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REPORT

**“EUROREGION AS A MECHANISM FOR STRENGTHENING
TRANSFRONTIER AND INTERREGIONAL CO-OPERATION:
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES”**

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Introduction

Region – term / origin

The term *Regio* comes from the Latin "*regere*", meaning to draw a line or border. In ancient Rome the "Regio" was used for demarcating an area rather than governing it. It did not correspond to any legislative or governmental institution. The word "region" is taken from the Latin *regio*, and a number of countries have borrowed the term as the formal name for a type of subnational entity such as provinces, counties, townships, territories, etc.

Historical, political and economic background

Europe today is characterized by its shared culture and history but also by its many borders. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the nation state developed as the predominant entity in the context of tensions between regions. Many of the new borders of these nation states, often the result of wars, became 'scars of history' that cut through Europe's historical landscapes with their regions and ethnic groups, whereas the latter never ceased to exist. The traditional concept of national border often developed out of a protective function. From a legal standpoint, borders represent a line where the sovereignty of states ends.

Since late 1989-1990, various processes have been under way in Europe, and include: the dismantling of EU-internal borders with the realization of the European Single Market; the shifting of EU-internal borders right up to the European Union's external borders, and thus to the external borders it shares with third countries; all border regions in Europe are directly affected by all of these developments, both on the EU's internal borders and on its external frontiers, where they are having to come to terms with a wide range of new tasks. Today's borders have largely lost their previous function of blocking off nation states from each other, even though there remain massive, clear economic, social and legal differences on the borders. Many border regions in Europe are not only separated by a national border, but often also face special problems due to additional geographical features like rivers, seas, oceans and mountain ranges. Status of many border regions can only be transformed into a favorable situation within Europe when all economic, social, cultural, business, infrastructural and legal barriers are dismantled and Europe has been integrated into a single, diverse entity. Border and cross-border regions thus assume a bridge function and become touchstones of European unification and of a viable neighborhood on the Union's external borders.

The growing exchange of goods over a large area and the free movement of people, labor, services and capital, both between EU Member States and worldwide, are particularly affecting European border and cross-border regions. The situation of border and cross-border regions in Europe is characterized by a wide range of economic barriers and imbalances on the internal and external borders of the EU. Economic centers in border areas are often cut off from part of their natural hinterland across the border, which effectively distorts the possible structure of trade and services

As a result, border and cross-border regions still frequently have to struggle with a shortage of alternative and high-quality jobs and of national and cross-border educational facilities. Companies in border areas frequently lack adequate knowledge of market possibilities, export opportunities and marketing resources across the border.

Cross-border cooperation

As far as „trans-border cooperation” we completely stick to the definition offered „European framework convention concerning trans-border cooperation between territory societies or authorities” (Madrid 21 of May 1980). According to the article of „Convention...”, trans-border cooperation are any common actions oriented on strengthening and development of good neighboring relations between territory societies or power bodies, which are under authority of two or several Agreement sides and signing necessary agreements or deals for this purpose. Trans-border cooperation is held within the competence of territory societies or power bodies, which are defined by internal legislation.

Objectives of cross-border cooperation are creation of the new quality of borders which become a meeting spaces, smoothing out the interfaces of European spatial development policy, overcoming border-related disadvantages and exploiting opportunities improving infrastructure, promoting locational quality and common economic development, improvement of cross-border protection of the environment and nature, promotion of cross-border cultural cooperation, making realities of subsidiarity and partnerships.

The main motives for cross-border cooperation are the transformation of the border from a line of separation into a place for communication between neighbours; the overcoming of mutual animosities and prejudices between peoples of border regions which result from historical heritage; the strengthening of democracy and the development of operational regional/local administrative structures; the overcoming of national peripherality and isolation; the promotion of economic growth and development and the improvement of the standards of living; the rapid assimilation into or approach towards an integrated Europe.

Euroregion

Definition, main characteristics, reasons for establishment

Euroregion is a form of trans-border cooperation between territory societies or local authorities of bordering regions of two or more states, which have a common border and where cooperation is targeted on common efforts' coordination as well as implementation of agreed upon actions in different spheres of life according to national legislation and norms of international rights for the solving of common problems considering rights of people who inhabit this territory on both sides of the border. In European politics, the term Euroregion usually refers to a transnational co-operation structure between two (or more) contiguous territories located in different European counties. Euroregions represent a specific type of cross-border region. Euroregions usually do not correspond to any legislative or governmental institution, do not have direct political power, and their work is limited to the competencies of the local and regional authorities which constitute them. They are usually arranged to promote common interests across the border and cooperate for the common good of the border populations. Euroregions as transfrontier structures are 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 border populations.

