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**EUROREGIONS ON THE POLISH-UKRAINIAN  
BORDERLAND AS AN IMPORTANT LINK  
OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

**Abstract**

International communities face the necessity of building a new order and provide favourable climate for mutual confidence which ensures stabilization and development of democracy and expands international cooperation. Before joining the European Union, the role of Poland as the «eastern wall» including euroregions «Bug» and «Karpaty» is specific because it is just here where the interests of the Union and Poland meet. Creation of euroregions pursues the policy to support the socio-economic and cultural development, environmental protection, transport development, etc.

**Key words:**

trans-border and inter-regional cooperation, euroregion, frontier, important link, borderland, border areas, martial law, mutual confidence, local communities.

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*«...All frontiers have something painful in itself, because they separate people, nations, and countries. Therefore, as a result of active regional and border cooperation they should achieve their target character...»*

Since the end of the World War II in all debates on the situation of territories spread along the Polish borders, the necessity to separate neighbour countries was emphasized. Border areas were under the special region control, which finally led to stagnation and very often even regress of social and economic life of these areas. In Polish consciousness such notions existed as «eastern wall», or «western wall» which for the nation's sake should be still kept and sealed. In 1970, that situation changed a little bit when border movement with the DDR (East Germany) was introduced. Accordingly, similar initiation was undertaken with a south neighbour Czechoslovakia, although there were problems of a formal nature. The eastern border was still closed. The martial law in 1981 changed the situation of openness to the neighbours and the world, and for many years the borders were closed. After the year of 1989 when Poland took the road of social and economic changes, the conception of pursuing the specific policy was accepted and efforts directed to activate the border area were undertaken.

With enlargement of the European Union after the «cold war» period when the world community started to build a new order creating the atmosphere of mutual confidence, stabilization, development of democracy and deepening international cooperation, Poland began to develop different forms of trans-border and inter-regional cooperation. Together with local communities from abroad Poland began to create trans-border communities generally called euroregions.

The word «euroregions» means agreement of border regions about trans-border cooperation. It is used with reference to any kind of cooperation in social, cultural and economic spheres with a number of countries and their local authorities. The trans-region area is a certain area located on both sides of the border and characterized by certain degree of unity which eliminates the formalities of the state border and aims at increasing the development and status of the region expanding the trans-border cooperation and the degree of institutionalisation of these structures. The European Chart of Border and Trans-border Regions where all European communities reside should be understood as neighbour cooperation of adjacent border regions or as foreign cooperation of local and regional authorities, or the cooperation between organizations and institutions which represent border areas (9). It helps to mitigate the border effects and to overcome the challenges of near-border areas on the frontiers of neighboring countries, and to improve life conditions of people inhabiting these areas. So, the trans-border cooperation has its aim to support every kind of mu-

tual cooperation leading to closer relationship between neighbour countries and territorial authorities of two or more sides (1). Euroregion is also «a formal structure of trans-border cooperation embracing the representatives of a local level and also in some justified cases social and economic macro-level partners» (13).

### **Euroregions in Poland – principles and legal basis of their functioning**

In Central and Eastern Europe favourable conditions for creating euroregions were available in the 90s. In case of Poland the way for their creation was opened due to joining the European Council and signing international conventions regulating the regional cooperation. The general legal framework of this cooperation is created by:

- European Framework Convention of trans-border cooperation between communities;
- territorial authorities, i.e. Madrid Convention of 1980;
- European Framework Agreement about border territories developed by the European Council in 1980;
- The European Chart of Border Territories passed by the European Council in 1981;
- The European Chart of Local Government approved by the European Council in 1985 (8).

Madrid Convention, which Poland joined in January 1993, has a particular meaning for accepting general rules in this country. In March 1993, the President of Polish Republic ratified the Convention. In February 1993, the European Chart of Local Government was adopted. It became a legal action defining the framework and forms of international contacts for local communities.

International State Treaties detailed frameworks of trans-border cooperation on Polish borders. On their basis appropriate agreements and contracts were worked out which form legal basis for cooperation of Polish local and regional authorities with their partners in neighbouring countries.

There are two models of euroregions in Poland. The first one is the International Association of Communities, which mainly works on the western border. It is made of self-governing structures gathered by the association and registered by the Court on the basis of «Law about Associations». It contains agreements and creates the euroregional structures with similar associations of the neighbours. The second one is the Interregional Association which is created with the help of district authorities. It is of administrative and council character. Such model dominates on the eastern and south-eastern borders (14).

