David Turnock

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
A MAJOR ELEMENT IN REGIONAL POLICY IN THE
NEW EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

ABSTRACT: Borders in East Central Europe have become much more permeable over the past ten years as formalities have been simplified and many new crossing points have opened. At the same time, cooperation in border regions has increased, thanks mainly to the EU 'Interreg' programmes, to include a range of business, cultural and conservation interests. In many cases these arrangements have been formalised through Euroregions which have become an indicator of good international relations. The paper reviews these trends with reference to examples and pays particular attention to environmental projects and the joint planning initiatives being undertaken in a number of Euroregions. At a time when regional policy has been generally weak, cross-border cooperation has contributed significantly to cohesion and it is also a good indicator of stability in the region. However, the impact has been greater in the north than in the Balkans and the first round of EU eastern enlargement will have implications for cooperation across the new external borders.

KEY WORDS: cross-border cooperation, (Euro) regions, east central Europe

INTRODUCTION: THE PERMEABILITY OF FRONTIERS
UNDER COMMUNISM AND TRANSITION

In communist East Central Europe (ECE) movement across state borders was very carefully controlled and cross-border cooperation (CBC) was effectively ruled out. Although the most substantial fortifications were usually restricted to the Iron Curtain itself, crossing points between communist states were few and far between and were subject to complex bureaucratic regulation with relatively few local arrangements to facilitate family contact or daily commuting. Movement was not by any means completely stopped in the communist period. The shortage of labour in East Germany and to a lesser extent former Czechoslovakia (FCS) led to significant daily commuting from Poland, though the friendly relations extended across the Oder-Neisse frontier were somewhat strained during the Polish 'Solidarity' era when (for example) Czechs
were only allowed to go into Poland with a written invitation verified by the authorities. There was also scope for limited local movement across Hungary’s frontiers with her various neighbours, given the prominence of Hungarian ethnic minorities in Romania, Slovakia and the former Yugoslavia.

Some border ‘loosening’ occurred in the 1970s through cooperation between Burgenland province and the Hungarian counties of Györ-Sopron and Vas in Hungary over a joint planning committee. Travellers between the Burgenland villages of Siegendorf and Morbisch were allowed to use the direct route through Hungary, while greatly increased travel by Austrians into Hungary increased supermarket turnover in Sopron and recreation use of facilities in the vicinity of Neusiedler See (Baran 1995 pp. 101—4). Meanwhile, the Baltic Sea Environmental Protection Committee was set up in 1960 with the aims of reducing pollution and creating a taskforce for programme implementation. A new convention agreed in 1994 now provides for a wider programme to run for 20 years. A particularly significant initiative arose through the Alps-Adria Working Community founded in 1978 to link certain parts of Austria, Germany and Italy with Croatia and Slovenia, then within Former Yugoslavia (Figure 1). This organisation was extended to western Hungary in 1986—9 and part of Switzerland in 1990. There is now a limited common budget and five permanent technical commissions. Particularly close contacts were established between Italy’s Friuli-Venezia Giulia region and adjacent parts of Austria and Slovenia with respect to environmental protection, culture and transport.

However these were exceptional cases, for in discussing the border between Hungary and FCS, F. Podhorsky (in Baran 1995 pp. 56—9) remarks that the Former Soviet Union (FSU) „was remarkable for distrust even towards its own allies”. The result was isolation and the reduction of cross-border contact to a minimum. The concept of circular cumulative causation may be used to emphasise the negative effects of a closed frontier on the economic development of border regions, with limited employment prospects prompting selective out-migration and population decline; noted in Poland’s borderlands and also in Slovenia where Horvat (1992) identified ‘demographically-endangered settlements’. The western borderlands of FCS constituted a special case of depression through the expulsion of the German minority and the consolidation of agriculture in the hands of large state farming enterprises. Population decline in turn discouraged investment in infrastructure, while jobs in manufacturing (usually handicrafts, food processing and extractive industries) provided few opportunities for the well-qualified. In order to create more jobs it was usually necessary to intensify agriculture and local food processing and develop textiles as in the Harz Mountains of East Germany.

The Transition: Enhanced Cooperation

International traffic flows have increased and the balance between internal and external movement has been transformed (Dawson 1997). In the Balkans there is now an emerging regional market with international specialisation where Albania’s agriculture and labour resources complements Bulgaria’s
manufacturing and Greece's tertiary sector, including the port of Thessaloniki (Petrikos 1996 p. 18). The transition has already seen massive strides towards a integrated transport geography (Hall 1993) and provision of 'missing links' has made for more rounded networks, especially where the break-up of federations has created new national interests and capacity on the main Eurocorridors is building up through provision for a new railway to link Hungary and Slovenia and also to connect Albania and Bulgaria through Macedonia. The major crossing points — like Hegeshalom on Austria's border with Hungary — have become substantial commercial centres in addition to their basic administrative functions. However, it must be conceded that international traffic does not necessarily mean cohesion in border regions and while Gosar (1996) notes Slovenia's progress in developing 'transnational functional regions' through early collaboration with Italy's Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, it is claimed that foreign investors do not generally choose to locate in Slovenia's border regions.

