of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and was among the first to ratify it in September 2014 during its EU Presidency. In 2016, Slovakia supported Ukraine in granting the latter the visa-free regimen and supports further expansion of the free trade area between Ukraine and the EU by facilitating the excess to the European market for Ukrainian export, including agriculture. Taking into account the European Green Deal, Slovak businesses can invest in high-tech agriculture and food production.

With regard to food security maintenance, Slovakia has been actively supporting Ukraine since the beginning of the large-scale Russian aggression on 24 February 2022, including in terms of crop export by road and rail transport and the development of multimodal and intermodal shipping. It has also been promoting the investment activity of agricultural companies in the purchase of elevators and granaries and implementing joint cross-border cooperation projects on the further movement of grain cargo to Danube ports, expansion of international transport network TEN-T to neighboring third countries, cross-border infrastructure development, etc.

These aspects of Ukrainian-Slovak relations and the issues of food security maintenance, including in Russian military aggression, are extensively covered in modern studies of Ukrainian and foreign researchers. Slovak researchers also address the abovementioned problems [1-10].

Taking into account the contemporary challenges and threats, Ukraine and Slovakia have enough resources and opportunities to intensify cooperation in food security maintenance in martial law, develop Ukraine's agricultural export capacity, and improve transport infrastructure between the countries through elaboration and implementation of joint projects under international and bilateral agreements and developed policy measures.

1. Ukraine and Slovakia in food security maintenance

1.1. Food security and agriculture in Ukraine. Agricultural export to Slovakia

Food security is a fundamental human right. It is secured by meeting the need for enough healthy and nutritious food and food preferences good for an active and healthy life. Food security is also achieved due to consistent output, storage, distribution, and processing of agricultural products. It is characterized by the level of income, proper functioning of the agricultural and food market, and the use of food – nutritional value and safety of food.

Each country tries to maintain its food security based on natural and climate conditions, availability of production resources and economic entities, economic conditions for business activity, opportunities for foreign economic activity in case of food shortage, etc. Food self-reliance is among the most essential parameters that show the general economic and social level of the country.

EU countries are active in participating in food security policy directed at the provision of safe and nutritious food produced from healthy plants and animals to EU citizens. The European Union's policy protects each part of the food production process, from cultivation to consumption, by preventing food contamination and promoting food hygiene, food awareness, the health of plants, and the health and wellbeing of animals.

Finding the acceptable level of the country's dependence on food imports from abroad is among the significant political decisions. Meanwhile, food self-reliance is

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consistently controlled. Appropriately selected levels of food security and self-reliance must assure enough main food products for citizens in crisis on global markets.

No country worldwide is completely food self-reliant. Ukraine is among the countries that can produce main food products for its needs and export them to different countries. Ukraine is the fourth largest food exporter to the EU.

According to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, total commodity exports from Ukraine to Slovakia increased by 22.9 % in five years (2017-2021) (Fig. 1). In 2019-2020, exports from Ukraine declined because of the COVID-19 pandemic and introduction of a range of restrictive measures. Commodity exports from Ukraine to Slovakia was the largest in 2021 – \$ 775.9 million, which is 2.2 times more than in 2020.

According to European Commission, in 2021, Slovakia was ranked tenth in commodity exports from Ukraine to the EU countries, while Ukraine's share in extra EU imports to Slovakia was 4.5 % (Fig. 2).

