

## 13 European Territorial Cooperation within the Carpathian area

### 13.1 Situation and problems

The Carpathian region is a specific area of Europe, even from the point of view of European (international) cooperation. There are few places of the world, where in a relatively small area, the borders of so many countries meet. The most outstanding example can be found in the North-Eastern Carpathians. By drawing a circle with 60 km radius around the town of Mukacheve, (Ukraine, Transcarpathia region), some areas of 5 countries will be covered in the circle (Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary and Romania). There are only three places in the World in similar situation: beside Mukacheve, Darjiling in India (India, Bangla Desh, Nepal, Bhutan and China) and Katuna Mulilo in Namibia, Afrika (Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Angola).

If there is one area in Europe for which European cooperation is of vital importance, then it is the Carpathian region. The area which was delineated for the project includes 14 state border sections in 4466 km length (AT–CZ, PL–CZ, CZ–SK, PL–SK, PL–UA, SK–UA, SK–HU, SK–AT, HU–AT, HU–UA, HU–RO, RO–UA, HU–SRB, RO–SRB). It includes 81 NUTS3 units, of which, according to EU definition, 52 are border regions. Most of its large rivers are flowing through several countries. The Danube catchment area covers – at least in a small part of all 8 Carpathian countries. Tisa catchment area covers 5 countries. The new member states, with the exception of the Czech Republic, all are on the external border of the EU. It is therefore justified that the 6 EU member countries in the Carpathian region have a 28 percent share of the “European cooperation” Structural Funds support of the EU (2173 thousand €, 2004 prices for 2007–2013).

Cross-border cooperation between Carpathian countries has two main forms:

- Bottom-up initiatives which, of course, can enjoy EU support to their activities. Such initiatives are the Euroregions and Working Communities (*Figure 16*);
- Top-down initiatives of the European Commission, that is the cross-border and Trans-national Structural Funds programmes.

#### 13.1.1 Bottom-up initiatives

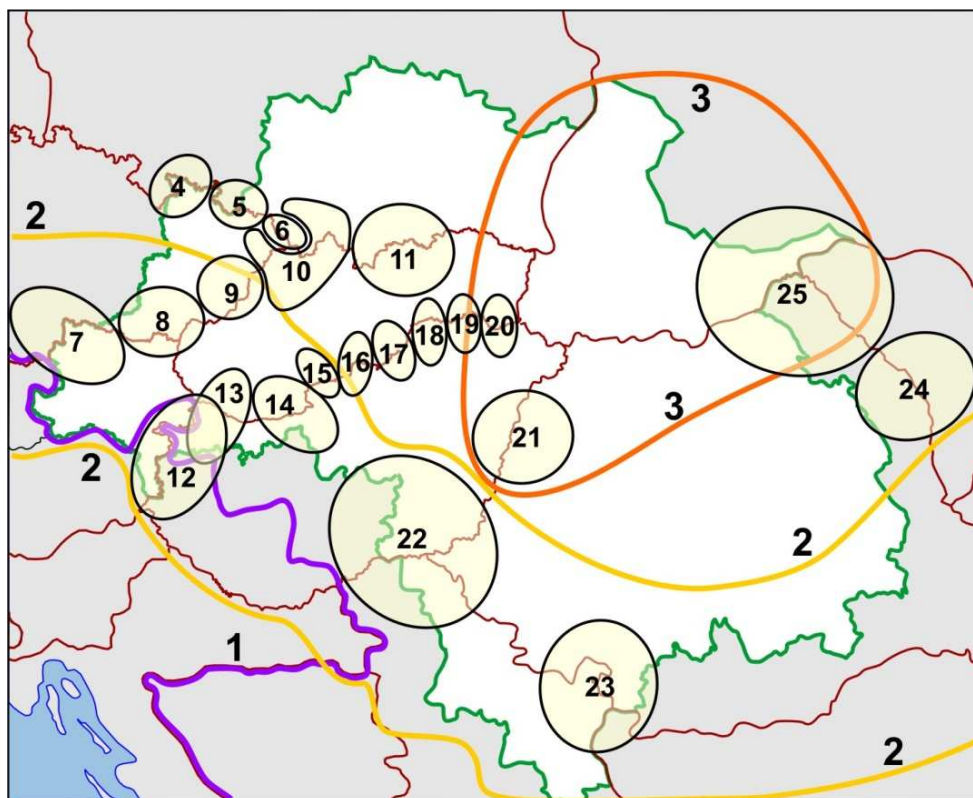
The main types of bottom-up cross-border regional cooperations in the Carpathian area are the Euroregions or Euroregions. The prototype of these regions was established as early as the 1970s on the German-Dutch border. Its organisational structures served as a model for all later established similar regions, at least formally. They emerged first along the Western borders of Germany. After the political