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION: THE 'INTERREG' PROGRAMME

In 1991 the European Commission recognised that border regions were disadvantaged because they lay at the extremities of transport systems planned on a national basis. In such areas trade was often distorted, while services were wastefully duplicated and mobility hampered by differences in language, taxation, employment practices and welfare systems. There is now recognition of shared responsibility for border regions as more countries sign up for with the signing of the Council of Europe's (CoE) convention on transfrontier cooperation. EU financial support under 'Interreg' was initially restricted to the internal borders, but 'Interreg II' (1994—9) included external borders and thereby affected the frontiers of Austria, Germany and Greece with ECE countries and a wider 'European Spatial Development Perspective' published in 1997 as 'Europe 2000+' — seeking economic and social cohesion as well as parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge — extended support to the candidate countries by the end of 1998 and formed the basis of 'Interreg III' (2000—6) with a total budget allocation of €180 mln financed through Phare-CBC. Even the borders of candidate countries and FSU states (Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) are covered through the Tacis CBC programme which started in 1996. The region can now gain from Western Europe's experience of CBC dating back to the 1950s coordinated through the Association of European Border Regions (1971) and its observatory on networking and good practice — Linkage Assistance & Cooperation for the European Border Regions (LACE) — which produces assessment reports, strategies and operational programmes for entire frontiers between pairs of countries, including maritime frontiers in the case of the Baltic.

Programmes pay attention to job creation since border regions tend to have above-average unemployment: exemplified by Jesenice and Maribor in Slovenia's borderland with Austria; eastern Hungary, affected by a drastic decline in FSU markets; and also in the Bulgarian-Romanian case by Vidin's prob-
lems associated with the closure of the Vidachim tyre company and war in Yugoslavia as well as severe poverty in Romanian counties of Calarasi, Giurgiu and Teleorman (Table 1). Benefits arise from business cooperation through fora, fairs and exhibitions, as well as a growth in tourism stimulated by information, training and provision of better facilities such as hiking trails and cycle routes. Attention is also given to lobbying for new frontier crossings and related road approaches; better services including health, water, gas and electricity; and pollution prevention and environmental conservation through study of water supply and sewage needs and environmental education exchanges. A further dimension covers education, training and culture through school exchanges, university cooperation, cultural festivals and sporting events. Momentum is generated through information centres; for example the Phare centre at Smolyan in Bulgaria providing an AEBR link with the Association of Rhodope Municipalities formed 1992. Twinning arrangements are widespread and results are disseminated through newsletters and media coverage. Particular reference should be made to the proportion of the Phare budget (usually one tenth) that can be used for ‘small projects’ of less than € 50,000 involving simplified application procedure in keeping with the principles of transparency and decentralisation: these often have low cost/high impact and often involve support for municipalities and NGOs setting up business meetings and cultural/sporting events. There may also be study visits e.g. to borders where CBC has been particularly successful.

Table 1 — Intereg programmes for cross-border cooperation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme Elements</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania—Macedonia</td>
<td>476*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria—Czech Rep.</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria—Hungary</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria—Slovakia</td>
<td>106</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria—Slovenia</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria—Greece</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria—Macedonia</td>
<td>506*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bulgaria—Romania</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czech Rep.—Germany</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czech Rep.—Poland</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czech Rep.—Slovakia</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany—Poland</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece—Macedonia</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary—Romania</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary—Slovakia</td>
<td>631*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy—Slovakia</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland—Lithuania</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland—Slovakia</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Programme Elements: A Economic Cooperation including development of SMEs; B B Tourism; C Transport; D Education, Training and Labour Market; E Social-Cultural; F Environment Information; G Institutions; H Rural Development

Strengths: A Regional/Local Links; B Regional Planning; C Business Cooperation; D Social-Cultural Links

Weaknesses: A Differences in Economic Development Levels, or economic stagnation; B Weak Infrastructure (including complications of mountainous terrain and administration e.g. regional level); C Language and Historical Factors; D Finance

Despite gaining experience through Interreg and political support for CBC, all border sections needed better institutions, more information and expertise in project preparation.

Italy—Slovenia: high Slovene unemployment and lack of regional administration.


Regional Policy

It is a contention of this paper that CBC makes a significant contribution to regional policy. Under communism there was no formal regional planning process in which local communities could participate. Administrative regions were essentially passive in the face of central government development programmes which were the haphazard outcome of sectoral decisions (the clout of some regional leaders notwithstanding). Now that local government is being reconstructed initiatives can be taken that reflect the development of civil society and the potentials for growth. ECE has been slow to develop West European-style strategic regional planning although control procedures are gradually being introduced to process planning applications — notably those concerned with foreign direct investment (FDI) — and major projects are now subject to environmental impact assessment. Of course local authorities are free to build 'identity' and promote their perceived attractions to boost investment, create jobs and thereby improve living standards. But the basic municipalities are small with limited resources and competence while larger regions — the boundaries of which have often been contested in recent years — may not be fully accountable. Slovakia's regions were without elected councils until 2001 while the Hungarian county level is still fragmented and state-dominated and cannot fulfil its role as an 'intermediary' between the central government and the lowest tier administrative units" (Szigetvari 2001 p. 299). So typically, there was decentralisation, yet also fragmentation and weak institutional capacity with local budgets dependent on central decisions. There has also been limited ability to absorb funds and Phare projects have sometimes overloaded administrative capacities (Bachtler et al. 2000 p. 372).

