

Cross-border Cooperation - a tool for regional development in Europe

Motto: "Think globally, act locally!"

MARIA VIORICA BEDRULE-GRIGORUȚĂ
DIANA LINA

"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
Bd. Carol I, 22, Iasi
Romania

Email addresses: mvgri@uaic.ro; lina.diana@gmail.com

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the importance of the cross border cooperation for the regional development in European Union. We would also want to put a stress on the euroregions concept, as forms for promoting regional integration through cross border cooperation - the case of Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion situated in Romania-Moldova Republic border area.

With its last enlargement in 2007, the European Union has taken a big step forward in promoting security and prosperity on the European continent. The accession of Romania in E.U. also means that the external borders of the Union have changed, E.U. have acquired new neighbours and have come closer to old ones. These circumstances have created both opportunities and challenges. In this context, *the Economic and Social Development Strategy for Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion, 2007-2013* project aims to promote reinforcing the existing forms of regional cooperation and to provide a strategic framework for their further development, which is corresponding to the objectives of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

In this context, the cooperation between Ungheni (Republic of Moldova) and Iasi (Romania) evolved and conveyed to an institutional structure - Siret-Prut-Nistru euroregion. We think the future success or failure of this entity is depending on the public administrations capacities to promote and sustain partnerships.

Key words: cross border cooperation, regional development, strategic framework

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present the importance of the cross border cooperation for the regional development in European Union; we would also want to put a stress on the

euroregions concept, as forms for promoting regional integration through cross border cooperation- the case of Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion situated in Romania-Moldova Republic border area.

2. 1. Euroregions- cross border cooperation promoters in the process of regional development

In the widening Europe over the last decades, cross-border cooperation has been transformed from defensive lines and barriers into zones of reconciliation between peoples. Regional cooperation is also an integral part of the preparation for integration into the European structures. The European Commission's Third Report on Cohesion [1] notes that cross-border co-operation is a key priority for the EU with a view to fostering integration and to limiting the economic and social fragmentation.

During the European Union enlargement process we assisted at a double transformation: the cross border functions are dissociated in space and, in the same time, the biggest part of the territory is treated as a cross-border dilated area. Therefore, the organized Europe is perceived as a "regional form of ineluctable globalization process, in which the exchanges are establishing the economic interferences the guarantee for pacifist relationships" [2].

In Europe, the Euroregions are one of the most common instruments responsible for development of border regions and cross-border cooperation. The Euroregions should be "magnets" for the social, economic and cultural development of the areas and populations concerned, in full synergy with the territorial authorities [3].

Existing Euroregions are initiatives of border regions or other local entities of several countries and have no defined statute in the E.U. context.

The legal statute of Euroregions can be: a community group without a legal personality, a nongovernmental organization, or a public entity. Euroregions does not create new type of government at cross-border level. Their work, competencies and power are defined by the local and regional authorities that constitutes them.

If we want to define Euroregions, one definition might be: a cross-border structure established between entities of local or regional government across the border in order to promote their common interests.

The Association of European Border Regions sets the following criteria for Euroregions identification :

- an association of local and regional authorities on either side of the national border;
- a transfrontier association with a permanent secretariat and a technical and administrative team with own resources;
- of private low nature, based on non-profit making association or foundations on other sides of the border in accordance with the national law;
- of public law nature, based on inter-state agreements, with the territorial authorities participation.

Today there are more than seventy cross-border regions in Europe, operating under the name of Euroregions, euroregios or Working Communities, and some of these initiatives are dating from 1950s.

In 1980, on the initiative of the Council of Europe, a set of European countries concluded an international treaty, called the Madrid Convention, as a first step towards cross-border cooperation structures based on public law.

Both the European Union and the Council of Europe consider the development of cross-border co-operation as one of their top priorities. For the E.U. cross-border co-operation is an important instrument of ensuring the balanced development and integration of the European

continent [4].

