

PRACTICE AND PERSPECTIVES OF EUROREGIONS IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE GREEK-BULGARIAN-TURKISH CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

Cross-border cooperation is gaining strength in recent decades, both in the EU Member States and around the the Union's external borders in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. It helps to alleviate the shortcomings of national borders, overcome the peripheral status of many border regions and improve the living conditions of the population living in them on both sides.

The role of the Euroregions is of utmost importance for the region of Southeast Europe. the Balkan region, participates formally in a large number of Euroregions. The problem is that they do not function in practice and therefore their existence does not lead to a deeper integration among the participating countries. In this paper the essence of the structure of the Euro-regions, the prerequisites for their appearance and the objectives they pursue, are analyzed, as well as examples of good and bad practices in the region. Opportunities and perspectives of Euroregions in the Bulgarian-Greek-Turkish border region are studied. The main goal of the paper is to analyze the potential spheres of cross-border cooperation in SEE, the barriers before them in the region, as well as the weaknesses and opportunities of cross-border cooperation and Euro-regions in the Greek-Bulgarian-Turkish border area.

Keywords: *Cross-border cooperation, Euroregion(s), Southeast Europe, Bulgaria, Turkey*

1 EUROREGIONS AS PARTS OF THE EUROPEAN CROSS-BORDER LANDSCAPE

The emergence of the Euro-regions derived from the historical development and deepening of European integration in the last century. At the end of 1980 the construction of the single European market and the democratic processes in Central and Eastern Europe opened the national borders, and many border and cross-border regions were established, which in turn focused public attention on the border regions problems. It became clear that they have a peripheral status in many areas of life, which turns them into structurally weak areas with no or low development in terms of infrastructure and economy, and that the EU needed a special policy for the these regions to abolish border problems hindering integration. For this purpose, traditional instruments of EU regional policy were applied, primarily in Southern and Western Europe, in the form of specific regional aid for border areas. They were developed on the basis of strategies or plans for cross-border development and relevant operational programs that are under the umbrella of the big community initiative INTERREG.

The regional and local territorial authorities in border regions responded very rapidly to these favorable conditions. Numerous cross-border regions were established, including at all internal and external borders of the EU, where regional and municipal associations established „Euroregions” or similar structures. The main goal of the EU-funded cross-border cooperation (CBC) was to help to convert the border from a line of separation into a place for communication between neighbours. Other major reasons were to overcome the mutual hostility and prejudices between people in the border regions, which result from historical

heritage, as well as to overcome the national peripherality and isolation. The strengthening of democracy and development of operational regional/ local administrative structures are also products of cross-border cooperation. The ultimate goal is the promotion of economic growth and raising the standard of living in the participating countries. It turned out that strong cooperation on cross-border basis in all areas of people's lives is necessary to compensate for geographical disadvantages of border areas and huge disparities in income and infrastructure, which are evident along the external borders of the EU, but also within countries. Across Europe, the peripheral location of border regions within their own country, and sometimes in Europe, very often leads to imbalances in comparison with the level of economic concentration in central and urban areas. Sometimes such imbalances (e.g. GDP and income) are particularly prominent, as is the case in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe, or at the EU external borders. The growing concentration of labor, services and capital in European industrial centers must be counteracted through coordinated European and national policies, in particular through European spatial development and territorial cohesion policies. It should also be borne in mind that many border regions in Europe are not only separated by a national border, but often by additional geographical factors such as rivers, seas and mountains. Numerous border areas with minorities represent an additional problem. All these factors put brakes to real integration between European countries. At the same time, people on both sides of the border need to create a common historical consciousness and way of thinking.

The practice of the Euro-regions is getting widespread in Central and Eastern Europe after opening of borders in 1989/90, when numerous cross-border initiatives and projects are supported by the EU cross-border programs for Central and Eastern Europe (Phare CBC and TACIS CBC). These border regions, including on the Balkans, learn from EU experience and gradually establish cooperation with neighboring regions on regional/ local and national level.

1.1. Legal basis of cross-border cooperation in Europe

An adequate legal framework and tools are essential for the development and implementation of cross-border cooperation. A variety of legal agreements, including protocols and treaties, are applied in Europe in order to facilitate cross-border activities and to make the establishment of cross-border structures easier. However, the direct participation of cross-border regions, in particular regional and local authorities in the management of cross-border programs still faces a number of restrictions of a legal nature. These obstacles are related to several factors. First, there is no single instrument of public law which is valid throughout Europe and is suitable for cross-border cooperation in general. Cross-border activities and specific programs continue to be governed by bilateral agreements between countries that depend primarily on the political will of the relevant partners.

Multilateral agreements are one of the most important and long-term instruments of cross-border cooperation. First, these are international agreements in the context of regional integration (e.g. the cross-border cooperation agreement between the Nordic countries since 1977). Second, there are agreements concluded under the auspices of international organizations such as the Council of Europe. Multilateral agreements provide for a number of common conditions for intergovernmental agreements at the level of regional/ local authorities but they are limited because they themselves do not provide for a CBC agreement, but simply a framework that must be transferred into national law. Furthermore, there are differences in regional/ local administrative structures and legal systems of the participating countries and often the direct agreements between regional authorities for establishing of permanent collaboration are impossible within the public or private law.

Bilateral and trilateral agreements cover the possibility of cross-border cooperation exclusively between the national authorities, through protocols or agreements. This type of cooperation is carried out within the framework of intergovernmental committees that have different action plans, work in different geographical areas and promote cooperation in other clearly defined areas.

They are also different types of simple agreements for good neighbourhood at the borders, agreements on spatial planning, agreements on strategies for cross-border regional development or interstate agreements on the implementation of the Madrid Convention. Examples of agreements in the field of good neighborly relations, which promote mutual understanding, cooperation, friendship and good neighborhood are those concluded between Poland and all its neighboring countries in the period 1990 - 2000. Other agreements cover specific issues, e.g. disaster prevention and mutual assistance in cases of emergency or severe accidents, the supply of water, employment in the border regions, public health, tourism, etc.

Western European agreements, which led to the establishment of government committees to improve cross-border cooperation, are also evaluated as very effective. Similar examples are those between France and Switzerland signed in 1973, between France, Germany and Switzerland signed in 1975, between France, Germany and Luxembourg signed in 1980, between France and Italy signed in 1981, between France and Spain signed in 1994.

In the 80s and 90s the governments in Central and Eastern Europe often concluded international agreements in the field of regional planning (Austria and Hungary in 1985, Germany and Poland in 1992, Slovakia and Poland in 1994, Slovakia and Hungary in 1995, the Czech Republic and Poland in 1995). These agreements may allow regional authorities to become involved in the cooperation between national authorities. This model is used in federal states where cooperation agreements between different levels of public authorities have made joint cooperation and management of cross-border programs and projects possible. In most cases, regional and local authorities have been given the right to directly conclude international agreements on all the issues that are within their competence, provided that such agreements are in accordance with national legislation. Because of the exclusive state competence in foreign affairs, however, regional and local authorities act under the control of national authorities, which retain the right to veto or approve their actions.

