

## RESULTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION - SWOT ANALYSIS ON EURO-REGIONS

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### Abstract

*The paper analyses the effects of cross-border cooperation. We have in view the cross-border cooperation between Romania, Rep. of Moldova and Ukraine. Some of the results of this cooperation are the present Euro-regions created between all three countries. We identified the main determinants of development, as well as the main barriers that influenced socio-economic development. The SWOT analysis performed shows the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for these countries. There were used data from national institutes of statistics, divided into several categories like population and labour force, social and cultural dimensions, agriculture and forestry, other economic activities, transport and technical infrastructure, also there were used results from different publications in this field, including the previous research of the authors. The results show that, at present, there are many differences in the investigated Euro-regions caused by the different national policies applied or the institutional strategies implemented. Each country and each Euro-region has its own opportunities and constraints, also common objectives and they can be the basis for future common inter-state projects or governmental, regional or local economic scenarios.*

**Key words:** cross-border cooperation, euro-regions, SWOT analysis

### INTRODUCTION

Cross-border cooperation between Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, in its current form, was launched in 1997, when the "Lower Danube" Euroregion was created. The initiative was followed by the creation of the "Upper Prut" Euroregion in 2000, and later, in 2002, the "Siret-Prut-Dniester" Euroregion. Nowadays, the importance of the Euro-regions mentioned above is greater than the beginning of the cooperation process, from different points of view. Of these, we would like to mention the fact that, at present, the border between Romania and the other two countries represents the eastern border of the European Union (EU). At the same time, we mention the Association Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Moldova and the Eastern Partnership signed in 2014 between EU and both countries. Also, at present, the political conditions are different given the

political options in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Another particularity is the length of the borders between states which is considerable, and the characteristics of the territory which is mostly rural. In addition, the North-East Region of Romania is one of the poorest regions in the EU. On the other side of the border, the Republic of Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe, and Ukraine has been in deep economic crisis for many years. Of course, there are many other arguments that support the importance of the analysed area in the current international context.

Euro-regions are usually organized to promote common interests across borders and to cooperate for better standard of life for border populations. Cooperation shall create direct and permanent links between areas and communities on both sides of the border. It is based on:

- trust and tolerance, understanding and good cross-border relations;
- efficiency and capacity of services provided to citizens through public-private partnerships on both sides of the border;
- management and joint responsibilities for issues related to: environment, mitigation and prevention of natural disasters, etc.;
- coordination of regional policies on development, flood prevention, mutual assistance in case of emergency;
- revitalization of joint managing authorities based on transparency and respect in the decision-making process [7], [8] and [4].

First of all, some well-established definitions and clarifications for terms used are needed. During the last years a several definitions for Euro-regions and Cross-border cooperation were created. In the next, we want to highlight some of them.

"Creating a prosperous and secure Europe does not depend solely on cooperation between states; cross-border cooperation between local and regional authorities is also needed, without affecting the territorial integrity of the states involved" [16].

"Euro-regions are forms of sub-regional cooperation that contribute to the development of economic and social cohesion of cross-border geographical areas that include administrative-territorial units from neighbouring states, members and non-EU members" [9].

"Euro-regions can be defined as areas or regions of economic interference and not only, in which two or more states jointly capitalize on material and human resources by initiating and carrying out agricultural, industrial, transport and communications activities and programs, tourism, and trade" [7].

"The Euroregion is the territory of local units, on both sides of a border, which are committed to cooperation in order to ensure the balance of interests and increase the standard of living of the population in the area" [1].

„Euro-regions can be defined as European cross-border and transnational cooperation organizations, more or less structured, which bring together institutions with authority

ranging from local to regional, or their equivalent, associated to develop a common set of actions or objectives, based on the common interests of the „project areas” concerned” [5].

However we define the Euro-regions, we can conclude that, they were designed in order to support the population to achieve a higher standard of living, without major differences on both sides of the borders, in order to develop the economy of cross-border areas. This objective must be achieved in close connection with the human right, as it is written in international documents, especially Vienna Declaration [17]: “The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.” “There is a need for States and international organizations, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, to create favourable conditions at the national, regional and international levels to ensure the full and effective enjoyment of human rights.” “Regional arrangements play a fundamental role in promoting and protecting human rights.”