change in 1990, they appeared also along the Eastern borders of Germany and later there was diffusion to other Eastern borders. Now, the German–Polish, the German–Czech, the Polish–Czech, the Polish–Slovak, the Slovak–Hungarian and the Austria–Hungarian borders are fully covered by Euroregions (*Table 13*).

The similarity to the model of the Dutch–German Euregion is, however, only the appearance, being the competencies and powers of Carpathian Euroregions radically different from the original model. Their established common boards do not dispose over any genuine decision-making competencies; they can adopt only recommendations. Even these recommendations are mostly of rather general and vague character. The partner regions are able to pay a very modest membership fee, which is hardly enough to pay one or two employees in a secretariat, and to host the rotating meetings of the board.

Figure 16

*Euroregions in the Carpathians*



Source: Author's edition.

Table 13

*Euroregions in the Carpathians*

Number	Name of the Euroregion	Countries	NUTS2 level regions, where the cooperation takes place
1.	Euroregion „Tatry”	PL, SK	Podkarpackie, Východné Slovensko
2.	Euroregion „Beskidy”	PL, SK	Malopolskie, Stredné Slovensko
3.	Euroregion „Tešínské Slezsko – Śląsk Cieszinsky”	PL, CZ	Śląskie, Moravskoslezsko
4.	Euroregion „Praděd – Pradziad”	PL, CZ	Opolskie, Severovýchod
5.	Euroregion „Silesia”	PL, CZ	Śląskie, Moravskoslezsko
6.	Euroregion „Neisse – Nysa – Nisa	PL, CZ, D	Dolnośląskie, Severovýchod, Dresden
7.	Waldviertel – Pomoravie – Zahorie	CZ, A, SK	Jihovýchod, Niederösterreich, Západné Slovensko
8.	Bilé – Biele Karpaty	CZ, SK	Střední Morava, Západné Slovensko
9.	Euroregion Ister-Granum	SK, HU	Közép-Dunántúl, Západné Slovensko, Stredné Slovensko
10.	Váh – Danube – Ipoly	SK, HU	Észak-Magyarország, Západné Slovensko, Stredné Slovensko
11.	Ipoly – Ipel’	SK, HU	Észak-Magyarország, Západné Slovensko, Stredné Slovensko
12.	Euroregion „Neogradensis”	SK, HU	Észak-Magyarország, Stredné Slovensko
13.	Euroregion „Sajó-Rima – Slaná-Rimava”	SK, HU	Észak-Magyarország, Stredné Slovensko, Východné Slovensko
14.	Euroregion „Košice – Miskolc”	SK, HU	Észak-Magyarország, Východné Slovensko
15.	Euroregion „Kras”	SK, HU	Észak-Magyarország, Východné Slovensko
16.	Euroregion „West Pannonia”	A, HU	Burgenland, Nyugat-Dunántúl
17.	Euroregion „Bihar-Bihar”	RO, HU	Nord-Vest, Észak Alföld
18.	Euroregion „Upper Prut”	MD, RO, UA	Moldova, Nord-Est, Chernivtsi
19.	Euroregion „Danube-Maros-Tisa-Kris”	HU, RO, YU	Dél-Alföld, Vest, Vojvodina
20.	Euroregion „Danube 21 <sup>st</sup> Century” (Iron Gate)	BG, RO, YU	Sud, Sud-Vest, Severozapaden, East Serbia

Source: Author’s collection.