Moreover, states can decide to sign treaties which aim to set common foundations for regional or local cross-border cooperation. The German-Dutch border treaty of 1991 is an example of interstate agreements based on the Madrid Framework Convention, which enable regional and local authorities and certain public bodies to engage in CBC. In the past two decades, there are cases where certain regions participate without national governments, f.e. the agreement between the provinces of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), Rhineland Palatinate (Germany), the German-speaking Community (Belgium) and the region of Wallonia (Belgium). These types of state treaties/ conventions can also include precise rules relating to the management of cooperation programs and are a common tool for CBC in all aspects and stages of a cross-border program - planning, implementation, financing, monitoring.

Agreements at regional and local level are a third variant. Through them working protocols were signed, which led to the formation of working communities in the internal and external borders of the EU, f.e. Communauté de Travail des Alpes Occidentales (COTRAO), ARGE Allp, ARGE Alpen Adria, Communauté de Travail des Pyrénées (CTP), etc.

1.2. Definition and legal basis of the „Euro-region“

The European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (Madrid Convention) that entered into force on 22 December 1981 was the first step towards the establishment of structures for cross-border cooperation based on public law. In order to allow for variations in the legal and constitutional systems of the Member States of the Council of Europe, the Convention defines a set of standard agreements that allow both local and regional authorities and countries to put cross-border cooperation in the most appropriate for their needs frames. It provides a legal framework for the conclusion of bilateral and multinational agreements for cross-border cooperation between regions. Decisions taken based on them are binding only on the public authority in the border region. Countries that have ratified the Framework Convention agree to promote and facilitate cross-border cooperation by removing obstacles to cross-border region.

The Madrid Convention made possible the creation of Euro-regions. Additional Protocols expand the opportunities for European border regions. The most important of them was the established in 2006 EU-level instrument for cross-border (and interregional and transnational) cooperation called European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), which is in the framework of public law. Since its entry into force such groups were established in different parts of Europe, which enabled the implementation of a huge number of partnerships between public authorities, experts, universities, businesses and citizens across borders. Most of the SEE countries in SEE have ratified the Madrid Convention (table).

*Table 1: SEE countries ratified the Madrid Convention as of 29/5/2015
(Council of Europe, European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities CETS No.: 106,*

<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?NT=106&CM=&DF=&CL=ENG>)

SEE member states of the Council of Europe	Signature	Ratification	Entry into force
Albania	7/5/1999	7/11/2001	8/2/2002
Bosnia and Herzegovina	30/4/2004	28/3/2008	29/6/2008
Bulgaria	2/6/1998	7/5/1999	8/8/1999
Croatia	7/5/1999	17/9/2003	18/12/200
Montenegro	10/11/2009	8/12/2010	9/3/2011
Romania	27/2/1996	16/7/2003	17/10/2003
Serbia	29/5/2015		
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia			
Turkey	4/2/1998	11/7/2001	12/10/2001

According to the Council of Europe the term „Regio“ comes from „regere“ (Lat.) that means „to define a line or a boundary“. In ancient Rome „Regio“ (region) is used to distinguish an area, but without regulating it. The region, as such, is not subject to any legislative or governmental institutions. Euroregions and other similar forms of cross-border cooperation do not create new forms of management of cross-border level. They do not have political powers and their work is limited to the powers of local and regional authorities who participate in them. In the framework of cooperation Euroregions represent arrangements for cooperation between units of local or regional government across the border in order to promote common interests and enhance the living standards of the population on both sides of the border.

In a joint document¹ the European Commission and the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) set the criteria for determining a cross-border structure as Euroregion:

- Association of local and regional authorities on both sides of the national border, sometimes with a parliamentary assembly;
- Cross-border cooperation with a permanent secretariat and a technical and administrative team with own resources;
- If legally private Euroregion - based on non-profit partnerships or associations from either side of the border and in accordance with the national legislation in force;
- If legally public Euroregion - based on intergovernmental agreements and with the participation of territorial authorities.

This definition is argued by Perkmann that considers it too narrow and limiting, because in some cases third organisations, such as regional development agencies, interest associations and chambers of commerce have become official members of the Euro-regions. Thus, he proposes the term 'Euroregion' to refer to CBC groupings that operate on a smaller geographical scale regardless of their precise organisational set-up or the nature of the participating actors (Perkmann, 2003).

There are different terms for the category "Euroregion" - "Euregio", "Euregion", "Euroregion", "Europaregion", "Grand Region", "Regio", "Council". In some cases the term "Euroregion" is not used at all. The terms "Regio" and "Euro-regions" are also used for national border partnerships established by municipalities and districts.

In terms of legal status a Euroregion can take various forms, such as a community of common interests that is not a legal entity - the European Grouping of Economic Interest, a non-profit community, a community without legal personality or a public body. Euroregions do not create a new type of government at cross-border level and do not have political powers, so that their work is limited to the powers of local and regional authorities that constitute them. In the EU the various structures for cross-border cooperation are adjusted on the basis of existing legal possibilities provided by EU legislation, the legal framework of the Council of Europe, bilateral agreements and national legislation.

The content of the CBC within the Euroregions is defined as „cooperation in all areas of life“ - work, leisure, culture and others (European Commission and AEBR, 2000). It is highlighted that equal emphasis should be put on social-cultural cooperation, as well as on cooperation in economy and infrastructure. Cooperation is realized in the form of advice, assistance and coordination of cross-border cooperation, particularly in the following areas: economic development; tourism and recreation; transport and traffic; agricultural development; regional development; innovation and technology transfer; environmental protection; education; conservation; social cooperation; culture and sport; emergency services and health issues; disaster prevention; energy; communications; waste management; public security.

It could be concluded that CBC is realized in various forms, but the status of a „Euroregion“ gives big freedom of the participating parties in the border regions for various initiatives and opportunities. The first Euroregion (EUREGIO) was established in 1958 on the Dutch-German border, in the area of Enschede (Netherlands) and Gronau (Germany). Since then, Euroregions and other forms of CBC have been developing throughout Europe.

¹ Practical Guide to Cross-border Cooperation Third Edition 2000, Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), European Commission, 2000.

1.3. EU as the major driver of cross-border cooperation in SEE

It seems that the European Union, through its regional and neighbourhood policies within its territory and along its external borders, plays a crucial role in the development of cross-border cooperation in the subregion of SEE. This support is implemented through the instruments of the European territorial cooperation (ETC², which are represented by three types of programs: cross-border cooperation (CBC), transnational and inter-regional.

The main goals of the CBC programs are threefold: to reduce the negative effects of the presence of borders and barriers between countries - administrative, legal and physical; to seek solutions to common problems, and to utilize the available unrealized potential. The programs include a wide range of areas, including fostering entrepreneurship, especially the development of SMEs, tourism, culture and cross-border trade; improving the management of natural resources; improving access to transport and communication networks and others.