By this study, we identify the main determinants of development, which are characteristics and common for all three countries, as well as the main barriers that over the years have negatively influenced socio-economic development of the areas analysed. We consider them very important for the decision makers, at national, regional or local level, in designing the future scenarios for sustainable development of the regions.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper is based on SWOT analysis. A socio-economic analysis was performed on the following dimensions/indicators: population and labour force, social and

cultural, agriculture, forestry and fishing, other economic activities, transport and technical infrastructure. For each category were used and analysed several main indicators: total population, density, age structure, mobility (changes of residence), birth, birth rate, mortality rate, labour renewal, demographic aging, number of employees, population structure occupied by main sectors, number of schools, number of teaching materials, school population, healthcare units by categories, number of beds, health objects, cultural objectives, historical and ethnographic heritage, number of artists, museums, land structure, total land area and average land area by type of farm, agricultural production, yields, structure and production of animals, structure and quantity of agricultural inputs, mechanization (tractors and agricultural equipment), size of the structure of active enterprises, structure of the business environment, number of tourists, tourist accommodation structure, agritourism pensions, accommodation capacity, tourist movement, length of public roads, modernized communal roads, length of railways, modernized railways, sewerage network, natural gas supply network, drinking water supply network, thermal energy supply, communes connected to public utilities.

The data used were provided by the statistical institutes from the three countries, at the level of NUTs 3.

Also, the results from previous research or papers were useful to reach the objectives proposed. Here, we mention the previous studies, which were identify and used in the present paper. Firstly, the results of the joint Romanian-Ukrainian project RUP 2015 („Regional policies in EU and Eastern Partnership Countries – Case study for rural area in Romania and Ukraine”, project between The Institute of Agricultural Economics-Romanian Academy from Bucharest and The Regional Research Institute of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences from Lviv). In this project, there were identified the common strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for Romania and Ukraine. The results of the study were published and revealed the

asymmetry in the levels of social and economic development, namely the difference in terms of wages, of self-realization possibilities and the disparities of workforce distribution, which influenced the growth of migration flows. The competitiveness in the Ukrainian-Romanian cross-border region will be defined by potential possibilities of the territory to create necessary conditions to meet the residents’, business and investors’ needs, etc. This stipulates activation of cross-border cooperation in order to establish intensive formal and informal cross-border markets of goods, services, capital and human resources.

Secondly, the results of the analyses done by the South-east Regional Development Agency from Romania and North-east Regional Development Agency from Romania were taken into account. Both Romanian development agencies have common border with Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Here, we mention „South-east regional development plan 2014-2020” (2014) and „North-east regional development plan 2014-2020” (2014), which established the main directions of development for 2014-2020, based on the SWOT analysis.

Thirdly, we used the studies carried out by other researchers, authors from Romania or the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and here we mention: Nitescu A. (2016) „The importance of clusters in regional development”, Serbanescu S. & al. (2016) „Regional policy in European countries”, Hrushko O. O. (2015) „Modern aspects of cross-border cooperation on the example of the functioning of Euroregion Upper Prut”, Kravtsiv V.S., & al. (coord), 2015 „Rural areas of the Ukrainian-Romanian borderland: socio-economic development”, Negut S. (2018) or the personal research of the authors of this paper: Voicilas DM (2017) „Opportunities and threats in North-east Romania – SWOT analysis in Suceava and Botosani counties”, Certan I., Certan S. (2015).

Very useful were the analysis done by Vasylova V. (2012) in the paper “Euroregions in Ukraine-Romania-Republic of Moldova area: Expectations, experience and prospects”

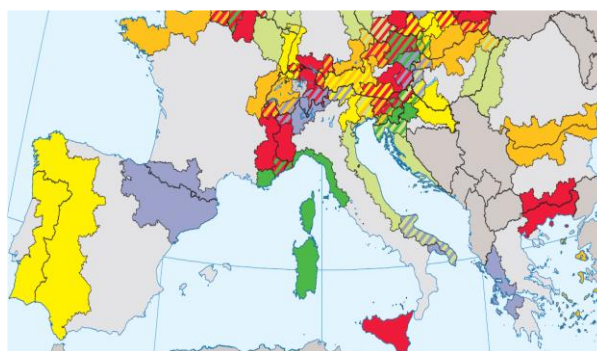
[18]. “The article analyses the phenomenon of Euro-regions and cross-border co-operation in Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Romania area in a comparative perspective with the Western European practice. It outlines the expected mission of the “Lower Danube” and “Upper Prut” Euro-regions, their general features and particularities, achievements and shortcoming, experience and prospects. The study shows that although the “Lower Danube” and “Upper Prut” Euro-regions did not prove to become self-sustainable structures and after 15 years of their existence reduced their activity, they should be given credit for the positive role in the revitalization of cross-border co-operation between the three neighbouring states on the EU Eastern frontier.”