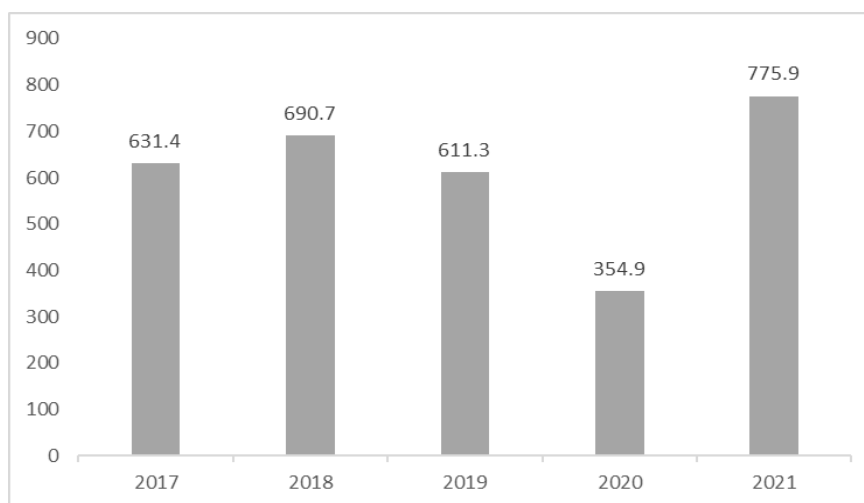


Fig. 1 Commodity exports from Ukraine to Slovakia, 2021, million € [11].

Let's examine the commodity structure of exports of some agricultural and food products from Ukraine to Slovakia (Tab. 1). The largest share in the structure of exports of some agricultural and food products from Ukraine to Slovakia accounts for meat and edible offal (4.01 %) and animal and vegetable fats and oils – 1.88 %. It is worth mentioning that exports of milling industry products from Ukraine to Slovakia increased by 3.2 times in 2021 against 2020, finished grain products – 2.5 times, and cereals – 2.1 times.

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EU imports of goods from Ukraine, 2021

	€ million	% of Ukraine in extra EU imports
Poland	4 188	4.3
Italy	3 288	1.7
Netherlands	2 465	0.7
Germany	2 082	0.5
Hungary	1 955	5.7
Spain	1 528	1.0
Romania	1 341	4.9
Czechia	1 288	2.7
Austria	874	2.0
Slovakia	868	4.5
Bulgaria	836	5.4
France	725	0.4
Belgium	678	0.4
Lithuania	445	3.6
Portugal	297	1.4
Denmark	258	0.8
Latvia	227	4.1
Greece	198	0.6
Slovenia	125	0.6
Estonia	112	2.0
Sweden	92	0.2
Ireland	66	0.1
Finland	59	0.3
Croatia	44	0.6
Cyprus	21	0.7
Luxembourg	13	0.5
Malta	6	0.2

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_st_eu27_2020sitc and DS-018995)



Fig. 2 EU imports of goods from Ukraine, 2021, million € [12].

Tab. 1 Exports of some agricultural and food products from Ukraine to Slovakia, 2021, thous. \$ [13]

Agricultural and food products	Cost	Index, 2021/2020, %	% of the total
Meat and edible offal	40046.2	157.7	4.01
Milk and dairy products, birds' eggs; natural honey	2311.2	129.0	0.23
Other animal products	57.9	34.6	0.01
Vegetables	53.8	22.0	0.01
Edible fruits and nuts	1843.2	137.3	0.18
Cereals	153.1	205.9	0.02
Milling industry products	1579.3	317.0	0.16
Oilseeds and oleaginous fruits	2607.4	144.5	0.26
Animal and vegetable fats and oils	18761.8	201.7	1.88
Finished grain products	1158.9	247.0	0.12
Various food products	584.0	78.3	0.06

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In 2022, the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine impacted the exports from Ukraine to other countries, including the EU and Slovakia. EU countries constitute the largest export direction for Ukrainian companies in 8 months of 2022 (62 %) [13]. Fig. 3 shows Slovakia's position in Ukraine's commodity export. Commodity export from Ukraine to Slovakia declined by 33.9 % in 8 months of 2022 and amounted to 3.66 % or \$ 701 million. Ukraine exported the most to Poland, Italy, and Germany. Growing commodity exports from Ukraine to the EU countries in the 8 months of 2021 and 2022 were boosted by the Free Trade Agreement. Taking into account the fact that meat accounts for the largest share in exports of some agricultural and food products from Ukraine to Slovakia, 3,394 tonnes were realized in 8 months of 2022 [13].

The analysis of agricultural and food exports from Ukraine to the EU countries and Slovakia in the researched period shows that the maintenance of food security directly depends on the cooperation between the countries.