The integration in the European Union is the major political objective of the countries in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosna and Herzegovina, FYROM, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia) and it represents their strategic path that they have taken, while their integration with their neighbouring countries in the Balkans is just a subproduct. The reason is that regional cooperation is an EU condition for further integration in the Union (Moraliyska, 2015). Because of this, it seems that cross-border cooperation in SEE is imposed by the outside (by the EU), following the top-down approach, instead of being developed as a result of awareness of local actors of its necessity and potential benefits. This is the reason why the European neighbourhood policy in general are subject to criticism by scholars, who claim that throughout it the Union tries to replicate the integration model that it applies within its borders. It is even considered that this policy's ultimate goal is coherent with the strategy that of Europeanization, which the EU is pursuing both within and beyond its borders.

The CBC initiatives at the EU's external border, in the pre-accession countries in particular, has always been a means of transferring, to the EU's external partners, the institutional management model adopted within the EU (Celata, Coletti, 2012). The ENPI CBC tries to replicate this strategy in neighbouring countries, through promotion of „soft“ cooperation, multi-level governance and regionalism by which the EU reshapes its internal political space. It could be said therefore that through the ENP, the “EU was primarily concerned with itself” (Del Sarto and Schumacher, 2005). This is why, the European Union is strongly criticized and accused of applying a uniformed approach to regions inside and outside it, despite their differences. Namely the European Commission's motto is claimed to be “our size fits all” (Bicchi, 2006), due to the so called inherent eurocentrism, as well as deep belief of the European Union that its model can be applied to solve policy problems elsewhere in the same manner as within the Union itself. This is how the EU intends to create a zone of extended governance around its borders and thus, export its legislation to European non-members.

On the other hand, the EU support is an important factor for the CBC development. It is not only financial but also technical and methodological. The CBC programs for the previous and present program period set the priority spheres, in which cooperation is not only recommended but necessary for efficient solving of the problems in the cross-border region.

² For the period 2014 - 2020 the amount of funds that the EU has prepared for territorial cooperation totals € 8,948,259,330, representing 2.75% of all funds for cohesion policy in the new programming period. They will be distributed as follows: 74.05% (a total of € 6,626,631,760) for cross-border cooperation; 20.36% (or a total of € 1,821,627,570) for transnational cooperation; 5.59% (or a total of € 500 million) for interregional cooperation.

2 EUROREGIONS IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Cross-border cooperation at the external borders of the EU with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean is characterized by a strong will to be intensified through informal contacts and organizations, although nation-states still play a dominant role in it (European Commission and AEBR, 2000). In these countries, cross-border cooperation in the past was absent for political reasons, but after the changes a continuous progress was made, with numerous Euroregions and other forms of CBC established at the EU borders with the Baltic States, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary and Bulgaria. The border regions of these countries, including the SEE countries face similar economic challenges (asymmetric industries and economies, differences in wages, lack of infrastructure, environmental problems, etc). It is also important that conflicts between or within neighbouring countries hinder CBC (f.e. the areas around Albania, FYROM or Russia).

The European parliament underlines that the Euroregions and similar structures are important instruments of CBC that nonetheless have to be further developed and improved and that they should have certain legal status. It also considers that cross-border cooperation is of fundamental importance to European cohesion and integration, and must therefore be given wide support. The European parliament admits that the ultimate aim of Euroregions is to promote cross-border co-operation between border regions or local entities, and regional authorities as well as social partners and all other actors that do not necessarily have to be Member States of the EU, on aspects such as culture, education, tourism and economic issues and any other aspect of daily life and calls on Member States to promote the use of Euroregions as one of the tools of cross-border cooperation (European parliament, 2005).

According to the Council of Europe Euroregions and similar structures are an important and successful element in cross-border cooperation, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. They need to be strengthened through joint bodies (not national delegations), general secretariats and financial resources (Council of Europe, 2009).

However, the evaluation of Euroregions' contribution to successful crossborder cooperation has different interpretations among the EU institutions and different scholars. An empirical study³ in Central and North Europe concludes that local governments do not establish or join Euroregions primarily due to policy concerns or to solve policy needs, but are mostly driven by a normative dimension of identity, sometimes in conjunction with the instrumental motivation to access funds (Svensson, 2013). However, Euroregions for which instrumental grant-seeking played an important role are less likely to create trust-based networks beneficial for the Euroregion's good performance. Short-time boosting of CBC intensity through external grants without access to the underlying resource of social capital is risky and puts into danger its future existence and efficiency. That's why inter-municipal cooperation is an important resource not only at the time of the Euro-region's establishment but in its operation.

2.1. Number and location

In 2013 the Association of European Border Regions identified 185 border and crossborder regions in Europe. A lot of Euroregions have been established in the Balkans, these with the participation of the EU Member States prevailing (figure).

³ The survey is a part of the dissertation of Sarah Svensson and relies on an dataset of 200 interviews, 138 of which with political representatives (mayors) and organizational representatives (Chairs and Managers) of six Euroregions located along three national borders (Hungary/Slovakia, Sweden/Norway and Austria/Germany).



Figure 1: Cross-border regions and Euro-regions in SEE (Association of European Border Regions, Cross-border co-operation in Europe, http://www.aebr.eu/en/members/map_of_members.php)

The most numerous are the Euroregions at the Bulgarian-Greek border. Greece has established several of them also with Albania and Turkey. Numerous are also the Euroregions founded at the border region between Bulgaria and Romania. In general the countries from the Western Balkans participate in one or two Euroregions. Macedonia and Serbia can benefit much from the creation of Euro-regions as they are countries bordering with two EU member states - Macedonia with Greece and Bulgaria, and Serbia - with Bulgaria and Romania. There are also Euroregions in the border regions of three countries, for example between Greece, Macedonia and Bulgaria or Greece, Albania and Macedonia.

Table 2: Cross-border regions and Euro-regions in SEE (Association of European Border Regions, Cross-border co-operation in Europe, http://www.aebr.eu/en/members/map_of_members.php)

# on Fig. 1	Name of region	Participating countries
124	Euroregion DKMT*	Hungary - Romania - Serbia
125	Euroregion Drina-Sava-Majevisa	Bosna and Herzegovina-Croatia-Serbia
126	Euroregion Danube-Drava-Sava	Bosna and Herzegovina-Croatia-Hungary
128	Euroregion Middle Danube-Iron Gates+Euroregion Danube 21	Bulgaria - Romania - Serbia
129	Euroregion Nishava**	Bulgaria - Serbia
130	Euroregion Danube-South	Bulgaria - Romania
131	Euroregion Rousse-Giurgiu	Bulgaria - Romania
132	Euroregion Danubius***	Bulgaria - Romania
133	Inferior Danube Euroregion	Bulgaria - Romania
137	Euroregion Stara Planina	Bulgaria - Serbia
171	Puglia-Ionian Islands-Epyros-Albania	Italy - Greece - Albania
172	Epyros - South Albania	Greece - Albania
173	West Macedonia - Albania - FYROM	Greece - Albania - Macedonia
174	Central Macedonia	Greece - Macedonia - Bulgaria
175	Euroregion Belasica	Bulgaria - Greece - Macedonia
176	Euroregion Morava-Pcinija-Struma	Bulgaria - Macedonia - Serbia
177	Euroregion Strymon - Strouma	Greece - Bulgaria
178	Euroregion Nestos-Mesta****	Bulgaria - Greece
179	Euroregion Rhodopi*****	Bulgaria - Greece
179a	Euroregion A. o. Rhodope Municipality	Bulgaria
180	East Macedonia - Thrace	Greece
181	Euroregion Polis-TrakiaKent-RAM Trakia	Greece - Turkey - Bulgaria

* <http://www.dkmt.net/>; ** <http://www.euregionisava.org/>; *** <http://www.cjgiurgiu.ro/>;
**** <http://www.euroregion.gr/>; ***** <http://www.nestos.gr/>

It can be seen that similarly to Western and even Central and Eastern European countries, the Balkan countries participate formally in a large number of Euro-regions as well. However, a quick search of their activities and work in internet shows that as early as their foundation, a big majority of them do not function in real and therefore their existence does not lead to a further trans-border and regional integration of the participating countries.