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the initial cross-border cooperation, which was based on simple economic relations between states with a common border, in the 70s this concept began to be developed and reached what we now call the Euroregion. Cross-border cooperation emerged in Western Europe, so that later, after the fall of communist regimes, it extended to Eastern Europe, to the current EU border, the border between Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. In view of this, cross-border cooperation between the three countries mentioned above can become difficult and different from that between EU Member States. These particularities determined us to consider it important to analyse the development stage of the Euro-regions in eastern Romania, which are the opportunities and the main constraints for the further development of them.

The importance given to cross-border cooperation within the EU is also highlighted by European Commission (EC) documents, through the Directorate-General for the Regions (DG Regio), which supports such initiatives through various measures and funds. Map 1 shows some of the cross-border programs co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), in which every program area is displayed in a

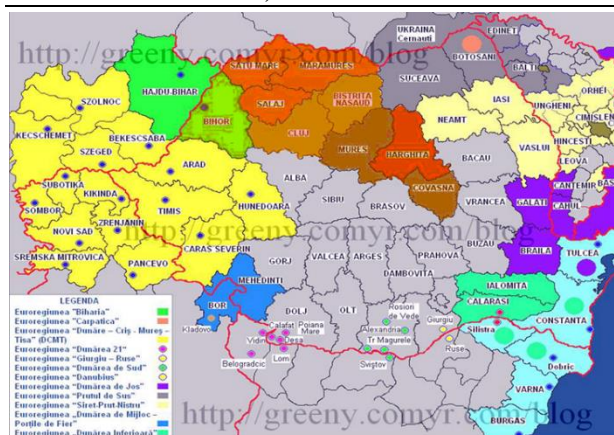
certain colour and the shaded areas are simultaneously part of two or more areas of the program. Obviously, at the level of Romania, the two areas in the DG Regio programs are the southern area (border with Bulgaria) and the western area (border with Hungary), areas neighbouring EU states. The cross-border programs with Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are not represented in this figure.



Map 1. Cross-border cooperation programs 2014-2020 (ERDF)

Source: Processing after [3].

At the same time, the development of the Euroregion concept has also developed cross-border cooperation between EU Member States and non-member states. This is also the case of Romania, as an EU member state but at its eastern border. Unlike Western Europe, where Euro-regions are primarily designed to promote the economic development of peripheral regions, Euro-regions in the eastern EU focus more on education, scientific cooperation, or cultural issues. Emphasis is also placed on the protection of national minorities and efforts are being made to create new opportunities for solving ethnic problems. Another peculiarity of these Euro-regions is that they are based on administrative-territorial units, which is not a general rule in Western European practice. Now, there are 12 Euro-regions in Romania (Map 2). They are located on all borders of Romania with neighbouring states: Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

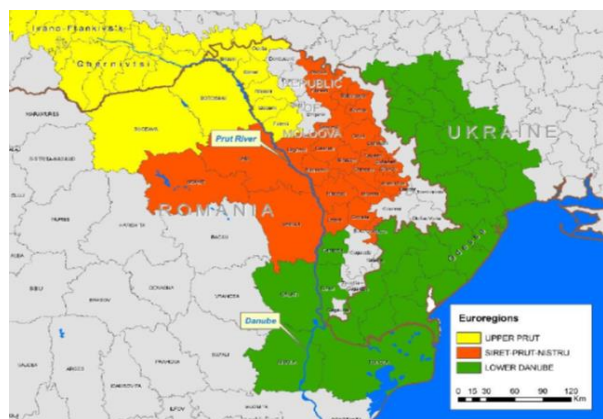


Map 2. Euro-regions in Romania

Source: [16].

Their degree of development and the degree of involvement of the authorities in achieving the objectives set at the establishment are different, depending on the funds available, the intensity of cooperation, the length of cooperation, the interests of the actors involved, traditions, or political factors.

At the eastern border of Romania, the regions that this paper considers for analysis are: Lower Danube, Upper Prut and Siret-Prut-Dniester. These are shown in Map 3.



Map 3. Euro-regions Romania-Republic of Moldova-Ukraine

Source: [10].

The general objective of the Euro-regions between Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine is to “expand and improve relations between local authorities and authorities in the economic, educational, cultural, scientific, sports and ensuring a sustainable development of the region in the context of European plan” [4].

The objectives pursued can be summarized as follows:

- strengthening democracy and developing territorial administrative units;
- joint resolution of environmental, social and economic threats;
- continuous improvement of transport and communications infrastructure;
- development of cross-border strategic concepts of agricultural marketing, waste recycling, tourism and regional development;
- diversification of activities in rural areas;
- improving the quality of living;
- improving the educational environment;
- preservation of cultural heritage.

The SWOT analysis was built using different information from different authors, also our own findings [5], [11], [13], [14], [15], [19]. We tried to sum up all the results obtained in different studies and present them in a balanced way and putting in evidence only the common aspects for all regions.