1.2. The role of the EU and Slovakia in support of agriculture in Ukraine and export capacity development

Ukrainian-Slovak cooperation is based on auxiliary institutions like Ukrainian-Slovak Intergovernmental Commission on Cross-Border Cooperation and Ukrainian-Slovak Commission on Economic, Industrial, and Scientific-Technical Cooperation, which also covers food security.

European Union and the international community, including the U.N. World Food Program and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), are trying to protect food security in Ukraine and assure access to the food supply for everyone [14].

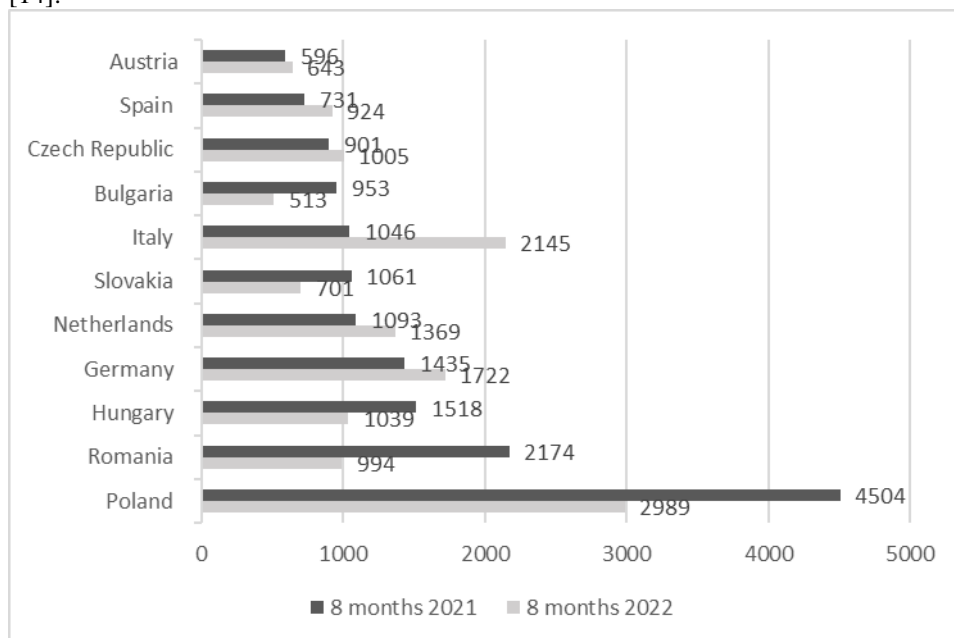


Fig. 3 Commodity exports from Ukraine to the EU countries and Slovakia, 8 months of 2021 and 2022, \$ million [13].

The Prime Minister of Slovakia has urged to guarantee the security of grain exports from Ukraine. European Commission is trying to coordinate exports of millions of tonnes of grain by road and rail transport, although these land corridors cannot replace the volumes that can be shipped by sea [17].

In the spring, Ukraine and Poland signed a memorandum to intensify cooperation in the railway industry, including the foundation of a joint logistics venture [18]. Its major goal will be to increase Ukraine's exports by rail to the EU and other regions worldwide due to European transit, which would secure the increase in agricultural exports abroad. No doubt, grain corridors are very important not only for Ukraine but also for the countries of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, since they are the largest importers of Ukrainian grain.

Grain is transported to Slovakia by rail through the border checkpoint Uzhorod-Matovce. Phytosanitary control of grain was canceled at this border checkpoint in order to increase its railway transportation capacity.

In April 2022, cooperation with businesses, central authorities, and local governments of Slovakia contributed to the implementation of the investment project of Ukraine's agricultural company Grain Alliance – the purchase of granary of 20,000 tonnes of simultaneous storage capacity in Čierna nad Tisou. As of early June 2022, the granary was reconstructed and a grain elevator accessible by Ukrainian trains was launched. In a short time, 70,000 tonnes of grain were overloaded in the elevator [19].

