

CROSS-BORDER RELATIONSHIPS IN EUROPE

Borders and border regions are special research fields of political geography and economic geography. Border is a term of several meanings as it is frequently used in philosophical, mathematical, geometrical, historical and geographical sense. In the present paper only political borders are considered and an outline regarding the political geographical and economic effects of European state borders is given. There are no bad or good borders only the political systems fill them with emotional content. Measures aiming to develop border areas and support for them are in the centre of European Union efforts.

Keywords: Border regions, CBC organisations, Eurometropolis, Cross-border co-operation.

Истван Сули-Закар, Габор Ленки. ТРАНСКОРДОННІ ВІДНОСИНИ В ЄВРОПІ. Дослідження кордонів та прикордонних регіонів є особливими напрямками політичної й економічної географії. Кордон – це термін з кількома значеннями, що часто використовується у філософському, математичному, геометричному, історичному та географічному сенсі. У даній роботі розглядаються тільки політичні кордони, а також дається план щодо політико-географічних та економічних наслідків європейських державних кордонів. Не існує поганих або гарних кордонів, тільки політичні системи наповнюють їх емоційний зміст. Заходи, спрямовані на розвиток прикордонних районів та їх підтримку, знаходяться в центрі зусиль Європейського Союзу.

Ключові слова: прикордонні регіони, СВС організації, єврометрополії, транскордонне співробітництво.

Истван Сули-Закар, Габор Ленки. ТРАНСГРАНИЧНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ В ЕВРОПЕ. Исследование границы и пограничных регионов является особыми направлениями политической и экономической географии. Граница – это термин с несколькими значениями, который часто используется в философском, математическом, геометрическом, историческом и географическом смысле. В настоящей работе рассматриваются только политические границы, а также дается план относительно политико-географических и экономических последствий европейских государственных границ. Не существует плохих или хороших границ, только политические системы наполняют их эмоциональное содержание. Мероприятия, направленные на развитие пограничных районов и их поддержку, находятся в центре усилий Европейского Союза.

Ключевые слова: пограничные регионы, СВС организации, еврометрополи, трансграничное сотрудничество.

Introduction. The territory of state – national territory – from a political geographical aspect – means an area surrounded by state borders. In this way the state border is a zone, belt or line that separates state areas from each other. State border is the boundary within which the state can practice its sovereign rights. It is an important geopolitical element of neighbourhood relations that had different meanings in different historical ages. There are no bad or good borders only the political systems fill them with emotional content: at the time of separating national states advantages were associated to them as they protect against the “enemy” on the other side. Ambivalent character of borders is presented by their protection that can be misused as well [26]. As a result of eliminating the iron curtain and especially of the extension of the NATO the traditional protection role of borders seems to be vanishing. International security is essential regarding regions along borders. Tension and war present potential threat on regional development. War tension repels factors that would have positive effects on development (those demanding secure existence, honest entrepreneurs, consolidated capital, innovation, etc.) while it attracts crime, narcotics and gun-running, black economy [25, 18]. The same was experienced in Hungary as well as the negative effect of the Balkan wars. Significance of borders has been changing in Europe: borders have been vanishing in one part of the continent while they have been being born in the other (eastern) part (numerous new borders appeared with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia).

Border regions, borderside regions in Europe.

In Western Europe the situation of regions along border was changed fundamentally by the turn of the millennium due to vanishing borders. Today's questions

associated to border regions either focus on the border status or on their specifics arising from their current situation, i.e. the appearance of new possibilities, advantages and disadvantages and their possible consequences. In Western Europe the fate of settlements along borders and the life quality of inhabitants are influenced fundamentally by the character of the border. Life standard of those living along borders may improve if co-operations among settlements, regions and countries along borders are extended (e.g. brother towns, labour exchange, nature protection, joint regional development, retail trade). Where borders are penetrable their binding character will increase and local development can be based on new spatial co-operations. Where, on the other hand, the separating character of borders dominates border regions will remain periphery areas [1.]. In the case of binding borders regions along the borders will co-operate eventually that present a new quality compared to separating borders providing several opportunities for joint developments [8.]. Entity of regions along borders generally creates their own cross-border infrastructure and common interests. Advantages from the positive effects of different sovereignties add up and may become important sources of regional development in the co-operating regions along borders [4]. Following World War II many leading Western European politicians committed themselves to the necessity of establishing European Unity. Schuman, Monnet, Adenauer, Spaak and others thought the small European continent with its separating borders is too dissected and cannot compete with the large states (USA, Soviet Union, China). This is why the elimination of the borders and the unification of national markets were announced. The Common Market aimed to establish a united European economic area without customs frontier (1968). The primary measure of this was the elimination of borders enabling the free movement of goods, people, service and capital (the four basic free-