2.2. Successful and unsuccessful practices in SEE

Other important and not listed by EABR Euroregions are the Adriatic Euroregion and Euroregion „Evrobalkani“, which are presented below as examples of a well-functioning and a non-functioning Euroregion.

The Adriatic Euroregion was founded on June 30, 2006 in Pula, Croatia and it is a model of transnational and interregional cooperation between the regions situated on the Adriatic coast. It is the institutional framework for discussion and co-decision in important issues in the Adriatic geographical area. The Euroregion has 26 members - regional and local authorities from Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania (Fig. 1).

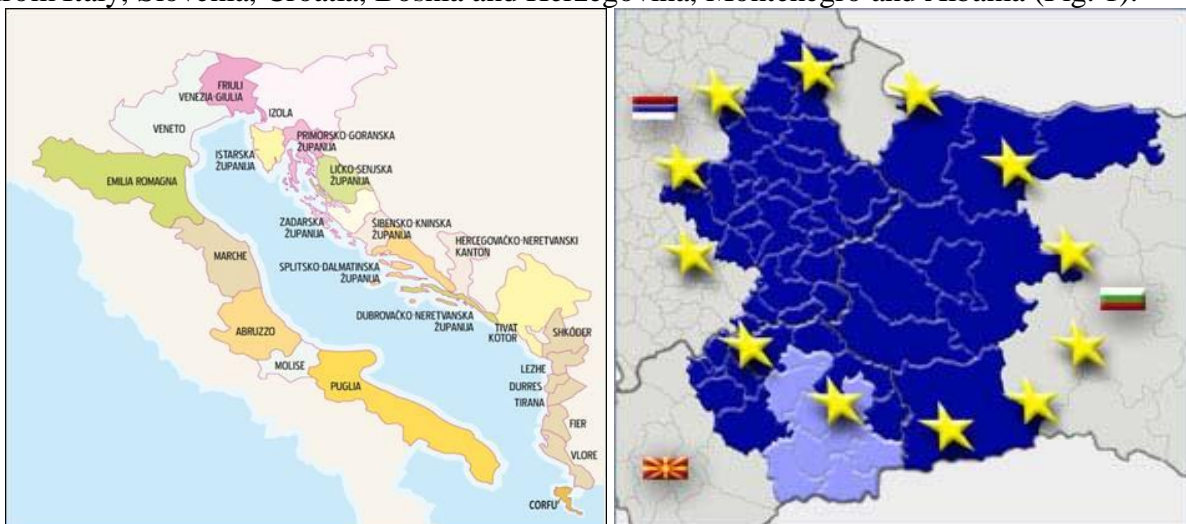


Figure 2: Maps of the Adriatic Euroregion and Euroregion "Eurobalkans"

(Adriatic Euroregion, <http://www.adriaticionianeuroregion.eu/>; Eurobalkans Euroregion, <http://www.eurobalkans.net/enstrane/introduction.htm>)

The objectives of the Adriatic Euroregion are associated with the formation of an area of peace, stability and cooperation, protection of cultural heritage, environmental protection, sustainable economic development in particular in tourism, fishing and agriculture, problem-solving in transport and infrastructure and others.

The Adriatic Euroregion is an example of a well-structured and actively functioning Euroregion. It employs seven technical committees - Culture and Tourism, Fisheries, Transport and Infrastructure, Environment, Economic Affairs, Welfare committee and Institutional affair Committee. Each of them has its own annual work program, which is presented by the chairman or deputy chairman. The purpose of the meetings and committee work is the creation of joint initiatives in the Adriatic-Ionian region through the presentation of common project proposals strategically important for the Euroregion as a whole.

For example, the objectives of the Committee on Economic Affairs include more than supporting cooperation projects of the Adriatic region and its partners. An important objective of the Commission is to promote the exchange of experience and best practices in economic matters between the participants in the region (by organizing events, seminars, workshops on specific topics), to hold discussions and ultimately to achieve a common position to be presented and defended at all government levels. Another major task of the Euroregion is to represent the economic interests of its members before the European institutions and the various organizations at national and international level. It also makes a monitoring of the current events of the EU institutions related to the economy and inform its members about their development. As a whole, the Euroregion is very successful in gaining different types of EU funding for its numerous projects and activities.

The Euroregion "Evrobalkani" is an example of a good idea for cross-border cooperation in the heart of the Balkans that left without practical implementation. It was established on 26 October 2002, when 66 mayors signed a protocol establishing a new Euroregion in the border region between Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia (66 municipalities are included - 38 from Serbia, 15 from Macedonia and 13 from Bulgaria (fig.)).

The initiative came from outside, as the Council of Europe wanted to start a long-term process to promote cooperation between the border regions of Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia. The overall objective is to use intensive cross-border cooperation as a tool for regional economic development and integration, and to promote better conditions for prosperity, security and peaceful coexistence between the neighboring countries. Emphasis is placed on the following topics: policies for regional development and cross-border regional development strategies; private sector development; capacity building at the local level, including civil society; education, training, youth and cultural cooperation.

The main purpose of the working group "Regional Economic Development" is to provide institutionalized cross-border framework for leadership in regional economic development, which is capable of identifying and promoting the priority needs of the participants in the Euroregion. It should also help to create a cross-functional and cross-border networks to promote business and economic development by allowing the establishment of contacts and connections that lead to the creation of joint ventures and public-private partnerships. In addition, the working group is also expected to systematize and identify barriers to cross-border cooperation in the field of economic development, and to develop a set of recommendations for the three national governments. It should also be a forum for exchange of best practices in several areas, thus helping to bring the region in line with the standards and norms of the EU and placing the region in a favorable position in terms of cross-border funding of the EU in parallel with the process of European integration of these countries.

Another goal that also remained only in the field of good wishes was the working group to prepare a set of proposals for specific projects and initiatives for cooperation that are more attractive for funding and submit them to international forums for finding investors/donors. However, despite its good intentions, the Euroregion in practice does not operate. This could be a result of the failure of the top-bottom approach in regional integration, or due to the lack of activity on behalf of the participating countries. Today, the three countries demonstrate eagerness to cooperate in border regions, but it seems that they are still searching for the most suitable legal framework to shape it. This is why, the format of Euro-region should be once more time revised in the region.