One of the objectives of the EU's cross-border co-operation is to prevent isolation of border areas.

The legal frame for the EU's actions within the framework of cross-border cooperation is constituted of three E.U. Policies: the Cohesion Policy, European Neighbourhood Policy and pre-accession policy for acceding countries.

Under the European Neighbourhood Policy, a set of priorities are defined together by the European Union and the partner countries, to be incorporated in a series of jointly agreed Action Plans, covering a number of key areas for specific action, including political dialogue and reform, trade and economic reform, equitable social and economic development, justice and home affairs, energy, transport, information society, environment, research and innovation, the development of civil society and people-to-people contacts [5].

For 2007-2013 EU- cross border co-operation will use a new external relations instrument. The new instrument European Partnership and Neighborhood Instrument (ENPI) will replace the existing geographical and thematic programs covering the countries concerned. ENPI has a specific cross-border co-operation component, financing the "joint programs" which bring together the regions of Member states and partner countries sharing a common border. The eligible countries covered by the ENPI are: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, Ukraine.

The ENPI will be implemented via 3 types of programs [6]:

1. Country or multi-country programs based on national action plans approved by the EC, covering a set of national priorities to bring the country closer to the EU.
2. Thematic programs addressing one or more challenges common to several partner countries and relevant to one or more Member States (type TEMPUS, LIFE).
3. Cross-border cooperation programs between nearby regions, in one or more Member States and one or more partner countries, which take place on the external border of the EU.

Key areas of the ENPI are:

- Promoting political dialogue and reform
- Strengthening of national institutions and bodies responsible for the elaboration and the effective implementation of policies
- Promoting environmental protection and good management of natural resources
- Supporting policies aimed at poverty reduction
- Supporting policies to promote social development and gender equality, employment and social protection
- Supporting cross-border cooperation to promote sustainable economic, social and environmental development in border regions
- Supporting policies to promote health, education and training
- Promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms and supporting the democratization process
- Ensuring efficient and secure border management;
- Promoting cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs, and the fight against and prevention of terrorism and organized crime
- Promoting participation in Community research and innovation activities
- Promoting cooperation between the Member States and partner countries in higher education and mobility of teachers, researchers and students
- Promoting understanding between cultures, people-to-people contacts

2.2. Cross-border cooperation between Iasi county Romania and Ungheni district-Moldova

The County Council of Iasi (Romania) and the District county of Ungheni (Moldova Republic) recognized since 2000 the role and the importance of regional co-operation for Romania-Moldova Republic relationships development. Therefore, based on the community needs from both sides of the border (separated by the Prut river), the public administrative entities signed the Cooperation Agreement. In this new context, in 2002 there was established a new cross-border cooperation instrument- Siret Prut Nistru Euroregion. (The County Council of Iasi and the District county of Ungheni are among the founders).

The public administration authorities from both sides of the Prut river understood that Ungheni –Iasi cross border area includes a geographical space which belongs to South East Europe and is confronted with a low level of life quality. That's one of the reasons which Siret Prut Nistru Euroregion founding is based on. There are also other strong arguments for developing the cross-border cooperation in this border area: the common historical roots, language, civilization and common interests.

Therefore, the main objectives of the Cooperation Agreement signed between The County Council of Iasi and the District county of Ungheni are:

- the organizational efforts of the local public authorities from Iasi and Ungheni areas are to be focused on cross-border cooperation relationship between local authorities and civil society;
- creating long term cross-border networks, based on reciprocal consultation and transfer of information, skills and knowledge regarding the democratization of public life.
- stimulating the twinning process between the communities from both sides of the border, in order to find solutions for common problems.