Several "labels" are used which are categorized under "Euroregions". These include euregio, euregion, euroregion, eurorégion, euroregión, euroregione, euroregiune, europaregion, еврорегион (evroregion), euroregija, grand region, grande région, regio, council or conseil.

Euroregions have following characteristics:

- geographical - Euroregion is the territory which has particular geographical position;
- political – a part of this territory is under legislative authority of sovereign states, which have common border;

- administrative – bordering regions of states which have common border create Euroregion;
- functional – Euroregion is a form of trans-border cooperation.

The *Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)* sets the following criteria for the identification of Euroregions:

- An association of local and regional authorities on the both sides of the national border, sometimes with a assembly like leadership structure;
- A transfrontier association with a permanent secretariat and a technical and administrative team with own resources;
- Of private law nature, based on non-profit-making associations or foundations on either side of the border in accordance with the respective national law in force;
- Of public law nature, based on inter-state agreements, dealing among other things, with the participation of territorial authorities

The main reasons for establishment of the euroregions are overcoming historical barriers through cross-border cooperation, removal of disparities between regions at both sides of the border, positive impacts on different spheres of lives of inhabitants in border areas of the countries at the cultural, social, economic and infrastructure levels, preparation and implementation of specific project proposal stimulating the area.

Euroregion – various aspects

There are various aspects in the consideration of Euroregions. If we consider the legislative aspect of the euroregion creation of Euroregion does not lead to appearing of the new administrative-regional formation with a judicial status. Legislative regulation on the territory of each Euroregion's member is held according to the actual state legislation, where it belongs. The governing Euroregion's bodies perform coordinative functions and do not have power authorities, and also cannot replace power bodies, which work on the each member's territory. Regarding political aspects euroregion do not act against state national interests; euroregions are not overstate formations; in their activity euroregions do not replace external political functions of the states, which administrative-territory units are their members.

If we consider the historical aspects in overwhelming majority of cases euroregions occupy territories, which have a common historical past and even once used to be inside one state. Sometimes, euroregions consist of territories, which in more or less distant past had so-called „controversial status”, a right to possess such territory, that belonged to one state was the subject of argument for a neighboring one, which has a common border with it.

If we take into account nationality aspects of the euroregions, as a rule, euroregions are multinational territories or regions, where representatives of several ethnical groups live. In many cases, representatives of multiple national minorities live on the territories of common borders, which represent the national majority of a country, located on the opposite side of the border.

In addition can be taken into account the following facts about Euroregions. Territories or regions, which are inside Euroregions are peripheral relating to administrative centers of own countries. Existence of common trans-border problems are typical for all territories or regions which are inside Euroregions. To solve the problems it is necessary to combine the efforts of territory societies or power bodies of neighboring states. As a rule the problems are ecological problems, the problems of bordering infrastructure's development of transportation and communication, rational usage of human resources, providing conditions for the development of national minorities....

Method of working

According to the Practical Guide to Cross-border Cooperation (*Third Edition 2000*) adopted by European Commission and prepared by AEBR method of working of Euroregion are defined:

- development and strategic-oriented cooperation, no measures based on individual cases;
- always cross-border-oriented, not as national border region;
- no new administrative level;
- hub for cross-border relations; citizens, politicians, institutions, economy, social partners, organizers of cultural events etc.;
- balancing between different structures and powers on both sides of the border and with regard to psychological issues;
- partnership cooperation, vertically (European, governmental, regional, local) as well as horizontally beyond the border;
- implementation of cross-border decisions at national level and according to procedures applicable on both sides of the border (avoidance of competence and structural power conflicts);
- cross-border participation of citizens, institutions and social partners in programmes, projects and decision-making processes;
- direct initiatives and the use of own resources as preconditions for help and support of third parties.