The principles of functioning euroregions are as follows:

- the principle of subsidies which is regarded as a help of international and central domestic institutions and organisations for realisation of trans-regional cooperation by regional and local communities; principles of partnership, equality and equivalence for the parties creating euroregion;
- the principle of solidarity of trans-regional areas emphasising the necessity to reach compromises between competitive views eliminating the right of the stronger side;
- the principle of concept or strategy for trans-regional development necessary for long-term cooperation;
- the principle of good neighbourhood for residents of border areas;
- the principle of keeping the identity;
- the principle of voluntary participation; possibility of making decisions to joining and leave the euroregion;
- the principle of symmetry and parity for all bodies on each party's side as for the same number of places and equal rights for representing businesses in euroregion; it also deals with the way of financing the euroregional structures;
- the principle of pragmatism and analysis of costs and advantages;
- the principle of friendship and confidence;
- the principle of consensus for gaining mutual opinion reached during discussions and negotiations; in practice this principle is difficult to implement;
- the principle of rotation, which implies changes of the roles the organizations play resulting in different initiatives and meetings that lead in its turn to some changes in management of different institutions; however, in practice this principle is not always kept when finances into a certain undertaking are allocated not on a symmetry basis (13).

The detailed principles of functioning euroregions depend mainly on the forms of trans-border contracts like activity of a border area, competence of regional authorities and councils of co-operating sides, mutual «openness» of sides, and intensity of cooperation. The cooperation is based on the «Law about Community» of 1989 (3).

In compliance with current law principles and above rules a dozen of euroregions were set up in Poland. This form of cooperation includes all border countries as well as distant neighbours. Only some communities have not decided yet to cooperate with foreign neighbours. The territory to develop is Northern Poland between euroregions «Pomerania» and «Baltic». The total Polish ter-

territory embracing euroregional cooperation covers 115,095 sq. km that constitutes over 36% of the total territory of the country. Every third Pole lives in that area.

Four euroregions function on the western border with Germany: «Sprewa-Nysa-Bóbr» and «Pro Europa Viadrna» created in 1993, «Pomerania» established in 1995 and is situated on the west and south border. Euroregion «Nysa» has been functioning since 1991. Seven euroregions function on the south border: «Tatry» from 1994, co-operating with Slovakia, «Glacensis» from 1996 with the Czech Republic, «Pradziad» since 1997 with the Czech Republic, «Śląsk Cieszyński» and «Silesian» since 1998 with the Czech Republic, «Beskid» functions since 2000 with the Czech Republic. The euroregion «Karpaty» was set up alongside the eastern and southern border in 1993 for cooperation with Ukraine, Slovakia and Hungary. Two euroregions are situated on the eastern border: «Bug» joining Poland with Ukraine and Belarus from 1995 situated partly on the northern border. The euroregion «Niemen» has been functioning since 1997. It embraces Poland, Belarus, and Lithuania. The only cooperation party on the north is the euroregion «Bałtyk» created in 1998 within which cooperate Poland, Denmark, Lithuania, Russia, and Sweden.

As for the area, the largest euroregions (considering only Polish side) are «Bałtyk», «Bug» and «Niemen». The smallest as for the area are the euroregions on the southern border of the country. With respect to population the biggest euroregions are «Bałtyk» and «Karpaty», and the smallest is the Polish-Czech euroregion (5).

### **Polish Trans-Border Cooperation on the Eastern Border**

Due to its position in Europe Poland is a transit country on the east-west and north-south axis. After geopolitical changes which took place in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989-1999, the importance of its position grew joining countries of Western and Central Europe with the Commonwealth of Independent States.

On that axis Polish eastern border is of particular importance; moreover, it became in 1999 the eastern border of NATO and it will become in a very short time the eastern border of the European Union. So, it is urgent for Polish science, government, parliament, and local authorities to get more interested in this border.

From the point of view of transportation network, border checkpoint and defence problems of the country, the most difficult and problematic is the Polish eastern border because it neighbours with four politically different subjects: Russia – Kaliningrad District, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. The problems of trans-border cooperation are of great importance at different levels, but in every

existing euroregion they have to be the results of a long-term activity but not as fast integration based on individual needs and demands.