The Euroregions and their members can submit, as any other juristic or natural person an application for INTERREG and PHARE-CBC project support. Of course, the organisational framework of the Euroregion facilitates some coordination of these project proposals and applications, and it is an advantage of this organisations. But, for the time being, establishing a Euroregion is rather of political significance, signalling the intention to cooperate. There are only few Euroregions which can boast with tangible results.

At present, there are 20 Euroregions or “Euroregion type” organisations in the Carpathian area (see Table). It is more than 20 percent of all such organisations in Europe.

Organisational consolidation, however, did not follow the quantitative increase. In many cases, even the organisational form is not yet cleared. Are they associations, or corporations or interest groups? Sometimes national governments do not know how many Euroregions are on their borders, because Euroregions are subjects neither to Association Act, nor to Corporation Act and there is no obligation to register the establishment of a Euroregion. The list below, can be therefore only of tentative character. The recent regulations of the European Commission concerning “European Groupings of territorial co-operation” might facilitate and promote the activities of Euroregions also in the Carpathian area.

*One example: The Carpathian Euroregion. Its birth and its activities 1992–*

After the democratic change in Central and Eastern Europe, enthusiasm for transnational and cross-border cooperation increased both within the respective countries and outside the region. A New York based institute, the Institute for East-West Studies, took the initiative in 1991, and proposed to establish a cooperation system in the North-Eastern Carpathian area. The family of the director of the Institute, Mr. John Edwin Mroz, stemmed from this area. That was one reason for his and his institute’s commitment to the cause of transnational cooperation in the region.

But, after the first months of general enthusiasm, already the first steps of organisation met some difficulties. Initially, in 1992, counties and districts from all 5 counties applied for membership in the cooperation scheme. But the governments of Slovakia and Romania vetoed their application with the argument: their regions were not entitled for entering into international contractual relationship without the permission of the central government. So, the Slovak and Romanian regions became not members but only observers in the new Euroregion. Later, however, they joined the Carpathian Euroregion.

In the first years, after the foundation, the Institute for East-West Studies persuaded one Japanese Foundation, the Sasakawa Foundation, to support financially the Carpathian Euroregion. The Council of Europe included into several publications their contribution to the foundation of the Carpathian Euroregion, but, as a matter of fact, after the foundation they never contacted the region any more. Concerning the European Union, the Carpathian Euroregion was not eligible for EU support since none of the founding countries was – by the time of founding – member of the EU, not even candidate in the year 1993. It was a strange situation: a European region on a very critical point of the continent could be established and could operate only with the organisational help of an American institute and with the financial help of a Japanese foundation.

Somewhat later the Carpathian Euroregion lost one of its most important external financing sources. The only substantial funding resource remained the membership fee of the participating

regions. But the Ukrainian regions were unable, from the beginning, to pay any membership fees, and the same applies to the Romanian and Slovak regions which joined later. Only the Hungarian and Polish regions paid the membership fee, but under these circumstances, it became quite high. Some Hungarian members found the costs of membership higher than its benefits and left the Euroregion.

Beyond financial problems, there were organisational and logistic problems as well. The first seat of the common secretariat was located – as a symbolic act – to Ukraine, to the city of Uzhgorod, in Transcarpathia region. It turned out soon that this choice entails a lot of logistic difficulties. Phone contact to Ukraine was extremely difficult, electronic (e-mail, internet) contact was almost impossible. The city of Uzhgorod is 23 km from the Hungarian and 6 km from the Slovak border but border crossing required several hours because of the slow and bureaucratic procedures. Consequently, the Secretariat had to be transferred to Hungary, to Debrecen, later to Nyíregyháza. The seat of the Carpathian Foundation was initially Košice in Slovakia, later it was also relocated to Eger, Hungary.