Content of cooperation

According to the Practical Guide to Cross-border Cooperation (*Third Edition 2000*) adopted by European Commission and prepared by AEBR content of cross-border cooperation within Euroregions are:

- definition of fields of action according to joint interests (e.g. infrastructure, economy, culture);
- cooperation in all areas of life: living, work, leisure time, culture etc.;
- equal emphasis on social-cultural cooperation as on economic-infrastructural cooperation;
- implementation of treaties and agreements and concluded at European level between countries to achieve cross-border practice;
- Advice, assistance and co-ordination of cross-border cooperation, particularly in the following fields: schools and education; social cooperation; culture and sports; emergency services and disaster prevention; health affairs; energy; communications; waste disposal; public security; economic development; tourism and leisure; transport and traffic; agricultural development; regional development; innovation and technology transfer; environmental protection and nature conservation...

Legal instruments and legal status

It is difficult to associate one legal framework to the term "Euroregion", as they operate across country borders and vary widely in their particular forms. Organization and cooperation within the Euroregion can be regulated by:

- Multilateral Agreements, in 1980, on the initiative of the Council of Europe, the so-called Madrid Convention (Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation) was introduced as a first step towards CBC structures based on public law. The convention has been signed by 20 countries and was more recently updated with two Additional Protocols. It provides a legal framework for completing bi- and multinational agreements for public law CBC among NCGs;
- Bilateral and Trilateral Agreements;
- Regional and Local Level Agreements.

The legal status of Euroregions varies. It may involve a community of interest without legal personality (Euroregion Neisse, Euroregion Elbe-Labe), a European Economic Interest

Grouping (Euroregion Transcanal), a non-profit-making association (for example, the Euregio Saar-Lor-Lux Rhine, under the private law of Luxembourg), a working community without a legal personality (Euregio Bayerischer Wald-Böhmerwald/Sumava) or a public body (Rhine-Waal Euregio). Certain cases show that the status of one Euregio can be interpreted differently in different countries. For example, the Euregio Maas- Rhine is a foundation under Dutch law, but is equivalent to an ASBL (non-profit-making organisation) in Belgian law. Three main types of Euroregion can be identified:

- Euroregions without legal personality (working communities or communities of interest)
- Euroregions which are based on private law
- Euroregions which are based on public law

Euroregion - history

Euroregions have contributed for economic development and cooperation in Western Europe. This experience is translated as a background with high speed towards central and Eastern Europe. The first Euroregions in the territory of Western Europe began to be created already in the late 1950's, namely on the Dutch-German border. In 1958, the term *Euregio* was applied for the first time. Then, in the 1960's, many problems pertaining to regional development, education including language one, commuting matters, transport and technical infrastructures or the environment started to be solved in a cross-border way. An of the first Euroregion - Reggio Basiliensis, now renamed TriRhena - occurred at the border between Switzerland, Germany and France in 1963, followed by others in the border area between Benelux, Germany and France, after which it expanded at a pace fast, so currently, there are a hundred such structures for cross-border cooperation.

Euroregions in Europe

There exist more than hundred euroregions in different parts of Europe. In North Europe and Baltic Sea Area: Oresund-Region (DK/SE), Gränskommitten Östfold-Bohuslän/Dalsland (NO/SE), ARKO (NO/SE), Skärgården (FI/SE), Mid Nordic Committee (NO/SE), The Kvarken Council / Kvarkenrådet (FI/SE), North Calotte Council (FI/NO/SE), Council of Torne Valley (FI/NO/SE), Euregio Karelia (FI/RU), Estonia – Finish 3+3 Regional Cooperation (EE/FI/RU), Helsinki-Tallinn Euregio (EE/FI), Euregio Pskov-Livonia (EE/LV/RU), Euroregion Country of Lakes (LT/LV/BY), Euroregion Saule (LT/LV/RU), Euroregion Bartuva (LV, LT), Euroregion Baltic (PL/SE/LT/LV/DK/RU), Euroregion Szeszupa / Euroregion Sesupe (LT/PL/RU/SE), Euroregion NEMUNAS/ NIEMEN/ NEMAN (LT/PL/BY/RU), Euroregion Pomerania (SE/DE/PL), Region Sonderjylland-Schleswig (DE/DK).