The efforts for cross-border cooperation development have crystallized into concrete projects, funded from E.U. funds such as:

- Development of cross-border cooperation DÉCOR (2003-2004)
- The assessment of the renewable energy capacities and the study of Republic of Moldova hydroelectrically resources exploitation (2003-2004)
- Creating of the cross-border center for training of the parents and specialists in children with disabilities assisting (2003-2005)
- Prut river Conference (2005)
- Creating of a resource center for business women (2003-2005)

2.3. The case study of Siret- Prut- Nistru Euroregion

With its last enlargement in 2007, the European Union has taken a big step forward in promoting security and prosperity on the European continent. The accession of Romania in E.U. also means that the external borders of the Union have changed, E.U. have acquired new neighbours and have come closer to old ones. These circumstances have created both opportunities and challenges. In this context, the **Economic and Social Development Strategy for Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion, 2007-2013** project aims to promote reinforcing the existing forms of regional cooperation and to provide a strategic framework for their further development, which is corresponding to the objectives of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) [4].

In Europe, the Euroregions are one of the most common instruments responsible for development of border regions and cross-border cooperation. The Euroregions should be “magnets” for the social, economic and cultural development of the areas and populations concerned, in full synergy with the territorial authorities [7]. However, the present situation shows that the role of Siret-Prut-Nistru-Euroregion in development and integration processes

is not sufficient because the institutional capacity, especially strategic planning, is inadequate due to a lack of knowledge and experience.

Siret-Nistru-Prut Euroregion Association, with the headquarters in Iasi, is promoting the enlarging and improving of the relationships between the collectivities and local authorities in the fields of economy, education, culture, science, sport and ensuring of a sustainable development of the region, in the context of European Union required standards. Siret-Nistru-Prut Euroregion Association is member of the Association of European Border Regions (A.E.B.R) that is acting for the benefit of all European border and cross-border regions. From this perspective, A.E.B.R. actions are in conformity with European Union policies regarding regional development and community representativity at European level. In this context, the project proposes a systemic approach toward strategic planning: local strategic planning - regional strategic planning frame- European strategic planning frame.

The members of Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion Association are 2 county councils from Romania, Iasi and Vaslui, and 18 district councils from Republic of Moldova.

The entities from Siret-Nistru-Prut Euroregion Association, starting from their needs and constraints, have identified common goals, reinforced by their association statute. Their main goals are:

- transforming the borders from separation lines into a place of communication between neighbours;
- surpassing the psychological barriers through information exchange;
- the consolidation of democracy and the development of the territorial administrative units;
- stimulating the economic development and the improvement of the life standard;
- the qualitative improvement of the human resources;
- developing the strategic cross-border concepts regarding the marketing in agriculture,
- adopting the urban and rural cross border policies;
- preserving the cultural heritage;

We present hereby the organizational chart of Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion. (see figure no.1)

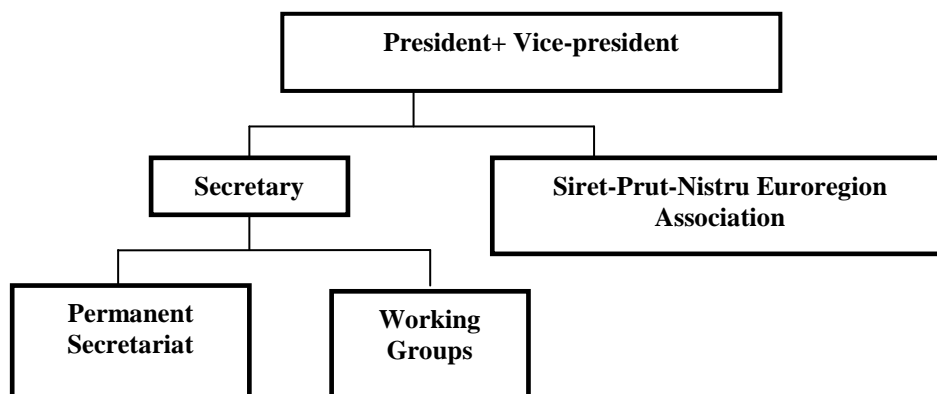


Figure no.1-Organizational chart of Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion

The presidents of these entities members of the Association are constituting the President's Forum of the Euroregion which is the General Assembly of Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion Association.(the policy-maker).