The abovementioned measures taken by the EU countries and Slovakia have secured support for Ukraine's agriculture in terms of its exports and reinforced food security.

2. Perspectives of Ukrainian-Slovak relations in terms of the agricultural export capacity development

2.1. Agricultural export logistics development

Before the large-scale Russian military aggression began, 75% of Ukrainian exports had accounted for seaports [13]. The seaports have been blocked since 24 February 2022. Therefore, the further maintenance of agricultural exports from Ukraine requires new alternative routes to establish logistics chains. Another option is to use road and rail transport and the capacities of the Danube river transport. Slovakia has joined the alternative logistics chains to export agriculture and assure food security.

In our mind, the areas the logistics capacities of Slovakia can be used in terms of Ukraine's agricultural export capacity development are the following:

- *railway infrastructure development – improving the efficiency of two border railway checkpoints with Slovakia. To increase the capacity of border railway checkpoints with Slovakia, new terminals must be constructed, already existing ones must be modernized, mobile staging posts must be created, the number of narrow-gauge trolleys must be increased, more narrow-gauge rolling stock of carriers must be added, and border crossing procedures must be simplified. It is also necessary to subsidize the manufacturing of cars for grain transportation at the largest EU plant in Slovakia to secure continuous transportation of grain by rail transport, reduce the rolling stock shortage,*

and optimize logistics costs. Reconstruction of the border checkpoint “Uzhorod- Vyšné Nemecké” will foster agricultural capacity, namely, a separate line for cargo on the Slovak side should be added. For that matter, the border checkpoint “Solomonovo-Čierna nad Tisou” should be developed and the project on the restoration of standard gauge on the Chop-Uzhorod section should be implemented. To increase railway capacity, stronger involvement of Slovak railway operator ŽSR is necessary;

- *border transport infrastructure improvement and creation of storage capacities for agriculture in the territory of Slovakia close to the Ukrainian border;*
- *construction of new border checkpoints jointly exploited by Ukraine and Slovakia and application of innovative technologies to simplify border and customs control through the introduction of e-services and consolidation of databases on both sides;*
- *an increase of the Danube river ports’ capacity to ship agriculture, creation of a new transport corridor to export agriculture to third countries – from Ukraine by rail to the river port in Bratislava and further by the Danube to Romanian Black Sea Port Constanța, etc.*

2.2. The use of cross-border cooperation

The further development of Ukrainian-Slovak relations in agriculture and implementation of agricultural export capacity is possible under the EU Strategy for the Danube Region that has been covering Ukraine and Slovakia since 2010. The Program is directed at the strengthening of transnational cooperation in the region to overcome imbalances in its socio-economic development and consolidate and coordinate endeavors of all participants to implement joint projects [20].

In this regard, the prospective ways to develop Ukrainian-Slovak cross-border cooperation in agriculture and agricultural export logistics are the following:

- *an increase in the share of sustainable transport like rail and water. Efficient logistics in rail transport must be secured through the improvement of the capacity of western border checkpoints with Slovakia, primarily the change of gauge and modernization and improvement of railroad capacity. The logistics of water transport and its infrastructure should be developed by the extension of the river ports network, the improvement of the efficiency of available capacities in river ports, the increase of water transport capacity, and the increase of capacity, modernization, and development of the Danube region ports, including the modernization of access to them by water and road routes (electrification of sections of railroad tracks to reduce the total cost of logistics and construction of new railroads);*
- *development of multimodal and intermodal freight transportation. It should be realized through the inclusion of ports into multimodal transportation, including in universal containers and in the combination of rail and water transport to ship agriculture and export it, the creation of a multimodal hub based on Danube ports and river terminals to activate freight traffic with Slovakia, the improvement of the technological capacity of multimodal transportation (including the development of freight transport-logistics*

terminals), the maintenance of coordinated functioning of all parts of supply chain using several modes of transport, and the modernization of existing and creation of new logistics multimodal terminals in Zakarpatska oblast with the functioning of integrated transport-logistics centers, customs servicing, and application of modern digital logistics solutions (TMS, YMS, WMS). The essential directions of the development of multimodal and intermodal freight transportation include the construction and arrangement of multimodal terminals on the border with Slovakia with an opportunity to overload automotive vehicles, in particular, to railway platforms for transportation on the 1,520 mm and 1,435 mm gauge;