Despite the efforts of some inter-ministerial councils, central government has been slow to build a regional planning system since 1989: in Poland, "regional policies have been extremely weak and subordinated to sectoral policies of the national governments" (Gorzela 2001 p. 323). In the Czech Republic, as elsewhere there were ad hoc interventions by government and international bodies but these were fragmented and uncoordinated. It is only in the present 2000—6 period that EU candidate countries producing national and regional plans as a basis for cohesion funding. However, during the 1990s period CBC programmes have provided an element of regional policy that was generally absent. This is particularly the case with programmes that included regional
planning as a specific objective. In addition to 'Interreg' a Spatial Planning Commission was established on the German-Polish border in 1992 and three years later it produced a policy for improved infrastructure and environmental rehabilitation to promote decentralised urbanisation. Planning in 1994 among the Baltic countries produced a concept of spatial development and CBC through an Oder region — including the Berlin and Dresden areas of Germany and extending to Szczecin, Zielona Gora and Legnica in Poland (Van de Boel 1994). This drew particular attention to the Pomeranian coastlands (especially Szczecin/Swinoujscie) attractive to German and Scandinavian investors, especially in the light of a possible Oder waterway linked with the European system. Through the Baltic arena Poland is also involved in cooperation with neighbouring countries as part of the 'Green Lungs of Europe' project — growing out of the initial 'Green Lungs of Poland' project — to coordinate activities in networks of national parks and other protected areas.

Further south, CoE is developing perspectives for 'Central Adriatic Danubian and South Eastern European Space' (Kennard 2000). And particular interest has been shown in the logic of an integrated Bratislava-Vienna city region underpinned by the Danube as well as by the need for cooperation over airports and the restoration of railway links (Altzinger 1997). Further scope exists for integration to extend to the Brno area in the Czech Republic and Győr in Hungary to form a wider working community. Both these cities are already benefiting from Austrian investment and have plans for motorway links with Vienna. A special economic zone is emerging in Bratislava's Petržalka suburb to attract more Austrian investment (Ivanicka 1995). The significance of this complex could increase with possible canalisation along the Morava and Vah valleys to link the Danube with the Elbe and the Oder-Vistula. Reference should also be made to an Austro-Hungarian Cross-Border Regional Council founded in 1992 which has addressed Austria's concerns over prostitution, crime and drugs arising from more open borders. Also public utility maps were harmonised to facilitate joint planning of infrastructure including sites for solid waste disposal. A 'West Gateway' Area Development Association is now operating in the Austria-Hungary-Slovakia tri-frontier area (Szöreynine-Kukorelli et al. 2000 p. 227). And in the run-up to EU enlargement CBC issues are now appearing in all levels of strategic planning and there is a good basis here for a joint vision of an integrated regional economy, social cohesion and good neighbourly relations.

CROSS-BORDER ACTIONS

Production

Investment in manufacturing by Austrian, German and Greek companies is attracted by low cost labour and facilitated by CBC assistance over promotion and facilities supplemented by help from governments over industrial estates and fiscal incentives. German investment in Poland is also being steered to various locations where there is state-owned land and adequate infrastructures
e.g. close to Zielona Gora airport as well as railway junctions and former Soviet airfields in the area. Chambers of Commerce & Industry are developing close links e.g. Bihor and Hajdu-Bihar on the Hungary-Romania border established cooperation 1992 for mutual exchange of information and organisation of exhibitions and fairs. There are cases of research into selected industries in the Bulgaria-Greece frontier area while on the Germany-Poland border area the textile industry is being targeted in collaboration with the Centre for Innovation & Technology Guben and German/Polish textile producers with the aim of offering model collections of quality ladies’ clothing with the financial help of a Burgschaftsbank. Agricultural projects seek to increase the output of high quality products through the development of farming methods and processing e.g., through a higher quality of viticulture on Slovenia’s borders with Austria and Italy. On the Hungary-Romania border there is an attempt to build on activities — concerned with food processing, agricultural machinery, basket making, and construction work — previously supported by cooperatives and FDI has been secured by entrepreneurs who have personal contacts in the area (Pal 2000). CBC is plainly essential in the situation that arises at Lendava on the Croatia-Slovenia border where the cadastral map is complicated by the changing course of the Mura river that marks the frontier.