doms) within the European Union (1992). Nowadays cross-border co-operation is one of the stressed fields of operation in order to strengthen economic and social co-operations. For this, however, according to EU experience the different development levels of the regions have to be reduced. Measures aiming to develop border areas and support for them (e.g. labour training, regional development and social politics) are in the centre of European Union efforts. The same were targeted by the INTERREG programme as well that were founded in order to support co-operation between regions along national borders (inner and outer borders of the Union). The INTERREG programme was aimed to develop regions along borders, the improvement of information exchange between organizations and to modernize border spatial structures [26]. Border areas are in a specific situation from several aspects: they are located along the border of one country and in the immediate vicinity of another. The border between the two countries separate, however, in Western Europe in most cases it also binds the two regions. Population of border regions is frequently of mixed nationalities and the two sides of the border show historical, cultural and economic relationship. Border regions represent specific transitional areas between the two countries via their common history, culture, traditions, settlement structure and the composition of their inhabitants. They are connected to two countries at the same time, they depend on their own centres but they are connected to the settlements on the other side of the border as well via traditional relationships [2]. It is also fundamentally important that border regions are mediators of the relationship between countries as well. In regions along borders the presence and effects of the neighbour is natural, its habits can be known. In these zones the quick intensification of relations the economy becomes intensified as well as exchange grows, new values and samples are adapted and their spreading towards the rest of the countries can be started from these regions. In Central Europe the area of the Carpathian basin is dissected most by state borders. Their effects impeding social and economic development are well known and the separating role of borders has a significant part in the backwardness of the associated areas [15, 16]. In Western Europe the borders were eliminated and the former customs offices and tollhouses received new functions. For example in the former tollhouse of the small town of Gronau at the German-Dutch border the centre of the Association of European Border Regions is located [6].

Cross-border (CBC) organizations in the European Union. Following the termination of World War II one of the most characteristic feature in Western Europe was the appearance and spreading of Euregionalism. Regionalism was proved in the last decades to be suitable for solving century long (political, ethnic, regional development) actual problems. Euregionalism appeared in Eastern Central Europe as well in the 1990s and it was hoped to be successful in solving old problems characteristic for the region. A task of special importance for Euregionalism was the reduction of the separating role impeding social and economic function of political state borders and to strengthen cross-border relations [19.]. In the eastern part of Europe parallel to the consolidation of national states and the strengthening

of their central leadership most of the areas along their borders became periphery regions. Being frequently cut off their former natural (local, regional) connections on the other side of the national state border, neglected by the national state centres as well the development of these areas slowed down. This was reflected in the economic parameters and in the lower level of infrastructure. Cross-border interregional connections played an important role in the strengthening of the position of Western Europe in the competition. Provinces of the region developed bilateral co-operations along borders into multi-lateral spatial associations after World War II. In this way the Regio Basiliensis, the association of the French Upper Alsace county, the Swiss Basel city and canton and the southern German Baden district as a classic example. In this form a harmonic economic and cultural co-operation was achieved instead of a French-German opposition. Already in the early 1970s joint special trainings were organized in universities in the three landscape units [14]. States of Europe aimed to meet the challenges of the new millennium by establishing and developing various integration organisations. As a result, the disadvantageous social and economic consequences of border position were eliminated effectively in the western part of Europe in the last decades by successful Euregional co-operations. It can be stated that one of the most important European phenomena is the advancement of regionalism (Figure 1). Europe at the end of the 20th century became the Europe of regions. The northern and western European model of regionalism becomes a model for the whole Europe and regional states appear in more-and-more states in the Continent. This development did not avoid Hungary either becoming the initiative and participant of several regional co-operations of the area from the middle of the 1990s (Alps-Adriatic Co-operation, Carpathians Euroregion, Danube-Maros-Körös-Tisza Euroregion, Vág-Danube-Ipoly, etc.).