Difficulties have arisen also from the fact that the roles, competencies and the autonomy of regions in the participating countries were quite different. Members of the Council of the Euroregion were exclusively heads or leading officials of regional governments, no representatives of the business or scientific community, no NGOs.

The experts of the Euroregion prepared an excellent strategic document for the development of the area, a good operational programme and several project proposals. Unfortunately, with the exception of some conferences and study tours (and the cooperation of the respective universities) nothing was implemented from these strategies, programmes and projects during the 15 years existence of the Euroregion. The main reason for it was the lack of financial resources, but the inability of taking decisions and the lack of connections to the business community played also a role in this failure. Important factor was also the lack of an effective neighbourhood policy of the EU in these years.

Now, from 2007, there are possibilities for the efficient support of transnational cooperation in this area. The institutions, instruments, legal regulations and resources are in place. Unfortunately, in the meantime the Carpathian Euroregion has lost its dynamics, enthusiasm, and also a large part of its membership. Perhaps it has been established too early.

### *13.1.2 Top-down initiatives: the Structural Funds Interreg and Territorial cooperation programmes*

Interreg was a Community initiative which aimed to stimulate interregional cooperation in the European Union. It started in 1989, and was financed under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). It was designed to stimulate cooperation between the member states of the European Union on different levels. One of its main targets was to diminish the influence of national borders in order to attain equal economic, social and cultural development on the whole territory of the European Union. Interreg was launched as Interreg I for the programming period 1989–93, and continued as Interreg II for the subsequent period 1994–99. It has moved on to Interreg III for the period 2000–2006. Candidate countries could join the programme from 1995 (those who had EU member neighbour). From 1996, the programme was extended to borders between candidate states (it was financed from the PHARE pre-accession financial support instrument).

Nevertheless, in the first period, there were several problems during the implementation of Interreg-PHARE-CBC programmes:

- Candidate countries were obliged, to spend the largest part of their PHARE-CBC allocation on the borders to EU member states, while most needs and problems emerged on the other borders;
- Interreg was financed from the Structural Funds, PHARE-CBC from pre-accession aid. The two financial support funds were managed by two different DG-s in the European Commission. Their regulations, methodologies, timetables were totally different. Under such conditions it was extremely difficult (if not impossible) to implement a really common programme.
- Not only regulations but basic objectives were also different. Basic investment needs in the border regions of member states were satisfied from national resources and from Objective 1 support. Interreg was used mainly for the satisfaction of secondary, not so basic and urgent needs. In contrast, PHARE-CBC was the only source of EU support in the border regions of candidate states and they used it to satisfy basic needs (water supply, sewage systems, access roads and so on). Anyway, PHARE-CBC was very useful, but programmes could not be regarded as really common ones, they were rather parallel ones.
- A serious problem was that these funds could not be used along borders with non-member and non-candidate states, though, these border regions were – mostly – in the worst and most critical situation.

The situation turned for much better after 2004, when candidate states became members and they had access to the Structural Funds. It improved further from 2007 when the neighbourhood programmes and the ENPI (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument) was introduced. The new instruments enabled non-member states to participate in these programmes on equal conditions. Regulations became more harmonised. Besides cross-border programmes, neighbourhood programmes play a more important role in European cooperation.

The main financial data of the programmes are the following.

As it can be seen, ERDF allocations to these programmes between 2004–2006 and 2007–2013 have increased six-ten times. It means that substantially more and larger projects can be implemented.