Commerce, Transport and Tourism

As already noted increased cross-border traffic generates commercial activity which is very evident when border settlements with frontier posts are compared with those without. However where there are differences in price on the two sides of a border then substantial markets may develop (Wallace 1999). In eastern Poland the Bialystok open air market was considered the largest in ECE in the mid-1990s and attracted many suitcase traders from Belarus, while Germans would take advantage of lower prices to cross Poland’s western border and shop in Cedyinia or Kostrzyn: in the latter case over 1,200 jobs were created at the municipal bazaar. Powerful lobbies of small businessmen, capable of blocking larger projects, emerged in many well-located towns and communes (Stryjakiewicz 1998 p. 204). Furthermore the rapid spread of supermarkets through provincial towns in Hungary attracted cross-border shoppers from adjacent states (Croatia and Yugoslavia) at a time when these countries were less well endowed. Transport projects typically involve additional border crossing points and new links to develop cross-border labour flows. The Esztergom-Sturovo bridge dating to 1895 was reopened in 2000 — 56 years after its wartime destruction. Tourism has often benefited from improved cross-border transport to the point where rural tourism is a viable option for some of Ukraine’s Carpathian farmers, taking advantage of a clean environment (low fertiliser/pesticide application and lack of Chernobyl-related damage)
Environment

Closer cross-border contacts have help to build trust to the point where important joint conservation work can take place. Langer (1990) researched a number of worthy projects and several have now been taken up with the help of local groups and support from international NGOs like the World Wide Fund for Nature, the World Bank's Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and, recently, from the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe's Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme. The most outstanding project concerns the Eastern Carpathian International Biosphere Reserve of 164,000 ha which includes Europe's largest stand of beech forest as well as distinctive mountain meadows ('poloniny') — after the concept was first discussed in the 1960s in the context of a relatively small area. The prime focus is on forest management fragmentation to ensure the long-term presence of viable populations of flora and fauna most sensitive to habitat loss. But sustainable development is also being applied to the cultural landscape of wooden Orthodox churches and wayside shrines traditional to the Boyko and Lemko peoples. Conflicts have been overcome through negotiation with local people and there are now good prospects for establishing a network of protected areas in the Carpathians interconnected by ecological corridors (part of a future 'Natura 2000' system), appropriate for the conservation of large carnivores. The Carpathians, which extend across six countries, are also benefitting from the work of Carpathian Bridge ('Priashev'): an International Association of Public Ecological Organisations combining the Ukrainian 'Carpathian School' (Lviv) with 'Pcola' from Slovakia (Stara Lubovna) and the Foundation of Support of Ecological Initiatives from Poland (Krakow). There is also a TACIS cross-border cooperation project 1999—2001 for a Carpathian Transfrontier Environmental Network covering the Romanian and Ukrainian parts of Bucovina. The aim is to preserve biodiversity in active participation with stakeholders, with a pilot conservation project covering land use management and sustainable ecotourism. These initiatives are all helpful in launching a wide project for the whole Carpathian Ecoregion under WWF auspices.

Another major interest concerns the restoration of wetlands to establish a 'Lower Danube Green Corridor' through joint action by Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine under a pact negotiated in 2000. However the potential has been demonstrated most clearly in the Lower Morava; seen as a model CBC area for Austria, Czech Republic and Hungary. NGOs from the three countries — Austria's Union for the Morava River (Distelverein), Veronica (Czech Republic) and Daphne (Slovakia) — along with the three environment ministries and the Lower Austria government have been encouraged by WWF to conserve floodplain meadow where the rich flora provides a habitat for rare and endangered bird species: this requires regular mowing, for it is crucial for biodiversity but no longer commercially viable (Huba & Ira 1999). Historically the meadows covered 161 sq.kms, but the landscape has been transformed and degraded by river regulation and conversion to intensive arable farming, along with gravel quarrying, inappropriate forest management, overfishing and water pollution. Previously marginalised on the frontier of the communist
world, the Danube River Protection Convention (DRPC), which came into force in 1998, now offers a framework for international cooperation and more integrated river basin management. The new initiative seeks to extend the protection already provided under a various designations (including Slovakia’s 'Zahorie Protected Landscape Area’) to create a fully integrated trilateral reserve (Table 2).