Cross-border connections of Eastern-Central Europe. On the basis of western European examples, we Hungarians hoped – as early as the beginning of the 1990s – that there would be the chance to establish multi-lateral interregional co-operations in regions along the borders and they would receive new dimensions from the political changes in Eastern-Central Europe. These hopes were mostly realized and a geostrategic situation was formed by today in which the relationship of regions on the two sides of borders was changed fundamentally. Their co-operation is much different from the former one and can be developed on new bases due to the country joining the NATO earlier and the European Union as well.

Conditions of forming border regions, Euroregions and Eurometropolises are different country by country considering Hungary and its neighbours [5, 21]. Co-operations were supported by leadership statements of the seven neighbouring countries (apart from a few exceptions). However, our neighbours – except for Austria – are newly formed or transformed national states that operate in centralised fashion leaving little space for regional and local participants, they do not apply the subsidiary principle and have nationalist suspicion to cross-border co-operations [8]. Therefore even the spectacular (state level) declaration of cross-border co-

operations were hardly accompanied by actual measures and the diplomatic style statements were rather PR jobs trying to help the joining of the EU and to maintain the image of the “hard-working” country [17]. In the world market, however, - and especially in Europe - changes require the urgent reevaluation of cross-border co-operations. International division of labour and regional cohesion that become more-and-more dominant result in the cross-border movement of capital, labour and products. As a result, border side areas experience fundamental function changes becoming from periphery areas on the edge of states important transfer zones of interna-

tional division of labour where significant changes occur in the cost factors of both enterprises and individuals within a small distance [3]. Following the termination of the Warsaw Treaty the reevaluation of border regions and the strengthening of spatial cohesion became necessary for the countries of Eastern-Central Europe. Socialist economy prevailing for decades - due to its characteristic hierarchy and centralized structure - was insensible to distance and geographical position. Following the regime change the monopoly of central foreign trade companies ceased and enterprises and individuals established direct connections over the borders.