The other strand of INTERREG (Territorial cooperation) is trans-national cooperation. This strand aims at the cooperation within large European regions, including regions from several states. Until 2006, the Carpathian region as a whole belonged to the CADSES (Central European, Adriatic, Danubian and Southeast European Space) programme area, including 17 states from Poland to Greece. By preparing for the next – 2007–2013 programming period, the Commission and some member states found this space too large for trans-national cooperation and

divided the CADSES area into two cooperation areas: Central Europe (including the Carpathian countries Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia), and Southeast Europe (including the Carpathian countries Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Serbia). As it can be seen, the Carpathian area had been divided into two halves. Launching projects, embracing the whole Carpathian area will be not impossible, but undoubtedly more difficult than before.

Nevertheless, it can be stated, that even in the past period, very few CADSES projects were devoted to the problems of the Carpathian area. Out of the 1600 project partners of the CADSES projects, only 70 (4,3%) were located in the Carpathian area. Out of the 134 lead project partners, only 4 (3%) were located in the Carpathian area (Krakow, Vsetin, Karviná, Miskolc). And even out of these four, only one was engaged in the problems of mountainous areas (Shining Mountains, Miskolc) (*Table 14*).

Table 14

*CADSES projects in the Carpathian Area, 2002–2006*

Programme	Financial resources 2002–2004		Financial resources 2004–2006	
	Total million €	ERDF contri- bution million €	Total million €	ERDF contri- bution million €
POLAND – SLOVAKIA cross- border programmes		21.0	185.2	157.4
CZECH REPUBLIC – SLOVAKIA cross border programmes	18.2	13.7	109.1	92.7
HUNGARY – ROMANIA cross- border programmes	42	23.9	275.0	224.0
HUNGARY – SLOVAKIA cross- border programmes	27.8	23.8	176.4	207.6
CZECH REPUBLIC – POLAND cross-border programmes	46.0	34.5		219.4
AUSTRIA – CZECH REPUBLIC cross-border programmes	69.2	38.3		107.4
AUSTRIA – SLOVAKIA cross- border programmes		19.0		59.9
AUSTRIA – HUNGARY cross- border programmes	77	71	96.8	82.3
POLANDS – BELARUS– UKRAINE neighbourhood programmes		37.8		186.2
HUNGARY – (ROMANIA) – SLOVAKIA – UKRAINE neighbourhood programme		31.7		68.6

*Source:* Collected by the author.

### **13.2 Policy recommendations in respect to territorial cooperation and common programmes**

- 1) The promotion of European territorial cooperation should be one of the main objectives of Structural Funds supports. Territorial cooperation had been “promoted” to one of the three priorities of the Structural Funds objectives. A substantial share of support was allocated to the new member states and this is also a step to the right direction. Nevertheless, funds devoted to trans-national cooperation did not increase, yet considering inflation they even decreased in the present period. This is regrettable. Namely, for Carpathian cooperation, the most suitable form of cooperation is trans-national cooperation.
- 2) In the framework of cross-border programmes one should aim at launching really common, or at least “mirror” projects. Only projects of this kind contribute to eliminating borders as obstacles of cooperation.
- 3) Beyond bilateral cross-border programmes, larger emphasis should be given to neighbourhood programmes, including the participation of non-member states in the Carpathian area. Without the participation of Ukraine, it is impossible to prepare a really integrated programme for the Carpathians. Experience has shown that most problems of territorial cooperation are concentrated in those relatively small areas where the borders of three countries meet.
- 4) Mountainous areas should receive more attention in territorial cooperation projects. The significance and weight of the problem is much larger than the attention which was devoted to it in the framework of CADSES programme.
- 5) In the Alpine space, much more experience has been accumulated concerning project themes and approaches in mountainous areas. The Central European programme space ensures possibilities for projects handling together and parallel the problems of the Alps and the Carpathians. There is much to learn from the Alpine praxis in this respect.
- 6) Despite the division of the Carpathian area into two programme spaces, there are possibilities for implementing comprehensive Carpathian projects and for comprehensive Carpathian participation. According to Structural Funds regulations 20% of programme allocations can be used outside the programme area, and 10 percent even outside the EU. Projects should take advantage of this regulation.