- *the extension of the international transport network TEN-T to neighboring countries (non-EU members) and the development of cross-border infrastructure. It stipulates the inclusion of domestic water routes of Ukraine into the international transport network TEN-T on the Ukrainian side of the Danube. The implementation of this direction will foster the establishment of a qualitatively new border with Slovakia, strengthen the integration of the national transport network with that of the EU, and expand the list of routes included in the TEN-T. The development of rail and domestic water routes included in the TEN-T indicative maps will promote the increase of competitiveness of transport corridors, the improvement of the quality of infrastructure, and the increase in agricultural exports.*
- *cluster cooperation in agriculture founded on a smart approach to specialization. It can be realized when producing organic agriculture in the Ukrainian part of the Danube region. Zakarpatska oblast has accumulated the valuable experience of transition to organic agriculture. The creation of production-environmental clusters that cover business entities, farms, various agricultural companies and other agricultural entities, and processing companies stipulates the integration aimed at manufacturing of eco-friendly products based on innovative technology.*

Conclusion

The Ukrainian-Slovak relations have been developing under the impact of structural transformations in geopolitics, and in several stages. Both countries face a range of common threats and opportunities related largely to the consequences of the European and transatlantic integration processes and the emergence of new geopolitical alliances in Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian spaces. The geographical proximity of the countries, their historical, cultural, and language similarities, and common national interests and foreign economic benchmarks create preconditions for the future cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia and the use of unrealized capacity.

Ukraine is an essential and strategic trade partner for Slovak companies from the viewpoint of joint borders, market size, and its future consolidation.

Ukrainian-Slovak foreign trade relations are based on close historical trade links. Yet, the share of Ukrainian export in foreign trade with Slovakia accounts for less than 4%. Slovakia is positive toward Ukraine's transformation, strongly supports the European integration vector of the country's development, and provides political,

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economic, security-related, and humanitarian assistance. Slovak's support intensified in Russian military aggression.

The issues related to the development of international relations for Ukraine are very relevant in view of the 2014 events in the context of the protection of national interests. The fact of keeping good neighborly relations between Ukraine and Slovakia currently strengthens stability and security in Central and Eastern Europe. The emergence of new security challenges and threats has activated the cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia regarding the support of agricultural exports.

The research on commodity exports from Ukraine to Slovakia shows positive dynamics. Slovakia imports agriculture from Ukraine, mainly plant and vegetable fats and oils and meat. Significant growth in exports from Ukraine to Slovakia of the milling industry products and finished grain products can be observed. The volumes of commodity exports from Ukraine to Slovakia declined in the period of the large-scale military aggression.

A Russian blockade of seaports in Ukraine and the impossibility to secure sustainable agricultural exports have forced the Governments of the EU countries and Slovakia to develop alternative logistics routes. To assure food security, the ways to ship agriculture by road and rail transport across the Slovakian border have been elaborated, phytosanitary control has been canceled, and import duties have been lifted.

In order to secure further agricultural export logistics, the ways to develop shipping by rail, improve border transport infrastructure, construct new border checkpoints jointly exploited by Ukraine and Slovakia, and increase the Danube river ports capacity are offered. In the framework of the use of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia in terms of agricultural exports logistics and agriculture development, the increase in the share of sustainable transport like rail and domestic water ones, development of multimodal and intermodal freight transportation, expansion of international transport network TEN-T to neighboring countries (non-EU members), development of border infrastructure, and creation of production-environmental clusters growing organic products and exporting it to the EU countries and Slovakia are recommended.

Future relations between Ukraine and Slovakia will be based on a strategic partnership that will secure extended cooperation in agriculture and an increase in exports, contributing to the reinforcement of food security.

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