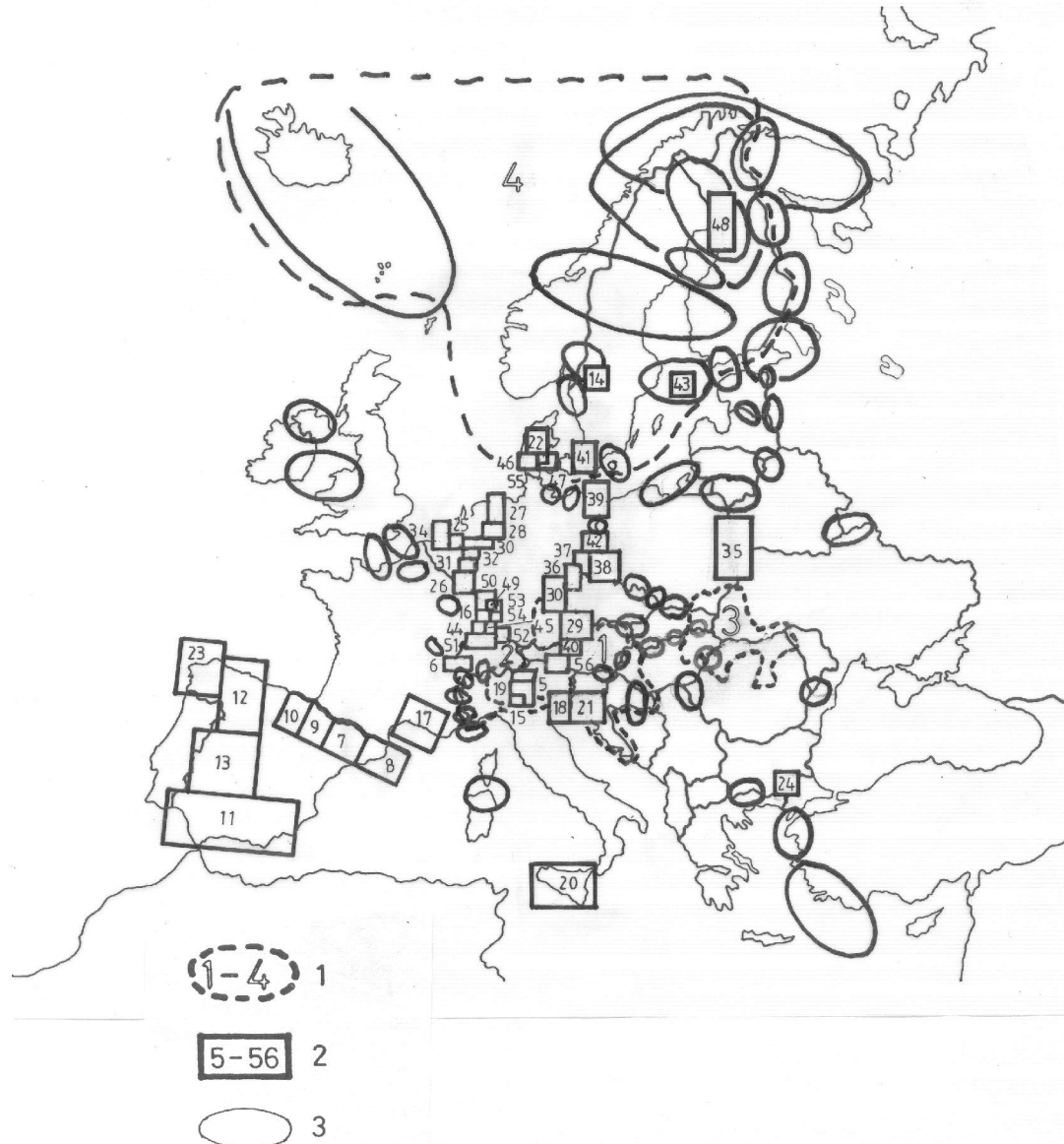


Fig. 1. Member regions (2011) of the Association of European Border Regions Legend: 1. Working groups; 2. Euregions; 3. Other - non member - cross-border co-operations

Source: AEBR, Gronau

This new situation requires the transformation of border regions and cross-border co-operations in Eastern-Central Europe. In Eastern-Central Europe regarding CBC connections economic, R&D, university and civil participants dominate nowadays, however, they are diverse, considering ownership and their decisions are autonomous. Local economy (locally owned, local decision makers, based on local connection network) has

been started to be established. Local governments became important participants while civil social organizations are new participants (local and landscape unit associations, societies). Despite all these changes the power of border regions to enforce their interest is still not reasonable and the role of the government was modified only slightly. The primary base of regional development in the transforming Eastern-Central Europe is still the

spatial reallocation of budget sources [7], however, the role of EU development funds increases strengthening spatial cohesion.

The spatial differentiating element currently is coping with the crisis and adjusting to the market economy requirements. In this the geographical location and the tension in the community (education, innovation sensitivity, civil traditions) of the border region have important role. A key reason in the development of regional differences is the difference of the qualification and education of labour influencing also the capability of adjusting to new situations and innovations. Closing up of regions therefore is helped greatly by improving the qualification and education of the population increasing partly the adaptation and partly the innovation capabilities. Despite the different character of training systems and

employment structure conditions for co-operation and for exploiting the different potentials are good in several regions. Differences in training systems may intensify the already started cross-border educational co-operations [9, 10] and eventually the strengthening of “cross-border” regional universities [11]. In the eastern part of Central Europe the elimination of borders may contribute to the revival of the once close connections between cities on the two sides of borders. Traditional development of the economic districts – based on city attraction districts and the inter-company relationships of the local economy – is repressed and is replaced by the international network of cities (Eurometropolises located on the two sides of borders but harmonizing their development) and by the economic network associated with them [13].