Euroregions in Central and East Europe are: Lyna-Lawa (PL/RU), Euroregion Puszcza Bialowieska (PL/BY), Euroregion Bug (PL/BY/UA), Euroregion PRO EUROPA VIADRIENA (DE/PL), Euroregion Spree-Neiße-Bober (DE/PL), Euroregion Neisse – Nisa – Nysa (DE/PL/CZ), Euroregion Glacensis (CZ/PL), Euroregion Praded / Euroregion Pradziad (CZ/PL), Euroregion Tesínské Szlesko / Euroregion Slask Cieszynski (CZ/PL), Euroregion Dobrawa (CZ/PL), Euroregion Silesia (CZ/PL), Euroregion Elbe/Labe (CZ/DE), Euroregion Erzgebirge (CZ/DE), Euregio Egrensis (CZ/DE), EUREGIO Bayerischer Wald - Böhmerwald - Unterer Inn (CZ/AT/DE), Euregio Silva Nortica (CZ/AT), Euregio Weinviertel – Südmähren – Westslowakei / Euregio Weinviertel - South Moravia -West Slovakia (AT/CZ/SK), Euroregion Bilé-Biele Karpaty (CZ/SK), Euroregion Tatry (PL/SK), Euroregion Beskydy / Euroregion Beskidy (CZ/PL/SK), Karpatský Euroregión (HU/PL/RO/UA/SK).

Euroregions situated in Northwest Europe are: North West Region Cross Border Group (IE/UK), Irish Central Border Area Network – ICBAN (IE/UK), East Border Region Ltd. (IE/UK), Co-Operation and Working Together (IE/UK), Euregio Scheldemond (BE/NL), Ems Dollart Region (DE/NL), EUREGIO (NL/DE), Euregio Rhein-Waal / Rijn-Waal (DE/NL), euregio rhein-maas-nord (NL/DE) Euregio Maas-Rhein / Euregio Maas-Rijn (DE/NL/B), Euregio Benelux-Middengebied (BE/NL), Zukunft Saar Moselle Avenir (DE/FR), EuRegion Saar-Lor-Lux Rhein

(BE/DE/FR/LU), Grenzüberschreitender Örtlicher Zweckverband (GÖZ) REGIO PAMINA (DE/FR), CENTRE (DE/FR), Regio TriRhena (DE/CH/FR), Conference TransJurassienne (CTJ) (CH/FR), Comité Régional Franco Genevois (CH/FR), Conseil du Léman (CH/FR), Internationale Bodenseekonferenz (DE/AT/CH/LI), Oberrheinkonferenz (DE/FR/CH).

In Alps and Danube Area there are: Espace Mont-Blanc (CH/FR/IT), Regio Insubrica (CH/IT), Regio Sempione (CH/IT), Conseil Valois-Valleé d'Aoste du Gd St.Bernard (IT/CH), Euregio Via Salina (AT/DE), Euregio Zugspitze - Wetterstein - Karwendel (AT/DE), EuRegio Inntal (AT/DE), EuRegio Salzburg - Berchtesgadener Land - Traunstein (AT/DE), Inn-Salzach-Euregio (AT/DE), Europaregion Tirol-Südtirol/ Alto Adige-Terentino (AT/IT), Euregio Steiermark - Slowenien (AT/SL), Euregio West/Nyugat Pannonia (AT/HU), Euroregion Drava-Mura (HU/SL), Euroregión Váh - Dunaj – Ipel / Euroregion Vagus – Danubius – Ipolia (HU/SK), Euroregion Ipel-Ipoly / Ipelsky Euroregion (HU/SK), Euroregion Neogradiensis (HU/SK), Euroregion Sajó-Rima-Slaná-Rimava / Euroregion Slaná-Rimava (HU/SK), Euroregión Košice-Miškolc (HU/SK), Euroregion Ister-Granum (HU/SK), Euroregión Kras / Karst Euroregion / Karszt Eurorégió (HU/SK), Hármás Duna-Vidék Eurorégió / Euroregión Podunajského Trojospolku / Triple, Danube-Euroregion (HU/SK), Zemplén Euroregion (HU/SK), Haidú-Bihar-Bihar Euroregió / Euroregiunea Bihar-Hajdú-Bihar / Hajdú-Bihar-Bihar Euroregion (HU/RO), Bihar-Bihar Euregio (HU/RO), Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisza Euroregion (DKMT) (HU/RO/YU), Euroregion Danube-Drava-Sava (HU/HR/BA), Adriatic Euroregion (IT/SL/HR/BA/CS/AL).

In Southwest Europe and Western Mediterranean Sea there are: Comunidad de Trabajo Galicia-Norte de Portugal (ES/PT), Comunidade de Trabalho Castilla y León – Regiáo Norte (ES/PT), Working Communities Castilla and Leon and Central Portugal (ES/PT), Comunidade de Trabalho Centro-Extremadura (ES/PT), Comunidade de Trabalho Algarve-Andalucia (ES/PT), Euroregion Pirineus-Mediterrania (FR/ES).