### **Euroregion «Karpaty»**

Euroregion «Karpaty» is one of the most ambitious undertakings initiated in Central Eastern Europe. It was the first euroregion that covered exclusively the territories of the former political eastern block, such as: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Ukraine. The creation of that euroregion in February 1993 in Debreczyn was preceded by several years of cooperation and contacts among Carpathian territories. In April 1997, Romania joined that cooperation (6).

The part of Polish borders of Karpaty euroregion is marked by the ex-districts (up till 31.12.1998): Krosno, Przemyśl, Rzeszów, and Tarnów. At present, they are territories of the following districts: in the whole Podkarpackie, and partly of Małopolskie. From the geographical point of view they are lands of Kotlinia Sandomierska, Zewnętrzne Karpaty, External Eastern Karpaty, and Pogórze, so the landscape is very diverse – from lowlands on the north through foothills to the range of mountains on the south. Almost the whole area is located in the Vistula river basin and only partly in the Dniester basin. This territory is unique in the respect of natural resources. Not polluted natural environment with a big number of eco-systems belongs to one of the most valuable regions of Europe.

The most precious territories are under the law control, and they are 50% of Polish euroregion. It includes two national parks: Bieszczady and Mazury, 70 nature reserves, a dozen of landscape parks, areas of protected landscapes, and nature monuments.

It is mainly an agricultural area, so about 45% of employees are related to that branch. They mainly work in gathering and processing cereal, potato and sugar beet, breeding cows, sheep and pigs.

The biggest industrial centers are: Dębica, Bochnia, Jasło, Krosno, Przemyśl, Rzeszów, Tarnów, and Sandomierz with chemical industry, electromechanical, glazing, textile, and agricultural food processing industry. The euroregion can pursue regional policy promoting economic performance in the outskirts, e. g. in the economic area of Zahana. It also co-operates with international organisations, e. g., with ONZ Committee for European Economy and euroregion Moza–Ren.

In the social sphere the most important aims are: making contacts with inhabitants of the region, learning about local habits and historical traditions. That is why many activities are undertaken. They are permanently related to the regional calendar of euroregion Karpaty – Festival of Carpathian Culture, Festival of Traditional Sports and Folklore, or Charity Festival for Handicapped People. In schools and universities the clubs are being established to popularise the idea of border cooperation.

An important communicative route from Western Europe to Ukraine goes through the region and further to the east. Unfortunately, the region has no international airport. There is a national airport in Rzeszów only for home flights and Krosno airport serves for sports activities.

Because of the problems caused by differences in taxes and customs rules of particular neighbour countries, a great attention is paid to improve the quality of infrastructure of border checkpoints with aim to get the international status.

The Hungarian part of the euroregion covers the northern-eastern part of the country with the biggest cities: Miskolc, Debreczyn, and Nyireghza. The steelworks, chemical, machinery, mining, red copper, and power stations industry are dominant here.

The Slovakian part of the euroregion embraces the eastern part of the country with Koszyce and Preszow, and here science and culture play the most important role. Well-developed heavy industry (processing of ore imported from Ukraine), chemical, and light industries allow for compensating losses caused by poor agriculture as this area is mainly mountainous. Only a small Hungarian border part of this area has fertile black soil.

The Ukrainian part includes districts located in the western and south-western part of the country. Because of the vast black soil steppes these areas are used for cultivating; mainly vegetables and grapes, and also for breeding cattle. The main branches of industry are: the production of machines and transport devices, excavating of coal, steel works, electronics and chemistry. In Lviv, Chernivtsi, and Ivano-Frankivsk, scientific and cultural institutions dominate.

The Romanian part of euroregion lies in the Eastern Carpathians. The largest city is Satu Mare. The biggest part of the country is agricultural and the main branches of industry include transportation, metallurgy, machinery, food and wood processing.

The growth of euroregion "Karpaty" gives the possibility to create new independent institutions supporting the trans-border cooperation in the Carpathian area. Due to the Institute of East-West Studies, support, specifically some finance and technical help, was provided by Karpaty Foundation. Another institution, the Karpaty Society of Regional Universities, cooperate with a variety of institutions besides governmental and international ones promoting the development of the region.