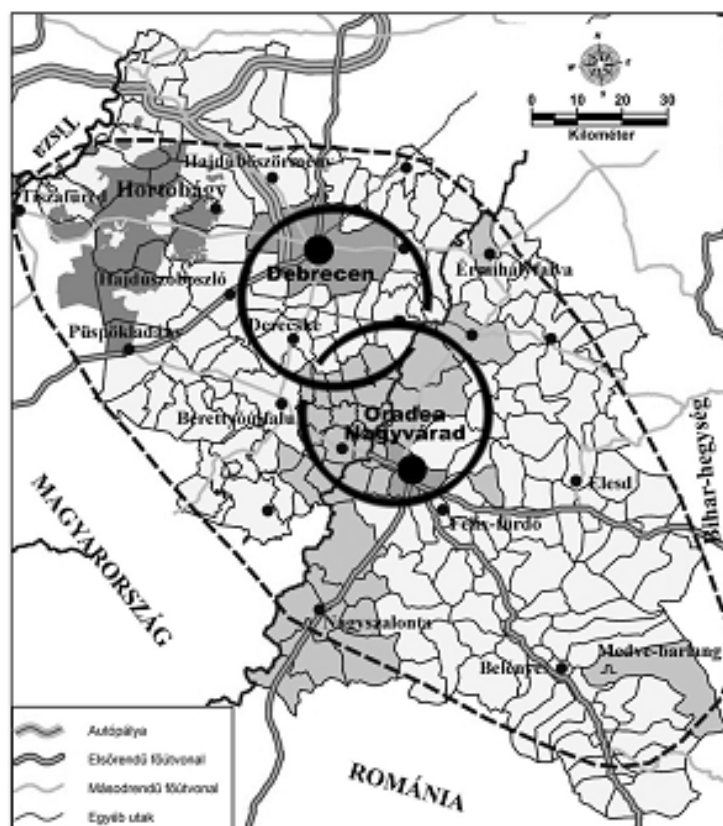


Fig. 2. Debrecen-Oradea Eurometropolis

Source: Süli-Zakar I., 2009

Especially advantageous was the situation of cities near borders as they attracted significant investment due to their gateway functions as bases for multinational companies and organisations. Diplomatic and financial life of such gateway cities intensified their international marketing role, the significance of their higher education and their conference tourism increases rapidly.

Major diplomatic success was achieved by the countries of Eastern-Central Europe in recent decades and they belong to the most developed and strongest democracies of the World. Security of the countries as members of the OECD, NATO and European Union is much stronger than was in the past. The favourable changes in the position in World politics of Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary naturally include the posi-

tively changing potential of border regions.

According to the experience of the empirical research in the border regions cross-border co-operation programmes, innovation oriented joint economic development, establishment of Eurometropolises and Euroregions are general aims. Network of Eurometropolises and Euroregions advances from Western Europe towards east in order to utilize comparative advantages along the borders better. The most important target in border regions is the development of such economic, innovation and social environment by the establishment of various institutions that can extend the fields of successful economy and can increase the regional development success of border regions in neighbouring countries.

Cross-border co-operations are important ele-

ments in the European integration process. Fundamental political conditions for such co-operations has been present in most border regions in Europe since the 1990s as a result of fundamental political and economic changes in Central and Eastern European countries. Intent for co-operation is reflected by the increasing number of Euregions and other CBCs (e.g. Eurometropolises) especially in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Border regions start their closing up and integration (meaning better co-operation of areas on the two sides of borders and better connection with associated national economies) generally from very disadvantageous positions due to their geographical location and economic situation. Therefore development of infrastructure and higher education supporting the modernizing of the economy is of special importance. Number and effectiveness of such developments, however, far less than desired as these are mostly investments requiring high financial support.

A general problem is imposed by the financing of cross-border co-operations. In this respect the conditions are worst in Central and Eastern Europe (especially along the non EU borders). The most important outer financing source for Euregions are the EU funds (INTERREG, PHARE CBC and TACIS CBC prior to 2007), however, obtaining support from these sources was made difficult by the lack of self-sufficiency and experience.