And finally in Southeast Europe and Eastern Mediterranean Sea: Euroregion Nestos-Mesta (EL/BG), Euroregion Delta – Rhodopi (BG/EL), Euroregion Network Polis-Kent (EL/TR), Euroregion Evros-Meric-Maritsa (BG/EL/TR), Euroregion "Belasica-Beles" (EL/FYROM/BG), Lower Danube Euroregion (RO/MD/UA), Upper Prut Euroregion (RO/MD/UA), Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion (RO/MD), Danube South Euroregion (BG/RO), Euroregion Strymon-Strouma (BG/EL), Euroregion Rousse-Giurgiu (BG/RO), "Danube 21" Euregio (RO/BG/Serbia), Euroregion Danube East (RO/BG), Eurobalkans (Nis-Sofia-Skopje) (BG/MK/Serbia).

European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

The EGTC is a new European legal instrument designed to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. Unlike the structures which governed this kind of cooperation before 2007, the EGTC is a legal entity and as such, will enable regional and local authorities and other public bodies from different member states, to set up cooperation groupings with a legal personality. For example, an EGTC or EGTC members can be:

- Member States
- regional or local authorities
- associations
- any other public body

The EGTC is unique in the sense that it enables public authorities of various Member States to team up and deliver joint services, without requiring a prior international agreement to be signed and ratified by national parliaments. Member States must however agree to the participation of potential members in their respective countries. The law applicable for the interpretation and application of the convention is that of the Member State in which the official EGTC headquarters are located.

Conclusion - added values of the euroregions

There are many added values that arise as results of euro-regional cooperation. We could highlight European added value, political added value, institutional added value, socio-economical and socio-cultural added value.

European added value arises from the fact that in the light of past experience, people who are living together in neighboring border regions want to cooperate and thereby make a valuable contribution to the promotion of peace, freedom, security and the observance of human rights. Political added value means making contribution towards: the development of Europe and European integration; getting to know each other, getting on together, understanding each other and building trust; the implementation of subsidiarity and partnership; increased economic and social cohesion and cooperation; preparing for the accession of new members; using EU funding to secure cross-border cooperation via multiannual programmes, and ensuring that the necessary national and regional co-financing is committed in the long term.

Institutional added value could be: active involvement by the citizens, authorities, political and social groups on both sides of the border; secure knowledge about one's neighbor (regional authorities, social partners, etc.); long-term cross-border cooperation in structures that are capable of working efficiently - as a vertically and horizontally functioning partnership, despite having different structures and areas of responsibility, - as a legally accepted target of aid and a working partner, receiving and administering funds; joint drafting, implementation and financing of cross-border programmes and projects.

Socio-economic added value are the mobilization of endogenous potential by strengthening the regional and local levels as partners for and initiators of cross-border cooperation; the participation of actors from the economic and social sectors (for example, chambers of commerce, associations, companies, trade unions, cultural and social institutions, environmental organizations and tourism agencies); the opening up of the labor market and harmonization of professional qualifications; additional development, e.g. in the fields of infrastructure, transport, tourism, the environment, education, research and cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises, and also the creation of more jobs in these areas.

Socio-cultural added value are: lasting improvements in the planning of spatial development and regional policy (including the environment); the improvement of cross-border transport infrastructure; lasting, repeated dissemination of knowledge about the geographical, structural, economic, socio-cultural and historical situation of a cross-border region (including with the media's help); the overview of a cross-border region afforded in maps, publications, teaching material, and so on; the development of a circle of committed experts (multipliers), such as churches, schools, youth and adult educational establishments, the conservation authorities, cultural associations, libraries, museums, and so forth; equal opportunities and extensive knowledge of the language of the neighboring country or of dialects as a component of cross-border regional development and a prerequisite for communication.

Bilateral or trilateral (multilateral) cross-border cooperation at regional/local level will therefore remain a necessity over the long term, not just in order to prevent cross-border conflicts and overcome psychological barriers, but, above all, in order to facilitate partnerships that will balance and reconcile these differences, through Euroregions and similar structures. Partnerships of this kind need to be cultivated within regions, with all the often very different social partners on either side of each border, and externally, with national government. (The European Charter on Border and Cross-Border Regions, AEBR, 20 November 1981, amended on 1 December 1995, amended on 7 October 2004)