Table 2. Specimen cross-border actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country 1</th>
<th>Country 2</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>Conservation of Lake Shkodra/Skadar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Free trade zone established at Česke Valenice. Enhanced waste water treatment capacity. National park and protected area management. International centre for fish farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Hungary/Slovakia</td>
<td>'West Gateway' Area Development Association. Jarovce-Kitsee industrial park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>Kranj information and business support centre; Jesenice regeneration; Maribor business and technology park. Tourist border zone project with interest in special production activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Provision of the Kukuryki border crossing. National park management (Bialowieza).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</td>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>Conservation of the Neretva Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Conservation of the Belitsa Mountains (also Macedonia); translation centre to facilitate contacts; bilingual business guide published; information centre at Smolyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Association of Danube River Municipalities established; cultural-sporting events in the Giurgiu-Ruse area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>Conservation of the Stara Planina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>National park management (Karkonosze)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Free trade and innovation centres at Cheb. Cross border medical centre at Dippoldiswalde, close to a crossing point in a region of tourist interest; ecological model for sustainable development with pilot areas (cycle/hiking routes, thermal baths, museum exhibitions and festivals) for the Bavarian Forest-Šumava region. Farm structure, sheep rearing and conservation in Sachsische Schweiz and adjacent parts of Bohemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Joint education programme including a Polish College and student hostels on the Odra to complement the existing Viadrina University complex in Frankfurt. Growth of municipal bazaars at Cedynia and Kostrzyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>Trade fairs and proposed free zones for Bitola and Gevgelija (also Skopje). Automatic monitoring stations for the Vardar to complement the existing system in Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Business zones and industrial parks at Bekescsaba Industrial Park, Bihar (Berettyoufal-Biharkeresztes) and Zahony (1996). Csenger innovation centre and animal husbandry project to support cattle farmers and provide a model farm with dairy and meat processing; also technical and professional extension services. Agreement for the refining of Beces sugarbeet in Arad and joint vegetable production in the Mecsek-Salonta area. Water and flood protection for the Criș and Mureș basins. Csenger-Satu Mare vocational training project Trade centre in Timișoara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Reconstruction of the Esztgorgom-Šturovo bridge. Environmental management of border habitats including Naszaly near Vac and the Aggtelek/Slovak karst region. Pollution control on the Bodrog, Hernad and Sajo (linked with industries in Slovakia).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hungary—Ukraine: Modernisation of the Tisa border crossing at Zahony-Chop
Italy—Slovenia: pilot viticultural project at Gorizia/Nova Gorica to improve wine quality and develop aromatic characteristics.
Macedonia—Yugoslavia (Kosovo): Conservation of Šar Planina
Lithuania—Poland—Russia (Kalinigrad): Fisheries, migration, trade and transport; ice-free port with free-zone status in Kaliningrad. Lithuanian farmers work Russian land. Sustainable development programmes.
Poland—Slovakia: Conservation and tourism in Babia Gora and Tatra. 'Cross Border Communication System' for information to stimulate enterprise and cooperation. Nowy Sacz-Bardejov cross border route brings pilgrimage tourism to the Lemko community of Uscie Gorlickie. National park management (Tatra)
Slovakia—Ukraine: Conservation of Carpathian mountain meadows ('poloniny')

Source: LACE

EUROREGIONS

The conventional vehicle for particularly close CBC coordination is the 'Euroregion'. The concept evolved in Western Europe after such trans-frontier regions were first recognised in the 1960s with the support of the Regional Development Fund and the CoE. They do not feature in the European Commission's agenda and coordination is provided by the Association of European Border Regions <http://www.lace.eabr-ageg.de>. But Euroregions comprise an extension to Interreg: they are concerned with the same issues of border area cohesion — hence each ER has specific objectives, in the context of broad Interreg objectives for an entire frontier between a pair of countries — but with a desire for more permanent collaboration in agreed areas, rather than ad hoc arrangements. Moreover, the European Commission accepts that member states may delegate the management of 'Interreg' programmes (or parts of them) to Euroregions, with a proportion of the allocation placed at their disposal for 'people to people' activities. Moreover, they have now become formalised within the EU system of National Units for Territorial Statistics (NUTS) through the combining of basic units (NUTS III) into transfrontier regions which may then be recognised at the NUTSII level.

Euroregions have been widely adopted across ECE during the past decade and 31 are now in existence. They have emerged through CBC at the grass-roots and often evolve through good relations established in the early years of 'Interreg'. Thus West Pannonia ER follows from the Austria-Hungary Cross-Border Regional Council already referred to. However, access to 'Interreg' is often crucial in providing finance while government need to approve CBC in principle; usually a pure formality given the growing consensus that ERs are a force for stability and proof of good neighbourly relations necessary for countries seeking EU and NATO membership. Thus Germany's treaties with Poland in 1990—1 (Freiherr von Malchus 1997) and 'Interreg II' finance created a basis for ERs on Germany's eastern frontier. In the late 1990s there has been a further surge given the wider scope of Interreg III, but a political baseline was provided by the 1996 treaty between Hungary and Romania which cleared
the way for Danube—Criş—Mureş—Tisa ER in 1997. Lower Danube and Upper Prut ERs were also created in 1997 when the new Romanian government was actively seeking NATO membership and wished to outstanding territorial disputes resolved. USAID has also provided some finance and the American Institute for East-West Studies (IEWS) was instrumental in bringing the Carpathian countries together in 1993 to form the first ER that did not include a single EU member state. However, Romanian representatives were constrained pre-1996 when academics joined in polemics criticising the CER for serving only Hungarian self-interest (Deica & Alexandrescu 1995 p. 10). Furthermore, Slovak members were only permitted to assume associate membership (and there was also ambivalence over the Tatra ER) until a new government gave full approval to CBC after the 1998 election. Now there are virtually no border regions which are not part of at least one ER (a link for Bratislava is in preparation) and such are the overlaps, that a total of 15 districts are two ERs and one (Rimavska Sobota) is in three. Despite Poland’s acceptance of ERs, „the great wealth and economic disparity between Germany ... and the relatively underdeveloped former Regained Territories raises the threat of losing economic and political control to Germany” (Weclawowicz 1996 p. 167). However, there is now greater acceptance over local government initiatives taken independently because sovereignty is in no way affected and supporters of CBC feel that alarmist views flatter the ER concept with a coherence that goes way beyond reality.