Based on the SWOT analysis performed, the main strengths and weaknesses of the Euro-regions were identified and grouped by separate dimensions and indicators.

The strengths identified are presented below.

(1) Population and labour force:

- High population density;
- Balanced age structure of rural active population;
- Availability of skilled personnel in traditional activities;
- Labour force surplus;
- Cheap labour force.

(2) Social and cultural dimensions:

- Hospitality of the population;
- A significant amount of revenues from migrant workers, who are abroad;
- Important cultural-historical and ethnographic heritage represented by numerous cultural objectives (churches, monasteries, museums, memorial houses, mansions, inns and monarch courts);
- Preservation, revival, development and popularization of folk traditions and rituals, massive participation in conducting various folk festivals and professional events.

(3) Agriculture, forestry and fishing:

- Significant agricultural land resources;
- High diversification level of agriculture;
- Significant forestry resources;

- Availability of raw materials for further processing of agricultural products;

- Private ownership of land

- Rich hydrographical network by the presence of rivers: Dnister, Prut, Siret, Suceava and Moldova.

(4) Other economic activities in rural areas:

- Rich natural and anthropic resources (variety and diversity of objectives of national and international interest, with special landscape areas, with natural reserves and protected areas and diverse therapeutic factors);

- The number of tourist accommodation units is on the rise (most of them are represented by agro-tourism boarding houses and chalets);

- The tourist accommodation capacity increased;

- Availability of raw materials for the production of building materials.

(5) Transport and technical infrastructure:

- TEN-T road network;

- TEN-T railway network;

- The sewerage networks increased;

- The natural gas supply networks increased;

- The drinking water supply networks increased;

- The presence of the international airports;

- Significant coverage of the area by mobile communications of various operators.

Among the weaknesses, the most important and common for all three Euro-regions are mentioned below.

(1) Population and labour force:

- Demographic decline of rural population;

- Demographic ageing of population and labour force;

- Strong external migration;

- Elderly population feminization;

- Population mainly employed in the primary sector;

- Low living standards;

- Low salaries.

(2) Social and cultural dimensions:

- Descending trend of educational units;

- Descending trend of the qualified teaching staff;

- School population decreased (school abandonment increased);

- School performance decreases;

- Deficient healthcare staff;

- Precarious remuneration in the healthcare system;

- Inadequate endowment of public units with healthcare equipment;

- Lack of health care units and hospital beds in rural areas.

(3) Agriculture, forestry and fishing:

- Preponderantly agricultural region;

- Presence of (semi-) subsistence household farms;

- Low productivity of crops, as a result of relatively low use of modern inputs, carriers of technological progress;

- Structure of agricultural production is slightly imbalanced (crop production prevalence in total agricultural production);

- Soil degradation emerged as a result of inadequate utilization of fertilizers;

- Weak integration of agriculture to the market.

(4) Other economic activities in rural areas:

- Advanced degradation of many buildings that are historical monuments;

- Lack of programs and financial resources for the renovation of historical buildings;

- The relatively low development level of SMEs in rural areas;

- The disparity in the development of SMEs both in terms of sectoral and territorial structure;

- Lack of infrastructure to support SME development;

- Low levels of communications infrastructure in recreational areas.

(5) Transport and technical infrastructure:

- Low modernization level of highways;

- Low modernization of regular roads in some areas;

- Poor existing infrastructure of local border crossing check-points.

Following the SWOT analyses performed by the authors of this paper, but also by other authors, several opportunities were identified, as well as common threats, which target the analysed Euro-regions.

Thus, the opportunities can be grouped taking into account the dimensions and indicators mentioned at the beginning of the study, as follows:

(1) Population and labour force:

- Regional partnerships for the development of education, employment and social inclusion;

- Thematic objectives related to the Europe 2020 Strategy dedicated to human capital.

(2) Social and cultural dimensions:

- European Structural Funds dedicated to improving educational, transport and technical infrastructure;

- EU funds dedicated to regional development and human resources development in the health system;

- EU funds and government programs dedicated to culture and heritage conservation;

- Cross-border cooperation;

- Cultural exchange programs with other localities;

- Promoting old customs, traditions, crafts and customs;

- Outsourcing the old ethnographic and folkloric traditions.

(3) Agriculture, forestry and fishing:

- Diversified agricultural practices;

- Tradition in raising animals;

- Rich forest resources;

- Great fishing potential.

(4) Other economic activities in rural areas:

- Tourism.

(5) Transport and technical infrastructure:

- Presence of trans-European roads and rail networks;

- European funds dedicated to TEN-T road and rail networks.