2.3. Barriers to Euro-regions in Southeast Europe

The European Association of border regions has identified several priority measures for collective action at regional, national and European level aimed at improving the economic development in border and cross-border areas. One of the key areas is promoting the development of SMEs in the CBC, and another is the improvement of entrepreneurial innovation and competitiveness by CBC. Others include cross-border labor markets and staff training, as well as improving services by CBC. CBC can also be efficiently developed in the spheres of cross-border environment protection, tourism services, agriculture and cultural heritage preservation and cooperation (European Association of border regions, 2011).

These priority areas are in a direct connection with the border regions' practical problems. Besides that there are additional, specific issues. For example, border regions in general are extremely vulnerable to demographic change and migration, which is particularly evident in border areas in SEE. They have to contend with a shortage of alternative and high-quality jobs and their inhabitants are facing many problems when they start working in the neighboring country. Businesses in border areas in SEE lack sufficient information about the market and export opportunities and have limited opportunities to exploit the competitive conditions in the neighboring country and their access to public procurement in it is often limited.

In general problems of border regions are amplified by differences between neighboring countries that do not allow a joint solution to the problems, such as: different administrative structures and competences; different fiscal and social legislation; the fact that it is difficult to establish cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises which do not have cross-border providers and commercial markets; various laws on spatial planning; differences in environmental legislation; unresolved border issues; exchange rate differences; various transport systems; diverging labor markets, wage structures and social systems; risk of loss of security by opening the border; increasing cross-border tourism in conflict with conservation and environmental protection; difficulties in cross-border vocational training, which hinders the creation of cross-border labor market; prejudices, stereotypes and insufficient empathy and understanding of the characteristics of neighboring countries and others.

An empirical study⁴ of conditions for cross-border cooperation in the Bulgaria-Greece-Turkey border area identifies the main barriers and obstacles to international territorial cooperation (ITC). It shows that a range of factors seem to hinder the active involvement of the local governments in cross-border cooperation, among which are the lack of knowledge about the possibilities of ITC projects, potential partners, administrative procedures, as well as complicated and highly demanding EU regulations and lack of co-financing (fig.).

⁴ Part of the TERCO: Final Report – Scientific Report. December 2012. Case Study on Greece-Bulgaria-Turkey, conducted by the Department of Planning and Regional Development in the University of Thessaly (Greece) and covering all the municipalities in the Greece-Bulgaria-Turkey border region. The empirical work includes standardized questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire was sent by email to all municipalities and 79 questionnaires were collected in the period July-November 2011 (44 from the Greek, 25 from the Turkish and 10 from the Bulgarian part of the cross-border region). In the period August-November 2011 28 in-depth interviews (via face-to-face meetings and phone calls) were carried out (13 in Greece, 6 in Bulgaria and 9 in Turkey). Out of them 11 were conducted in municipalities, 5 in NGOs, 4 in universities and 8 in other agencies.

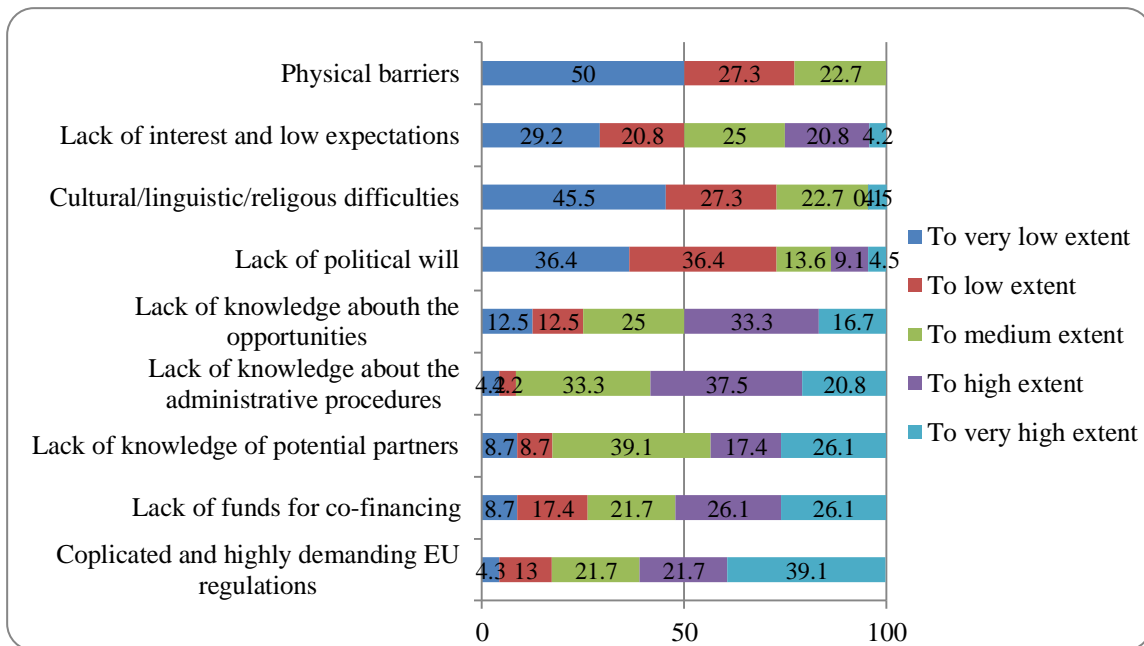


Figure 3: Barriers to ITC in the Greece-Bulgaria-Turkey border area

(TERCO: Final Report – Scientific Report Part II. December 2012. [434]. 2.6 Case Study on Greece – Bulgaria – Turkey. DPRD, University of Thessaly)

However, these responses represent only a small proportion of all and indicate that there is still a potential for improvement and removal of the aforementioned barriers. On the other hand, this empirical evidence suggests that there is a fertile ground for the development of further cross-border cooperation on the basis of political will, very low physical, cultural and linguistic barriers, and a sense of high expectations. Something more – cross-border projects are perceived as a good opportunity to establish relationships with the foreign actors and facilitate the communication between the local stakeholders. The setting up of networks is considered as an efficient tool that can bring forward new ideas, promote entrepreneurship, stimulate sustainable social and economic development, and motivate local stakeholders for innovative actions (DPRD, University of Thessaly, 2012).

The study also shows that according to the border actors the physical barriers do not constitute an obstacle for cross-border cooperation, as the contemporary information and communication technologies, as well as project partners’ meetings overcome such kind of technical obstacles. On the contrary, they present good opportunities for further cooperation in fields related to this physical particularity, f.e. a joint management plan for fisheries in the broader river basins. For the Bulgarian part of the cross-border region, language is considered as an important obstacle for successful cooperation, while for the Turkish and Greek part these are visa restrictions as well as the lack of skilled staff, and the lack of skilled staff in local governments, respectively.

Another important case study conclusions indicate that the majority of municipalities consider the demand for development and growth of the regions involved as a principal reason for their participation in cross-border activities, as well as their peripheral location. The common perception that the CBC influences the improvement in the standard of living, the decrease in unemployment and the creation of incentives for local entrepreneurship is also a major driver.