The present pattern of ERs is uneven, but allowance must be made for the continuing operation of the Alps-Adria Association which reduces the need for additional institutions on Slovenia’s borders with Austria and Italy. And while Tacis CBC covers the borders of candidate countries with FSU states there has been no comparable source of finance for parts of the former Yugoslavia where recent tensions and poor economic development prospects are further constraints, although joint planning of a Budapest—Osijek—Sarajevo—Ploče highway has been a stimulus for the Danube—Drava—Sava Euro-region for Baranya (Hungary), Osijek—Baranya (Croatia) and Tuzla (Bosnia & Hercegovina). Yet there is only one ER on Greece’s northern borders and there have been no developments yet on the Bulgaria-Romania frontier where psychological barriers are much stronger than they are within the former Habsburg empire. However, an ER at the Iron Gates is a possibility for Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia, while another project for Austria’s Waldviertel and the adjacent part of the Czech Republic is in preparation.

ERs tend to be highly proactive over CBC and, as in the case of each ‘Interreg’ two-country programme, each has its own financial allocation so that and funding is a significant though not overriding incentive for progress. At a time of more stringent border controls ERs may be offer the advantages of visa-free travel — e.g. citizens of Kaliningrad, Lithuania and Poland — despite frontier delays. ERs usually concern two countries but there are three for Beskid, Neisse, Bavarian Forest, Beskid, Bug and Neisse; five for the CER (Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine) and six in the case of the maritime approach of the Baltic ER: Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia (Kaliningrad) and Sweden. Usually the limits of an ER remain unchanged,
but they may be additional support later e.g. with a part of Belarus joining the Bug ER in 1998 which was originally a Polish-Ukrainian arrangement; while some additional Romanian counties joined the CER after 1996.

ER's have spawned a range of institutions. The Baltic ER has a council, presidium, executive board, secretariats and three working groups (regional development and spatial planning — with spatial planning centres in each country; environment protection; and social problems/cultural exchange). Bug ER has a council (with 10 members per country) and seven thematic working commissions; and like other ERs there are offices in each country: Brest, Chelm and Lutsk. Local associations may create the national groupings for the wider ER: thus White Carpathians ER involves the Stredne Povazie association based in Trenčín and the Eastern Moravian association at Zlin. Beskid ER has an intercommunal association which includes three agreements between Polish and Slovak villages. Some ERs have developed out of municipality associations, as in the case of Košice-Miskolc (an ER that is territorially divided and does not include any frontier section). Mesta Nestos where a Rhodope Association was first established and the Silesia and Tesinske Slezsko ERs developing out of an association covering municipalities in Northern Moravia and Upper Silesia.

*Euroregion Programmes: Carpathian Euroregion (CER)*

The actions of the ERs tend to involve similar projects of the kind already referred to in Table 2. However the level of cohesion achieved is usually greater than for conventional 'Interreg' operations and a number of the more significant themes may be mentioned. Combining backward mountain regions from five countries, progress has been made in the CER to enhance identity and highlight the advantages of an ethnically diverse multi-language low-wage workforce, with traditions of cooperation; supported by a general commitment to regional development on the part of both NGOs and local government (Helsinki 1998). Having developed links with local authorities and NGOs, the CER is able to provide a communication channel to debate regional issues. Cooperation is proceeding on several fronts. Regional trade fairs have stimulated a growth of small-scale commerce, assisted by the fact that all the CER states except Ukraine are now members of the Central European Free Trade Association. A development association is building a network of small business centres, while a university association is facilitating mobility in the higher education sector and there is a substantial cultural and sporting programme. Tourism and conservation are important issues promoted initially by an enterprise development agency in Uzhgorod (Ukraine) which initiated a 'Movement for Central/Eastern European Rural Hospitality'. But there is now a wider network emerging through the World Wide Fund for Nature's 'Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative' and GEF project in the Eastern Carpathians already referred to.
Euroregion Programmes: Neisse/Nysa Euroregion

Here it was recognised that the economy of the polluted 'Black Triangle' must be rebuilt using clean technology and alternative sources of energy, with greater concern for agriculture, forestry and tourism to provide the base for sustainable development. Advanced soil acidification, retarded nutrient cycling and a major decline in biodiversity has been linked with atmospheric pollution and spruce monocultures. 'Forest death' has also occurred through pollution aggravated by insects and the spread of parasitic fungi. Regeneration should aim at broadleaved or mixed forest stands to enhance the stability of forest ecosystems. Desulphurisation and reduced power station capacity is also easing the problem in badly-affected areas like the Jizera Mountains. Further benefits arise from wider use of gas and greater energy efficiency through the supply of surplus steam from Poland's Turow power station to Gorlitz and Zittau in Germany and Liberec in the Czech Republic. Meanwhile, access to the German market (especially in Berlin) gives the Liberec area of Bohemia the chance to escape the communist legacy of heavy industry dominance, while the Poles have the opportunity of developing land belonging to the Agricultural Property Agency at Porajow where a few hundred meters of Polish territory intervenes between the borders of Germany and the Czech Republic on the edge of Zittau.