The following common threats were identified in the analysed Euro-regions:

(1) Population and labour force:

- Birth;

- Migration.

(2) Social and cultural dimensions:

- Increasing the number of children with parents who went to work abroad;

- Decreasing individual and collective school performance;

- The state budget allocated to health care.

(3) Agriculture, forestry and fishing:

-The polarized structure of agriculture;

-Perpetuation of (semi-) subsistence farms;

-Maintaining the unbalanced structure of agricultural production;

-Intensive exploitation and poor industrialization of wood;

-Reduced use of fish potential.

(4) Other economic activities in rural areas:

-Valorisation of the natural and anthropic resources of the region from the tourist point of view;

-The correlation between the natural potential and the developed infrastructure.

(5) Transport and technical infrastructure:

-Use of EU funds;

-Continuation of the economic crisis.

Unlike other EU Euro-regions, those on the EU's eastern border have encountered a number of difficulties over time. First, the ambiguous wording of the first agreement concluded in 1997 complicated the promotion of Euro-regional projects [18]. Thus, internal organizational difficulties prevented their implementation, affecting their efficiency. There were differences of opinion on the role and purpose of setting up Euro-regions.

Then, other difficulties encountered were related to the economic situation in the participating countries, which limited the possibilities of implementing mutual economic projects. Thus, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Romania were not mutually economically attractive countries at that time.

The projects in the Euro-regions analysed depended to a large extent on donor countries and organizations, primarily European funds, which significantly limited the development of cross-border projects.

Last but not least, other problems were related to the imperfections and discrepancies existing at national level, regarding the legislation of the three states, the lack of clear concepts and strategies for reform and sustainable economic development, high customs duties, high prices for transport, inadequate tax regulations, lack of real competition in the market, bureaucracy or corruption.

Difficult relations between central and local/regional authorities, specific to post-communist states, have generated additional problems for cross-border cooperation in the initial stage of their existence.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis carried out lead us to some conclusions that we summarize below.

The development of these Euro-regions and implicitly the increase of the living standard of the regional population depend on several factors, such as the political, geopolitical, administrative and business ones. They have their origin in the history, culture or traditions of the analysed areas. But, beyond these aspects, we believe that purely economic interests must prevail, and the socio-economic development of Euro-regions depends on public and private initiatives, the investment climate, the desire of administrations, the will of politicians.

In other words, the development of Euro-regions can be achieved through industrial parks and the development of cross-border business infrastructure (agriculture, forestry and fish farming are prerequisites for better exploitation, production and export; population density and availability of qualified staff in traditional local activities recommend areas analysed for policies oriented towards local development based on business with traditional origins; business partnership). Also, the emergence of small and large power plants and the provision of trans-regional connections of national networks can be a factor in Euro-regional development.

Last but not least, the development of cross-border tourism (for the capitalization of natural and anthropic heritage), but also the development and modernization of transport networks and the opening of new border crossing points, can contribute to achieving the objectives of the Euro-regions.

Our findings show that the Euro-regions analysed are very divers and different from each other. The analysed Euro-regions are different not only from each other but also within the same Euro-regions there are differences, either from one country to another, or even within the same country from one area to another. There are many positive aspects which characterize the areas analysed, but negative aspects, as well. They interact permanently and they are, sometimes, very

divergent. These characteristics make the process of construction of fair and solid strategies or policies very difficult.

In other words, the cross-border cooperation and the Euro-regions development have multiple implications, as was written by Hrushko, O. O. (2015), "it was determined that the cross-border cooperation projects implementation not only positively affects the development of the region, but also is an effective mechanism for the formation of public opinion on the movement of Ukraine towards the EU.

It is concluded that trans-regional cooperation today is looking for new models of national infrastructures, which includes power systems, transportation and communication network.

The development of a common policy on technogenic and ecological safety, prevention of pollution of river basins, and the development of tourism and recreational activities also must be included in such new model. The implementation of joint strategies must be established and have to include the equalization of socio-economic and political development of border regions". These conclusions are valid for Republic of Moldova and its policies, as well. Taking into account these principles, we can say that the Euroregion analysed have potential and they will acquire consistency and will develop solidly.

In conclusion, the Euroregion is the future form of international and cross-border cooperation. Cultural, linguistic and traditional links are prerequisites and welcome for strengthening Euro-regions (expression of identity and roots). Pragmatically, in the next stage, these premises are replaced by economic interests. The economy becomes the premise for the future structure of Europe, based on Euro-regions.

Thus, the future Europe can be understood not as a Europe of countries, but a Europe of regions with common economic, social, political and military interests on the international stage.



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