### **Euroregion «Bug»**

The idea to create euroregion «Bug» for the first time was expressed at the Polish-Ukrainian conference in Kazimierz Dolny in 1992. This conference was devoted to economic cooperation, and the notion «eastern wall» was replaced by euroregion «Bug». The official opening of euroregion «Bug» was

signed on 29 of September, 1995, in Lutsk, Ukraine where it was called the Trans-border Association of Euroregion «Bug» (12). The choice of the territory of the euroregion was justified by geographical proximity and numerous economic, cultural, and social relations. This euroregion embraced on the Polish side the following districts: Lublin in the widest range, Chełm, Tarnobrzeg, Zamość and later on Bielsko-Biała (after the administrative change of the country districts: Lublin, Mazowsze, Świętokrzyskie, and Podkarpackie); on the Ukrainian side Volyn oblast, and from Belarus Brest. Euroregion «Bug» embraces three-sided relations on the Polish border with Ukraine and Belarus, and its main goal is creating conditions for socio-economic, scientific and cultural development of the border areas.

The Polish part of the euroregion lies between the Vistula and Bug and embraces Lublin upland, Roztocze, Kotlina Sandomierska, and lake district Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie. The area is 29,269 sq. km and is inhabited by 2,700,000 people in 251 communities (10).

The major natural resources are: hard coal in Lublin Coalfield, sulphur and natural gas in the region of Lublin. The most significant plants on the Polish side are the following: Daewoo Motor Poland in Lublin, Stalowa Wola Steel works, cement plants in Chełm and Rajowiec, nitrogen plant in Puławy, sulphur plants in Tarnobrzeg and experimental coal mine in Bodganka near Łęczna. Among light industries we can distinguish numerous processing plants located in the regions growing wheat, sugar beet, potato, flax, hop, tobacco, fruits, and vegetables. Agricultural character of the economy is accounted for climate and soil conditions. The main city Lublin is the academic and cultural centre. The most important high schools are: A. Curie-Skłodowska University, Catholic University in Lublin (the only high school of this type in Poland), Medical Academy, Agricultural Academy, and Lublin Technical University. In Poleski Park Narodowy (National Park) there are the most interesting and attractive collections of relicts of swamp fauna and flora. In Middle Roztocze there is Roztoczański National Park with a few dozen hectares of reserves. Variety of land, diversity of climate and soil result in rich variety of plants and habitats (17).

For the development of trans-border cooperation the «Trans-border System of Protected Areas» (TOCH) was elaborated and implemented at the Institute of Environmental Protection and Institute of Tourism. The priority was tourism in the region of eastern Polish border. The main aim of the concept is to protect the most precious, in respect of nature and landscape, territories in the region of eastern border of Poland, and territories of Ukraine and Belarus.

The Ukrainian part of the euroregion is of forest-swamp character. On the territory of Shatski Lake district there is Shatski National Park, a landscape park, and numerous reserves with many different species of plants and animals protected by law. Natural resources are similar to those of Poland, mainly hard coal in Volyn-Lviv coal field and resources for building materials. The biggest cities are: Lutsk, Kovel, and Novovolynsk. Lutsk is an important academic centre.



There is Lutsk Industrial Institute and Volyn University. The whole region specialises in cultivating cereals, sugar beet, potato, flax, and hop.

Belarusian part of the euroregion is oblast Brest. The land profile is mainly lowland with well developed river network. The biggest city is Brest being at the same time the port of Bug and serving on the border with Poland. At present, it is also a very important industrial centre including mainly the food production, textile manufacturing, building materials and machine manufacturing (5).

By its status euroregion «Bug» develops different aspects of regional cooperation but the dominant aim is the improvement of living conditions of its residents taking advantage of geographical position and supporting social and economic development, a proper use of the area, communication and transport, protection of natural resources and environment, taking advantage of common cultural heritage and mutual activity to reach agreement among nations (15).

To realise above goals within the euroregion «Bug» the following task forces function:

- for area development and transport;
- for education, culture and environmental protection;
- for sport and tourism;
- for international contacts and cooperation in the area of economy, information technology, and data base.