Euroregion Programmes: Danube—Criș—Mureș—Tisa (DCMT) Euroregion

Since its establishment in 1997, much thought has gone into transport planning in Banat: unified before the First World War under Habsburg administration but broken up by the Treaty of Trianon so that roads and railways were progressively severed where the new frontiers were imposed and a mature central place system was degraded in the process (Suli-Zakar 1992). Now there is a desire to improve connections between the largest cities — Novi Sad (Yugoslavia), Szeged (Hungary) and Timișoara (Romania) — which are also the second cities in their respective countries (Nagy 2001). This will be achieved in part by extension of the motorway currently approaching Szeged from the north, but Szeged's rail connections with the other two cities could be greatly improved by restoring the bridge over the Tisza and reopening track dating back to 1857 which was closed in 1940. Mending the breach at Szeged and restoring the link eastwards from Subotica would provide a new east-west rail route between the Black Sea at Constanța and the Adriatic at Rijeka. The Bega/Begej Canal extending from Timișoara to the Tisa and Danube is also to be restored in connection with a network of free zones across the region. At the same time several former road and rail links could be restored and thereby improve cohesion at the local level and stimulate small business including rural tourism (Pal 2000).
EVALUATING CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Although the CBC project is still evolving, the limited progress already achieved can be counted a success in the context of a generally low capacity to absorb development funding in the early years of transition. Border areas emerged from communism in a state of limbo in which localism has thrived through variety initiatives to try and overcome stagnation and demographic decline. In the context of a prime concern for government regulation by economic sectors rather than regions, the modest resources of Phare-CBC have facilitated a degree of regional planning and development. However, not all the developments noted can be attributed to 'Interreg' and other CBC programmes: many business developments would probably have occurred in any case because of differences in labour costs, but it is impossible to say to what extent CBC has contributed since many initiatives have been concerned with promotion and publicity without which FDI might have been restricted.

As formalised trans-frontier regions, ERs have achieved rather more in a situation loaded with tensions arising out of formerly contested frontiers. There has been particular cynicism over Hungary's special interest in cross-border institutions, but the change in climate in the late 1990s has been remarkable and the entire Hungary-Slovakia frontier is now organised into ERs, despite major differences of opinion over energy projects like the Gabčíkovo hydropower plant and the Mochovice nuclear power station in Slovakia. Antagonisms have also been reported in the Spisz region where adjustments to the Poland-Slovakia frontier during World War Two soured relations between the two ethnic groups; yet the Tatra ER has achieved much in its first five years. Bug and Niemen ERs have overcome political tensions between Belarus and Poland while Baltic cooperation has succeeded despite Kaliningrad's evil (and exaggerated) reputation as a centre for crime, drugs, prostitution and pollution. The DCMT ER has survived NATO action in Yugoslavia and should benefit from the changed political climate arising from Yugoslavia's membership of the Security Pact for South Eastern Europe.

ERs contribute significantly to spatial policy by providing their own development concepts as an input to spatial planning perspectives, especially where a regional development strategy is formalised, as in the Niemen ER. They tend to cooperate particularly well with state planning authorities to 'smooth the seams of regional planning policies' in the countries involved. Cohesion and growth has been particularly welcome in easing ethnic tensions in areas where, for example, a large Roma minority may be perceived as a weakness by potential investors (Baranyi et al. 1999). Of course the plans involve tensions: Beskid ER has high biodiversity value in the Babia Gora region which is protected in both Poland and Slovakia. But the high priority for job creation through light industry and tourism points to the need for sustainability through coordination of planning to ensure an adequate infrastructure for transport, water and sewage. Indeed such care is ideally needed along the entire Poland-Slovakia frontier and indicates the further potential of the cross-border dimension in regional planning.
Constraints on Cross-Border Cooperation

But despite its many successes, CBC in general is limited by a variety of constraints (Table 3). In terms of building momentum, these relate to issues of local authority competence; cultural tensions; lack of harmonisation in manufacturing quality standards; and fear of competition. Wheat moving over the Hungary-Romania border has been picketed by the Romanian farming union 'Agrostar' claiming that tariff increases were not being implemented. There may also be difficulties in establishing and maintaining cross-border links. And it is particularly difficult to make progress in relatively backward areas. While West Pannonia ER is considered very successful, "the true integrating market forces [in the CER] are still underdeveloped [and] it is only the underground (black) economy where intensive 'cooperation' can be observed in this region" (Szigetvari 2001 p. 305). Comprising as it does the poorest regions of the countries concerned, remote from capital cities — with stagnating levels of industrial and agricultural activity; a diverse range of legal regulations and administrative procedures; a poorly-developed business-financial infrastructure and serious transport defects — there is little interest shown by foreign investors.

Table 3 — Some constraints on cross-border cooperation getting started

— progress is inhibited by actual or perceived differences in the competence of local authorities to take initiatives. On the Bulgarian-Romanian border, Romanian local authorities are perceived as having lower competency than Bulgarian counterparts. The same applies on the Hungary-Romania border where the Romanians are again seen as constrained at the municipality level.