Environment, tourism and culture seem to be the most important areas of cross-border cooperation and the municipalities acknowledge the contribution of EU-funded cross-border cooperation in preserving the natural environment, enhancing local economies and improving the cultural and social aspect of the region. The Bulgarian municipalities also stress the positive impact of environmental and sports projects on other domains, f.e. forests protection or sporting activities can create attractive settings for tourism and leisure. However, the main focus of the cross-border cooperation programs by now has been focused on the development and entrepreneurship in the broader area, business cooperation and innovation, water management, increase of alternative tourism, and enhancement of common cultural heritage through the promotion of archaeological monuments.

In general Euroregions in SEE and in particular in the Bulgarian-Turkish-Greek border region are considered by the local authorities as necessary to meet the need for development and improvement of the cross-border relations between the three countries and shape a “culture of cooperation” among players on the different sides of the cross-border area. The activation and operation of these Euroregions is seen by the majority of interviewees as a comparative advantage that facilitates international territorial cooperation initiatives in the area. Promotional activities involving info days, friendly user websites, and personnel meetings could substantially facilitate the CBC as well and offer opportunities to acquire a better picture of potential partners in the border area in terms of skills, experience and competencies.

3 BULGARIAN-GREEK-TURKISH CBC AND EUROREGIONS

3.1. Characteristics of the Bulgarian-Greek-Turkish cross-border region

The Bulgarian-Greek-Turkish cross-border region consists of 7 Greek NUTS3 regions - Evros, Xanthi, Rodopi, Drama, Kavala, Thessaloniki and Serres, 4 Bulgarian NUTS3 regions - Blagoevgrad, Haskovo, Smolyan and Kardzhali and 3 Turkish NUTS3 regions - Tekirdağ, Edirne and Kirklareli. It covers 58.933 km², 37% of which are Greek territory, 31% Bulgarian and 32% Turkish territory. Its population is around of 4,3 mio inhabitants (2009), of whom 45% are Greeks, 20% are Bulgarians and 35% are Turks.

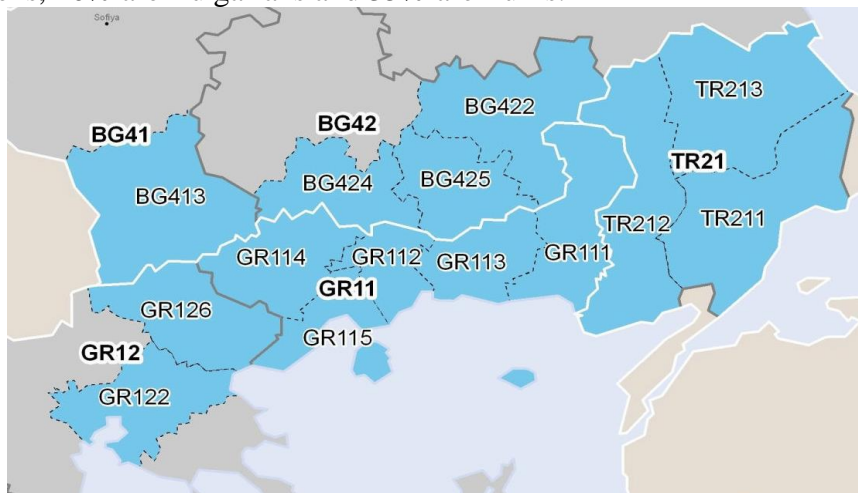


Figure 4: Bulgarian-Greek-Turkish cross-border region

(TERCO: Final Report – Scientific Report Part II. December 2012. [434]. 2.6 Case Study on Greece – Bulgaria – Turkey. DPRD, University of Thessaly)

The cross-border region has rich nature including mountains (Rila, Pirin, Rhodope and Strandzha), big rivers (Nestos (Mesta), Strymon (Struma), Evros (Maritsa), Ardas (Arda) and Tundzha (the last two being tributaries of Evros)) and plenty of lakes. On its territory there are some fragile ecosystems and Natura 2000 sites, biogenetic reserves and others, which

make the area very ecologically sensitive. The transport infrastructure of the area is comparatively developed (3 international airports -Thessaloniki, Kavala and Alexandroupoli in Greece, one domestic airport (Tekirdağ in Turkey) and 4 ports (Thessaloniki, Kavala and Alexandroupoli in Greece and Tekirdağ in Turkey, as well as railway connections), as well as the social infrastructure (f.e. there are 11 universities and colleges in the studied area).

In 2008 the GVA of all the goods and services produced in the cross-border area accounts for approximately €45 bln, 67.9% of which is produced in the Greek part, 27.1% in the Turkish part and 5% in the Bulgarian part. The GVA per capita in the Greek, Bulgarian and Turkish part are €13,507, €3,864 and €8,356 per inhabitant, respectively. 10.7% of all production was produced by the primary sector, 25.6% by the secondary sector and 63.4% by the tertiary sector. However, in 2008 25% of the employed people in the cross-border area were in the primary sector, 24.5% in the secondary sector and 50.5% in the tertiary sector. The primary sector absorbs a big part of the labor force in the Bulgarian area (30%), the secondary sector absorbs one third of the labor force in the Turkish area (33%) and the tertiary sector absorbs 58.4% of the labor force in the Greek area (DPRD, University of Thessaly, 2012).

The people's mobility across border checkpoints is an indication for the intensity of cross-border interaction. Mobility across the Turkish checkpoints exhibited a remarkable increase in the '00s - the number of people arriving increased from 1,816,039 (2000) to 3,547,929 (2010), while the people departing increased from 1,769,675 (2000) to 3,516,045 (2010). Out of the total number of people that pass through the border checkpoints in the Turkish part of the cross-border area the majority were Bulgarians (18% in 2000, 33% in 2010). While the Greek were 8% in 2000 and 13% in 2010. (DPRD, University of Thessaly, 2012).

3.2. Characteristics of the Bulgarian-Turkish cross-border region

The border region between Bulgaria and Turkey has to be studied separately as it covers different areas in comparison to these included in the trilateral Greek-Bulgarian-Turkish CBC. It includes the districts of Bourgas, Yambol and Haskovo in Bulgaria and the provinces of Edirne and Kirklareli in Turkey. The overall area is about 29.000 km² representing 14.99% of the Bulgarian territory and 1.58% of the Turkish territory. The total population is 1,5 mio people - 784.480 in the Bulgarian and 742.000 in the Turkish part (IPA CBC Bulgaria-Turkey Programme 2014-2020). The border line between Bulgaria and Turkey is 288 km long with three check points: Malko Tarnovo-Dereköy, Svilengrad-Kapıkule and Lesovo-Hamzabeyli.