The Association have been created in order to implement the President's Forum decisions and to contribute in a coherent way to implementing of the decisions regarding the Romania-Moldova cross-border partnership. The Working groups are formed by the members of the 2

county councils from Romania (Iasi and Vaslui) and the 18 district councils from Moldova (Basarabasca, Calarasi, Cimislia, Criuleni, Dubasari, Hincesti, Ialoveni, Leova, Nisiporeni, Orhei, Rezina, Soroca, Soldanesti, Telenesti, Ungheni, Anenii Noi, Floresti, Straseni). The implementation of the present project will contribute for improving the Working Groups members competencies in order to ensure the increasing of identifying and solving regional problems capacity.

The common problems of the members of the Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion are:

- the lack of an integrated approach for sustainable development,
- the lack of an institutional frame able to perform a strategic planning process,
- the need to complement EU structural fund activity in Romania and the EU Action Plans for Moldova

As a result of these problems, these areas are confronting with:

- poor performance of their economies;
- low skills and low productivity in rural areas and on opposite, area of highly skilled workers in urban area of Iasi;
- low rate of direct foreign investments
- high migration rate (from Romania to western European Union countries, on one hand, and from Moldova to Romania and other European Union countries, on the other hand)
- the need to address the issues regarding the environment quality.

These facts are proved by the statistic data regarding the performances of the North East region of Romania and Republic of Moldova economies which are revealing a low level of GDP, comparing with the GDP from E.U. The North East region of Romania is the poorest region of the European Union, taking the last position among EU regions in terms of income per capita as compared to the purchase power of its citizens. According to an Eurostat report, this index falls at only 24% of the European average. Also, the GDP per capita figures for Moldova are significantly lower than the EU member states that joined the Union in 2005 (only 569 Euro/capita in Moldova, in comparison with a range from 4,725 Euro/capita to 13,103 Euro/capita in European Union, in 2004).

In this context there is a stringent requirement to establish a strategy in response to an analysis of the opportunities and challenges of Romania- Moldova cross border euroregion .

The area covered by the Euroregion is representing more than 60% from the Romania-Moldova cross border region, which is covering both urban and rural areas. The previous national peripheral status of Romania-Moldova border regions can only be transformed into a favourable situation with a greater location value, improved economic development and a cross-border labour market within Europe when all economic, social and legal barriers have been dismantled and Europe has been integrated into a single, diverse entity.



Figure no.2 Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion map

3. Conclusions

Cross-border cooperation is a process that is getting more and more a strategic vision. Therefore, the cooperation between Ungheni (Republic of Moldova) and Iasi (Romania) evolved and conveyed to an institutional structure- Siret-Prut-Nistru euroregion. The future success or failure of this entity is depending on the public administrations capacities to promote and sustain partnerships:

- twinning partnerships - focused on reciprocal advantages;
- simple partnerships- oriented toward specific short time solving problems (economic, cultural, educational, social, environmental);
- institutional partnerships- initiated without a direct intervention of the public authorities.

References

1. European Commission. A new partnership for cohesion. Third report on economic and social cohesion. p. 158
2. Michel Foucher, "The European Republic" Mirton Publishing House, 2002
3. Council of Europe. Committee of Advice for the Development of transfrontier co-operation in Central and Eastern Europe initiative concerning trans-European consideration intended to encourage harmonious and balanced development of European territory (2004/C 226/02)
4. REGULATION (EC) No 1638/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 laying down general provisions establishing an European Neighbourhood and partnership Instrument
5. Commission of the European Communities, European Neighbourhood Policy, Strategy Paper, Brussels, 2004
6. Council of Europe. Committee of Advice for the Development of transfrontier co-operation in Central and Eastern Europe
7. http://ec.europa.eu/comm/world/enp/index_en.htm