Based on the experiences, it can be stated that the Eurometropolises and Euregions can be effective where changes in the economic environment resulted in better co-operation. The series of such steps established the united inner market within which cross-border co-operations had to face much less technical difficulties (although new challenges also appeared as a result of eliminating the strictly protected borders). Separating technical economic factors were further decreased by the introduction of the Euro along the borders of countries that applied it.

The above may also present favourable effects apart from the inner border regions of the EU on the border regions that will be the outer border of the EU when new countries join the Union. However, difficulties (visa requirement) to be introduced as a result of the Schengen Agreement (already introduced partly) will make co-operation much more difficult. This affects primarily the Ukraine and Serbia in the case of Hungary.

Even though the economic results of Euregional co-operation stay below the desired level the maintenance and improvement of direct connections along the borders are very important [12].

In 2012 in Eastern-Central Europe no border is found where city or regional co-operation, reduction of historical and ethnic traumas and joint regional development are not helped by Euroregions or Eurometropolises. It can be stated that Euregions and Eurometropolises became parts of everyday life in the eastern periphery of the EU [20].

The Committee of the Regions of the European Union discussed the submission on multi-level governance in its 80th plenary meeting in June 2009. The published material of the meeting is entitled "Committee of the Regions' White Paper on Multilevel Governance".

The Committee of the Regions organized discussions on the White Paper in several regional and CBC organisations of the member states and in experts' forums in the past months. Submitters – in our opinion – would like to intensify the process of decentralization, primarily in the new member states while they try to revive weakening regionalism and cross-border-co-operations.

In Western Europe by the end of the 1990s the "stage" of community, settlement and economic operation and competition was not the area of the country closed by national borders but the region formed on the basis of co-operation (and belonging occasionally to several countries). Regionalism became an organic part of European thinking by the end of the 20th century. This phenomenon is naturally not without antecedents, even this specific European political geographical model is based on a past of several centuries [22].

One pillar of European regionalism was decentralisation resulting in a new division of labour within the national states. National state regional policy was replaced by the own policy of the regions. Supporters of regional decentralisation in the European Union were the most developed regions as they are the primary winners of the united market and the economic and monetary union [23].

In the new member states joining the Union after the turn of the millennium actual regionalism has just been started. These are national states formed mostly in the 20th century where state centralisation has important nation building (homogenizing) tasks. They established a "seeming" regionalism – primarily in order to ensure and intensify the process of joining the EU – in the 1990s: creating greater or new large intermediate level public administration units and in most countries "statistical and planning" regions were created. These meet certain EU statistical requirements (EUROSTAT) and the minimum requirements of the planning and distribution of the European Union regional policy.

Following the presidency of J. Delors regionalism lost its momentum in the older member states of the EU as well and in most countries – primarily due to the advancement of ambitious "national" politicians – it came to a halt. This was a "message" for the Eastern-Central European states that wished to join the EU after the turn of the millennium not to "force" regionalism in their own countries [24]. This resulted in that the centralized state structure was not changed. Regionalism – and decentralisation with it in the new member states – lost a battle. Public administration regions were not created, spatial autonomies and CBC organisations depend on the government policy.

It can be read in the White Paper that the consultation, co-ordination, co-operation and evaluation principles and mechanisms recommended at Union level have to be applied in the member states. A condition of this is the strengthened vertical partnership practice among the European Union, the national governments, the regional governments and local governments. In the new member states joined after 2004 the legal and public administration conditions are mostly not adequate for establishing partnerships. Although in most countries NUTS II regions have been created – based on EU examples – during the long period of joining (mainly by merging

smaller counties) these are not “real” regions only so called planning-statistical regions that have no local governmental rights and are not entitled to carry out intermediate (regional) level government. They only have functions in statistical data provision and in the distribution of EU funding. As regionalisation lost its momentum in the EU from the end of the 1990s the new member states were not forced to realize real regionalisation in their countries. The EU was satisfied with the shallow regionalism resulting in the creation of planning-statistical regions. In this way, state-governmental centralisation remained strong in the new member states which has also very strong historical roots considering both the time period between the two world wars and the socialist decades realizing extreme centralisation.