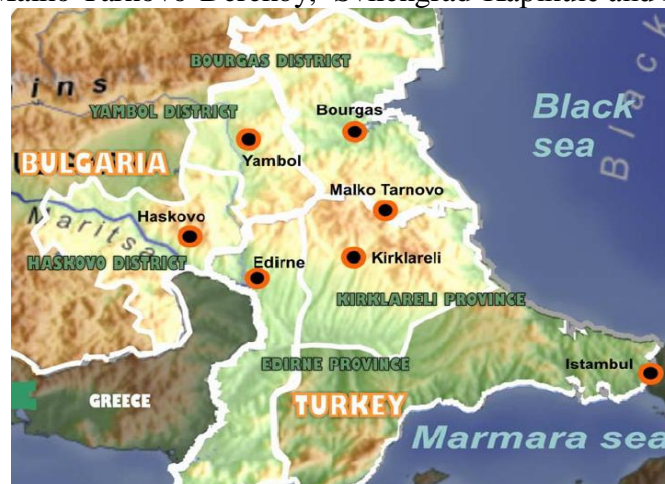


Figure 5: The CBC region between Bulgaria and Turkey (IPA CBC Programme between Bulgaria and Turkey)

Kırklareli and Bourgas are the two most developed areas in the border area between Turkey and Bulgaria. Bourgas is one of the most industrialized districts in Bulgaria, with developed industrial sectors such as chemical and petrochemical industry and petroleum refining, electric and thermoenergy, textile, shipbuilding, metallurgy, transport and machine construction industry, food, wine and tobacco industry, textile industry, mining industry, wood product industry. The Bourgas region is an important entry point to/from Bulgaria, including the Bourgas Port complex, oil and fishing ports, the ports of Sozopol, Nessebar and Tsarevo, Bourgas Airport including a cargo terminal, a triple railway and extended railway stations and major auto-traffic enterprises in Bourgas and Karnobat. In the Elhovo municipality there are mechanical and food industries, while Bolyarovo's main economic activity is agriculture. The region is also famous for its orchids, vineyards and for the cultivation of wheat; in the western part, in Haskovo, the cultivation of tobacco is dominant.

The Turkish population in the Marmara region is employed in industry, commerce, tourism and agriculture. The economy in Kırklareli is mainly rural, however, in the past few years industry has developed at a fast pace. The industrial goods produced in this region are food, textiles, clothing, cement and paper. Agriculture is especially developed in the cultivation of sunflowers, wheat, fruit and vegetables.

Agriculture has been among the leading economic sectors in the Bulgarian-Turkish border region, although tourism is a main source for Kırklareli and Bourgas (more developed in the latter). The level of tourism infrastructure for tourism is low in Kırklareli but its natural beauty offers possibilities for sea and cultural tourism. The proximity to the centres of Istanbul (Turkey) and Bourgas (Bulgaria) and the corridor linking Europe to the Middle-East are further points of strength for this area (CBC Programme, 2014).

3.3. The case study of Evros-Meric-Maritsa Euroregion

The case of Evros-Meris-Maritsa Euroregion is an example of a well-structured Euro-region in SEE. It covers the border region between three countries – Bulgaria (EU member since 2007), Greece (EU member since 1981) and Turkey (EU candidate status). It was founded in 2001 as a non-profit association with the aim to develop the relations between the border areas of these three countries. Initially the chairmen of the two Border Unions – Alliance for border initiatives “Maritza” (Bulgaria) and the Union of the border region “Evros” (Greece) signed an agreement for the establishment of the Euroregion “Maritza – Evros”, and later the members of the Border union of the Republic of Turkey “Merich” joined it.



Figure 6: The Evros-Maritza-Meric Euro-region (Turlay, 2011, p. 20)

The Euroregion includes four provinces - Haskovo and Kardzhali (Bulgaria), Evros (Greece) and Edirne (Turkey), and covers a territory of approximately 19000 km² with population of around 950 000 citizens. The eligible area in Bulgaria represents 66% of total cross-border cooperation (CBC) territory respectively the eligible area in Turkey represents 28% and 6% in Greece. In general, the including areas have common history and culture, which dates back to the Ottoman Empire, but the spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding is comparatively new and developed as soon as Bulgaria and Turkey EU integration (Bulgaria's membership and EU-Turkey's launch of negotiations in 2005), which gave them an impetus to leave historical and political misunderstandings and promote economic integration with the aim to fight against regional undevelopment caused by "border-line isolation" (www.maritza.info). It is governed by a joint office of the three presidents from the three border unions, while its executive body of the Euroregion is the Joint Executive Secretary Office with offices in Haskovo (Bulgaria), Petrolia (Greece) and Edirne (Turkey).

The goal of the members of the three border regions is to implement cooperation between the three countries at all levels and enhance the role of the crossborder cooperation as a tool of practical implementation of the four fundamental principles of the EU – free movement of goods, people, capital and technological know-how (Regional Municipalities Association „Maritza“, 1997). The activities, planned in the framework of the cross-border cooperation aim at further developing and improving the cultural, social, trade and economic relations between the three members of the Cross-border Union through implementation of joint Programs, regarding the present borders and the national sovereignty, as well as the administrative and economic autonomy of the three countries.

3.4. The case study of Euroregion Polis-TrakiaKent-RAM Trakia

In May 2012 the association Euroregion Polis-TrakiaKent-RAM Trakia was established including the regional societies of the Thracian municipalities - Polis (Greece), TrakiaKent (Turkey) and the regional association of municipalities Trakia (Bulgaria). It is the result of the cooperation agreements in the spheres of local government, economy, social politics, culture, ecology and agriculture, and is a different type of instrument for achieving the goal of „Thrace with no borders“.

This Euro-region has not still developed in terms of conception, structure or activities. The reasons for this are different – on one hand, the historical heritage reinforces the division of Thrace by means of political border. Different institutions and organizations in the Bulgarian public space claim that forming such an Euro-region would mean surrendering of Bulgarian national territory to the Turkish country under EU auspices. This misunderstanding of the essence of the Euro-region as an instrument of CBC forms a type of propaganda and negative attitude in Bulgaria towards collaboration in the border area. Within this framework, Thrace with no borders remains an intellectual idea and a utopia (Ganeva-Raycheva, 2012). However, the political will of the three countries is that the Trakia Euroregion could be realised and Thrace would be able to build up its own identity and turn into an economical source of power.

3.5. Barriers and opportunities to Euroregions in Bulgarian-Greek-Turkish border area

3.5.1. Barriers

The Cross-Border Cooperation Programme between Bulgaria and Turkey financed by the European territorial cooperation program clearly identifies the weaknesses in the border region between Bulgaria and Turkey. One of them is connected with the migration of

qualified work force to big cities, as well as the concentration of economic activities in cities. As border regions, there is a typical low level of foreign investment. In addition to that the productivity of the traditional agricultural sector is low due to lack of modern farming techniques. Meanwhile, the natural resources not yet recognized as a potential source of income (except for in Bourgas region). There is insufficient experience and infrastructures in the tourism sector, while historical monuments and archaeological sites on both sides of the border are not adequately maintained and sometimes abandoned. The environmental issue is also of great significance - diminishing water resources due to industrialization is evident and the cross-border rivers Maritca/Meric, Arda and Tundja are very polluted and unfit for irrigation. As a whole, there is an insufficient overall environmental monitoring and lack of joint plans and initiatives for environment protection and disaster management.

A classification of key obstacles and chances for cross-border cooperation in the cross-border region between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey distinguishes them into three groups – political, economic and cultural (table 3).