Today the cooperation with neighbours is free from any big disturbances. Poland was the first country that recognised on 24 August, 1991, the Declaration of Independence of Ukraine after the break-out of the Soviet Union. Regardless historical challenges (heritage of Stalinism, World War II and first years that followed) both countries acknowledge today the significance of cooperation, specifically the importance of strong partnership in the age of European integration and processes of globalisation. Polish economic cooperation with Ukraine has big potential though still existing difficulties are caused by the delay in implementation of reforms on the Ukrainian side; the realisation of reforms is pressing from economical and social point of view. Until now, this cooperation has a tendency of fast development. With this neighbour Poland has the longest eastern border of 530 km that makes it necessary to strengthen the relationship. Geopolitical convergence of business in Ukraine and Poland on macro-level should improve in the future the contacts on regional and local level (2). Some differences in opinions and misunderstanding hampered the proper elaboration of the concept area development (9).

The programme's policy and its pursuing within the euroregions is aimed at full integration of functional economy. The political aims are important because besides the regional affairs there are hidden far reaching political intentions available. Euroregions are to be one of the ways to make possible creation of unified Europe in the 21 century. To familiarise with the aims and promote

their implementation, it is planned to issue a geographical economical atlas devoted to matters of nature, demography, social and economic activity on Polish–Belarusian–Ukrainian borders. Besides, research on technical infrastructure, joint financial and economic undertakings is conducted on both sides of the border.

Special attention will be paid to ecological issues. One of the most important tasks would be to purify waters of the Bug that flowing towards central Poland supply Warsaw with drinking water. The project «Clear Bug» is devoted to that project.

Very important tasks also are: organising mutual cultural and sports events, as well as working out projects of trans-border infrastructure development.

In 1999, the «Bug» euroregion received money from the Programme of Euroregions Small Projects PHARE for the first time. In the range of that euroregion it is foreseen that from that fund the Office of Tourist Movement in Zwierzyniec will be supported, International Sports Festival for Children will be organised in Chełm, and Euroregion Office will be opened there. But in spite of rich projects their realisation is nonetheless postponed for the future.

### **Euroregions in the Process of Integration with the European Union**

The contemporary social, economic and political reality changes unceasingly. New forms of international cooperation are created. International society encounters many new challenges; the development of the communicative societies, communication, flow of people and ideas cause communities and nations to be closer to each other and become economically and culturally similar. It is accompanied by the phenomenon of globalisation and universalization of present problems. The globalisation of international politics affected by the development of technology is clearly seen in trade, economic relations, and environmental issues. But globalisation still guarantees adequate efficient legal order for subordinate institutions. The members of a community avoid over-nation authorities which could restrict their own governing; therefore, it is still emphasised that contacts of local communities within the euroregions are very important.

Poland is surrounded by seven neighbouring countries. On the basis of regulated contacts with other countries it acquired good conditions for development of international cooperation. All agreements on friendship and neighbour contacts make the existing borders intact and serve as a basic guarantee of security and important stabilising element in Europe. Geopolitical position in Europe on the axis of east-west and north-south fosters cooperation of the countries. Poland increased its activity in international relations in recent years and regional cooperation acquired a special meaning. It is treated as instrumental to

provide stabilisation in the region, overcome present economic divisions and negative ethnical stereotypes, and create traditions of cooperation (7).

Euroregions are essential points of implementation of the European idea of integration and can be considered as manifestation of globalisation. It should be stressed, however, that euroregions are at the same time ideas of coming back to local frameworks. It is the link between perception of one's own identity and active cooperation. That is why the development of euroregions can be concentrated on the problem of integration on the continental level. Although euroregions are created on rank-and-file decisions, they are the element of a new European order. The importance of euroregions is great because they belong not only to countries in the European Union but also they refer to the borders of other countries in Europe.

It can be forecast that eastern trans-border cooperation especially in the range of euroregions will continue to develop. It will especially deal with border checkpoints. The territory of the east border of Poland is less developed and poorly industrialised but it constitutes 1/3 of total population (over 7 mln) on the territory of 1/4 of the whole area of Poland. So to stop negligence in economic and social development of the borders of the European Union we need to elaborate and realise development strategy of border areas on the east. The essential element will be the cooperation of neighbour regions on both sides of the border.

The euroregion cooperation can play the role of a predecessor for the rest part of the country in multilateral euroregional cooperation, hence increasing its influence. It is Poland that should expand contacts with neighbour countries in the range of euroregions. It means to establish all kinds of relations providing the basis for still wider share of border territories in the European processes of integration.

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