In the last 20 years governments replaced each other as a result of democratic elections in the past 20 years and they always emphasized, especially when elections were coming the necessity of decentralisation and the importance of establishing the distribution of powers with the regional and local governments. This, however, has not been realized in most of the new EU member states. In our opinion this is the primary hindrance of the establishment of multi-level governments in the 10 new member states in the eastern periphery of the EU (all of them were parts or allies of the former Soviet Union).

The two strategic aims of the “White paper” are – 1, enabling civilians to participate directly in European processes and 2, to increase the effectiveness of community action. These are ideas that can be realized by multi-level governments. The division of responsibility and labour among the established levels of power can result in the increase of activity and participation of civilians at different levels.

A fundamental condition of participation democracy is that the established vertical and horizontal (government, regional and local governments, CBC organisations and the civil community) institutions help the partnership practice and the success of the local and regional level initiatives of the inhabitants via social discussions. (Especially in the fields of social issues, employment, integration and cohesion policy and sustainable devel-

opment.) Social organisations are very underdeveloped in Eastern-Central Europe and their efficiency could be improved by multi-level governments. Social organisations and local governments suffer from issues that are hardly recognised by the central government, including the integration of Roma inhabitants and the issue of ethnicity. Significant improvements are required especially in the former socialist countries and the EU needs to provide effective support in order to eliminate the post-communist public administration culture that impedes effectively decentralisation.

Nowadays the financial-economic crisis impeded regionalism processes but hopefully the role of regional dimensions will be revived in the integration process of the EU as a result of the Lisbon Agreement. With this it can be achieved that local and regional governments act not only like a mediator in the relationship of the EU and its citizens but as a real and responsible partner. Therefore the Committee of the Regions has to put the halted regionalism of the countries in the eastern periphery on the agenda again. One of the fundamental blocks of establishing multi-level governments in the post-communist countries is the lack of real regional governments. In these countries the fundamental condition of decentralisation (and via this, multi-level governments) is the establishment of real (local governmental) regions and ethnic based regional autonomies. On the contrary of government centralisation, multi-level governments can be helped by intermediate level local governments, cross-border organisations influenced not by the central government and where it is desired regional and ethnic autonomies. All these may eventually strengthen effectively participation democracy.

We regret to declare that the process of a united Europe – especially after 2000 – continued ambiguously. Twelve new member states joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, however, they became not full members. The EU now has “double speeds” as the “four freedoms” did not extend over the poorer countries that joined later the Union or only partially with conditions. Elimination of the borders has not been completed since Romania and Bulgaria are not part of the Schengen Agreement.

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Summary

István Süli-Zakar, Gábor Lenkey. CROSS-BORDER RELATIONSHIPS IN EUROPE.

Nowadays the financial-economic crisis impeded regionalism processes but hopefully the role of regional dimensions will be revived in the integration process of the EU as a result of the Lisbon Agreement. With this it can be achieved that local and regional governments act not only like a mediator in the relationship of the EU and its citizens but as a real and responsible partner. Therefore the Committee of the Regions has to put the halted regionalism of the countries in the eastern periphery on the agenda again. One of the fundamental blocks of establishing multi-level governments in the post-communist countries is the lack of real regional governments. In these countries the fundamental condition of decentralisation (and via this, multi-level governments) is the establishment of real (local governmental) regions and ethnic based regional autonomies. On the contrary of government centralisation, multi-level governments can be helped by intermediate level local governments, cross-border organisations influenced not by the central government and where it is desired regional and ethnic autonomies. All these may eventually strengthen effectively participation democracy. We regret to declare that the process of a united Europe – especially after 2000 – continued ambiguously. Twelve new member states joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, however, they became not full members. The EU now has “double speeds” as the “four freedoms” did not extend over the poorer countries that joined later the Union or only partially with conditions. Elimination of the borders has not been completed since Romania and Bulgaria are not part of the Schengen Agreement.

Keywords: Border regions, CBC organisations, Eurometropolis, Cross-border co-operation.