Table 3: Barriers for and driving forces behind Bulgarian-Greek-Turkish CBC (Jönsson, Tägil & Törnqvist 2000; IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Turkey 2007; European Territorial Cooperation Programme Greece-Bulgaria 2007)

Indicator	Barriers	Driving forces
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different political regimes and experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulgarian full EU membership and Turkey's candidate country status
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corruption (particularly thriving on Bulgarian and Greek side); • Abandonment of traditional activities i.e. agriculture; • Lack of knowledge-based workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available synergies
Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural mistrust; • Oral and written communication problems (different languages) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common history and culture; • Cultural exchange through various networks e.g. twinning of municipalities of Kardzhali (Bulgaria) and Komotini (Greece)
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visa regimes; • Inefficient road infrastructure in the Bulgarian area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighboring location; • Strategic location within the international network (corridors 4 and 9)

The political barriers are connected with the countries' political specifics. The EU accession of Bulgaria in 2007 has enhanced a wide range of reforms in Bulgaria, including towards regional capacity strengthening, while Greece, on the contrary, has considered every sign of decentralization as a threat to its territorial integrity. Only implementation of EU cohesion policy allowed Greek local authorities to enjoy more power and influence in policy making. Similarly, Turkey has perceived national unity as the highest priority in political life thereby being reluctant to empower regional authorities in decision-making but after becoming an EU candidate country it eased the grip on regional officials to drift towards closer cooperation with neighboring countries (Turlay, 2011). Indeed, Bulgarian full membership and Turkey's candidacy status have become the major driving political forces in the cross-border region.

As mentioned, among the economic barriers to the border region is the significant migration of young and educated people to bigger cities – a trend, which is further enhanced by the prevalence of traditional agriculture in the border area. In addition, high level of corruption in the cross-border region (particularly in Greece and Bulgaria), discourages flows of investment into the Euro-region and hampers cross-border integration in general. On the other hand,

economic synergies could be realized in agricultural production, tourism, telecommunications and logistics and the area could turn into an integrated economic cross-border space.

The cultural barriers derive from the traditional cultural mistrust between the three nations and creating a regional identity is hampered by language and religious differences. On the other hand, the rich and common culture and history represent an important driving force.

The physical barriers result from the visa regimes on the Greek-Turkish and Bulgarian-Turkish borders aggravated by inefficient road infrastructure in the Bulgarian side. On the other hand, the Evros-Maritza-Meric Euro region is directly served by the European Transport Network as Corridor 4 crosses Haskovo and Edirne provinces and Corridor 9 crosses the cooperation area in Evros, Haskovo and passes by the Edirne province (IPA Bulgaria-Turkey 2007). Close geographical proximity and strategic location within the international transport network are preconditions for deepening of the cross-border cooperation.

The Bulgarian-Turkish border area has similar weaknesses - technological obsolescence, permanent loss of skilled labour and high unemployment rate, lack of adequate transport infrastructure, insufficient level of training for local institutional agencies and lack of funds to finance cross-border projects, linguistic and cultural differences occasionally viewed as stereotypes and others. However, it seems that the excessive state centralization and the absence of adequate structures for cross-border co-operation is a major problem. There is no specific legislation on cross-border co-operation containing binding clauses for both parties and very little decisional power is granted to local authorities and consequently there is a low level of training of local agencies in the management of cross-border planning due to lack of funds, contacts and regional fact-finding studies. The creation of research and training centres to carry out studies on mutual awareness and develop cross-border management courses would contribute to increasing the operator training and fostering meaningful forms of collaboration for both countries (Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia, 2011).

3.5.2. Opportunities

Although the subregion of SEE has always been open to the world economy and culture, no sufficient cross-border co-operation took place until the beginning of the 21st century due to excessive centralisation of power, lack of training of the local institutional agencies, lack of funds to finance, contacts, experience and fact-finding studies on the region. This has been changing mainly through the EU financial assistance for CBC and by increasing the administrative capacity of local authorities. In general, socio-cultural and institutional operators are less inclined towards CBC in comparison to the economic operators. On the whole businesses show a willingness to co-operate, which is confirmed by the volume of trade and economic agreements between the three countries. However, communication between enterprises could be enhanced with the involvement of trade associations.

Strengths in the Bulgarian-Turkish border area are in the fields of education, productivity and human development, which are comparable to both countries' national averages. Both countries can also rely on a relatively young population. Furthermore, the area benefits from its proximity to Istanbul (Turkey) and Bourgas (Bulgaria) and from the presence of the corridor linking Europe to the Middle East. The Bourgas region, one of the most developed regions in Bulgaria and a free trade zone, has the opportunity to become an economic and financial centre and to attract and diversify foreign investments (Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia, 2011). Another important point for the region is its key position in the

future projects for the construction of the oil and gas pipeline crossing its area, connecting Europe with the resources of Russia and the countries of the Middle East region.

Cross-border cooperation in the Evros-Maritza-Meric Euro region could and has to move to a more advanced level of cooperation by creating new complementarities that will provide competitive advantage for the cross-border area. In order to maximize available (or potential) resources it might be useful to develop a strategy plan (Turlay, 2011). For instance in tourism, the Evros-Maritza-Meric Euro-region shares a common market theme and development of package-attraction will allure visitors to stay in the region for a longer period of time. As a whole, the contacts between local enterprises and social partners have to be stimulated, as well as the collaboration between the regional and local administrations in the three countries. The Euroregion Polis-TrakiaKent-RAM Trakia should be supported and made working. As a whole, there is a niche even for new Euro-regions in the Bulgarian-Turkish border area, without Greek participation.

More information exchange, joint consultations on different themes, as well as raising of the level of training of the actors involved must be carried out in order to further promote cultural understanding and deepen regional cooperation. Despite the difficulties linked to inadequate financing and administration's limited ability to plan and manage cross-border initiatives and despite that there are no agreements for regional co-operation efforts should be made to stimulate the exchange of information and consultation at institutional level. Other fields of cooperation should be the environmental and territorial planning sector, transport and telecommunications sector, tourism and in the economic and employment sector where all three countries have an interest in. Special emphasis has to be put on the people-to-people actions, which aim at encouraging or further development of sustainable co-operation networks between local and regional stakeholders in the border region.

4 CONCLUSION

Cross-border cooperation within the Euroregions can be in all areas of life: economic development, tourism, transport, agriculture, regional development, innovation and technology transfer, environmental protection, education, nature conservation, social cooperation, culture, disaster prevention, energy, communications, etc. It is realized in various forms. The status of a „Euroregion“ gives big freedom of the participating parties in the border regions for various initiatives. Within its framework cooperation between units of local or regional government allow cross-border structures to promote common interests and enhance the living standards of the population on both sides of the border.

The development of Euro-regions in SEE is on the rise. The problem with them, however, is that the lack of funds and administrative capacity predetermine their short period of existence. The countries in the SEE region should get aware of the Euro-reions' importance and opportunities and support the existing CBC structures at their borders. The role of the EU is also of crucial importance on the Balkans and its investment in cooperation, strong partnerships, good planning and more funds are the keys to success of cross-border cooperation on its external borders in Southeast Europe.

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