— business may be inhibited by fear of competition e.g. in tourism on the Czech Republic-Poland border where an integration of facilities has been proposed. Meanwhile, there is little foreign direct investment (FDI) from Austria's Burgenland province in the adjacent Hungarian county of Győr-Moson-Sopron because of the lower industrial quality standards.

— a positive attitude to visitors (arriving for business, shopping or pleasure) may be restrained by cultural differences e.g. language and religion and 'mutual suspicions' arising through historical experiences. Civil society may be too weak to steer the process at the grass-roots.

— the tempo of business will be relatively limited in where relatively backward regions are involved e.g. Romania's borders with Bulgaria and Ukraine.

— border crossings are sometimes virtually non-existent: on the Bulgaria-Romania border commuting is impossible because there is only one bridge, while ferries are expensive and some have stopped due to high harbour taxes on both sides of the river.

LIMITING PROGRESS

— even where business flourished e.g. on the Germany-Poland border where more than 50 joint ventures have been set up, administrative delays at the frontier are a disincentive. While some problems may relate to work practices it is also true that EU border regulations are obliging candidate countries to introduce tighter controls on their eastern frontiers when their domestic political interests make for closer contact with former Soviet states.

— Capacity does not always keep up with demand: 'traffic shock' means that there may still be long delays especially for trucks. Three vehicles crossing points in Bratislava on Slovakia's border with Austria are insufficient at rush hours and summer holiday periods when there is queuing. There is also insufficient capacity on the Czech Republic-Poland border.

— trade is unstable in a view of differences in prices and economic conditions generally.
— small-scale commerce in Poland and more intensive cross-border traffic in general is associated with crime (drugs and prostitution along with refugee smuggling and avoidance of military service.

— there are environmental problems while improved road links may be controversial in sensitive areas: notably the Prague-Dresden motorway in the Sumava where tunnelling is proposed as one option and abandonment in favour of rail transport as another; and the motorway link between Bulgaria and Greece which must avoid Kresna Gorge.

Source: LACE

A second group of issues concerns the scope for continued development. Even though business has been successfully promoted e.g. on the Germany-Poland border where more than 50 joint ventures have been set up, frontier formalities can cause considerable delay, especially for trucks. While some problems may relate to work practices, it is also true that EU border regulations are obliging candidate countries to introduce tighter controls on their eastern frontiers when their domestic political interests make for closer contact with former Soviet states. Cross-border commerce has proved to be quite variable. With the appreciation of Polish currency and equalization of prices German demand „dramatically declined in the second half of the 1990s and has ceased to be an important factor of local and regional development in western Poland” while in the east commerce was „dramatically influenced by the Russian crisis of 1998 and since then has not fully recovered” (Gorzelak 2001 p. 325). There has also been the problem of increased border security in connection with ’Schengen space’ which made it more difficult for traders to enter Poland from Belarus, while crime and pollution are also matters for concern.

CONCLUSION

CBC may be counted a qualified success with constraints arising more over capacity and resources than the principle of cooperation which has overcome historic tensions (Hajdu 1995). The long-term future of ’Interreg’ remains to be seen, but ERs seem destined to feature in regional planning and EU membership for the candidate countries should bring appreciably more cohesion funding (Objective 1) to the poorer regions. Where progress has been slow, institutions dedicated to permeable frontiers and the removal of bureaucratic blockages against socio-economic progress are significant in the context of a global world with enhanced mobility and integration. So the structures set in place should bear fruit in the future in line with the growth of investment and expertise. However, EU enlargement seems too destined to occur in phases and this will be divisive at least in the medium term through variations in funding and the maintenance of border controls on the new external frontiers. Moreover the ultimate extent of the EU remains uncertain (certainly with regard to Belarus and Ukraine) and to this extent border regions will remain sensitive areas by definition, with their fortunes inevitably reflecting the warmth of relations between the countries concerned.
REFERENCES


ПРЕКОГРАНИЧНА САРАДЊА: ГЛАВНИ ЕЛЕМЕНТ РЕГИОНАЛНЕ ПОЛИТИКЕ У НОВОЈ ИСТОЧНОЈ ЦЕНТРАЛНОЈ ЕВРОПИ

Дејвид Тарнок

Резиме

Границе у источној централној Европи постала су порозније, јер су у последњих десетак година поједнано урезане формалности и отворени многи нови гранични предази. У исто време повећала се сарадња у граничним регионалима, захваљујући, пре свега, Interreg програмима Европске Уније који обухватају широку лепезу пословних, културних и еколошких интереса. У многим случајевима ови подухвати су остваривани кроз форму „еврорегиона“ који су постали показатељ добрих међународних односа. У чланку је дат преглед ових трендова, уз навођење примера, а посебна пажња се посвећује еколошким пројектима и заједничким планским иницијативама у неким европеосима. У време када је регионална политика уопште узв слаба, прекогранична сарадња знатно доприноси коеzioni; она је и добар показатељ стабилности у региону. Њен утицај, међутим, већ је на северу него на Балкану, а прва руча источног проширења ЕУ имаће значајне последице на сарадњу с обе стране нових спољних граница Уније.