

The Strategic Role Of the Local Communities in The Development Of Cross-Border Cooperation Between Ukraine And The EU (on the example of the Transcarpathian Region)

Hanna Ihorivna Melehanych¹

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Abstract:

This article is devoted to the study of the implementation of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and EU countries. Transcarpathia was chosen as the region for the study because it is here that Ukraine is bordering with four European states. The most important role in the implementation of cross-border programs belongs to the communities in the field provided by the local self-government bodies. It is they who have the relevant knowledge and experience to successfully implement projects and programs from different funding sources targeted for the development of cross-border regions. The successful development and success of Ukraine's border territories largely depend on the successful mobilization and strategic use of funds.

Keywords:

cross-border cooperation, local community, local authorities, Transcarpathian Region

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Introduction

Ukraine borders on four European Union countries. This affects the development of the economy, socio-political relations, education and culture of the border areas. Not only has the cancellation of visas to EU countries provided evidence of good-neighborly relations between the members of the European Union and Ukraine, but it has also opened up many perspectives. However, this process simultaneously caused a number of challenges, especially for the border regions of Ukraine, and therefore for Ukraine as a whole (Marcu 2009; Sturza 2006).

The signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU and the start of implementing the respective section (Chapter 27. Cross-border

¹ Hanna Ihorivna Melehanych (ORCID: 0000-0001-7137-290X) – associate professor at the Uzhhorod National University, Ukraine. E-mail: hanna.melehanych@uzhnu.edu.ua

and regional cooperation) have determined priorities of development. They are connected with integrating the State strategy of regional development for the period up to 2020, the reforms of power decentralization, local self-government and administrative-territorial structure of Ukraine. Ukraine has begun to pay more attention to strengthening the contacts with European partners within the framework of the program of cross-border cooperation (Wawrzonek 2014). The respective provisions of the Association Agreement also envisage the interaction with European institutions to deal with issues of sustainable development which has a direct and immediate impact on cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in the field of regional and territorial development. The forward-looking forms of such cooperation are the establishment of cooperative relations between the representatives of local and regional authorities of Ukraine and the EU through contacts with the European Committee of the Regions and encouragement of involving the regions of Ukraine in the activities of European regional associations ('Rehionalne spivrobotnytsvo' 2018).

Consequently, the role of the local community and the region is becoming increasingly important. Changes that are taking place in the modern world reveal the importance of regional authorities and the role of local governments in the multifaceted development of territorial communities (Czepil & Opiola 2017; Opiola 2019). In the case of the region's location in the border zone, there arise new tasks and opportunities, although with certain challenges. Cross-border cooperation is one of the mechanisms for obtaining benefits and minimizing risks for the regions (Knippschild 2011; Medeiros 2009). For example, the region analyzed in this article is Transcarpathia. At present, cross-border cooperation in Ukraine is considered in two dimensions – as a tool for developing the border areas and as a factor in implementing European integration trends. The main task of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and the EU is to overcome the consequences of implementing, yet during the times of the USSR, the concept of viewing the border as a line of division and strengthening its bridging function. This, among other things, presupposes the prevention of the emergence of new dividing lines after the enlargement of the EU. On the other hand, there remains the situation when a full spectrum of resources of the border regions of Ukraine (human, production, natural, tourist and recreational, etc.) fails to be leveraged effectively. Admittedly, this fact makes foreign partners interested in the involvement of these resources (Horokhovska 2017; Scott 2009). In accordance with Article 212 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the EU cooperates with third countries at economic, financial and technical levels; one of the important points in this cooperation is financial aid. The assigned aid is provided through several EU instruments. The European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) is

one of the general tools for the EU's direct support of border cooperation at the EU's external borders. This document has considerably enhanced the scope for cross-border cooperation at the EU's external borders (Benko 2019: 195).

Theoretical justification

The issues of regional development and cross-border cooperation have been studied by many scholars in different countries (Böhm & Drapela 2017; Joenniemi & Janczak 2017; Klatt 2016; Sohn, Reitel & Walther 2009; Wassenberg et al. 2015) and have recently become the subject of interest for Ukrainian researchers. Regional and, in particular, cross-border cooperation is an area of scientific interest for such Ukrainian scholars as: E. Kish, N. Mikula, Z. Varnalii, M. Dolishnii, I. Artemov, V. Tolkanov, S. Maksymenko, S. Davydenko, K. Horokhovska, Y. Sotnikov, I. Kravchenko, etc. However, the impact of the forms and instruments of cross-border cooperation on Ukrainian regional competitiveness has been poorly researched, taking into consideration the current European integration processes and Ukraine's participation in them (Sotnikov & Kravchenko 2013). Scientific research on cross-border cooperation is developing in the direction of increasing effective cooperation based on new principles and new forms. A significant contribution to the development of the theory of regional governance in the aspect of cross-border cooperation has been made by domestic academic institutions. In particular, in Transcarpathian region the Institute for Cross-Border Cooperation was established. The research findings of the institute were published in the monograph *Connecting History. Essays on the Contemporary Transborder Cooperation in the Carpatian Region* under the general editorship Serhii Ustych ('Istoriia' 2017). In the scientific literature, this work is the first attempt of interdisciplinary research of the recent history of cross-border cooperation in the Carpathian region conducted by a group of scholars: historians, sociologists, economists, political researchers, cultural researchers and lawyers. The monograph reveals the traditions of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and friendly relations among people of different nationalities and religions, identifies the existing and potential conflict factors, analyzing ways they overcome or prevent them, and outlines the prospects of fruitful cross-border cooperation in the Carpathians. Another academic institution is the Scientific Institute of European Integration Studies. Owing to the research carried out by this organization, a collective monograph was published *Cross-Border Cooperation Of Ukraine: State, Problems, Prospects* under the general editorship Ivan Artyomov ('Transkordonne spivrobotnytstvo' 2012). It examines the legal and methodological foundations of cross-border cooperation in the light of European integration processes in Ukraine which are an important factor in

enhancing regional competitiveness. The monograph reveals the mechanisms of developing foreign economic relations in the border regions of Ukraine under the conditions of incorporating European integration tendencies. It also explores ways of evaluating the effectiveness of these foreign relationships and many other issues related to these research topics. The accumulated theoretical and practical experience testifies to the versatility and multidimensionality of the topic of cross-border cooperation. The success of cross-border cooperation also depends on the peculiarities of local development since they are closely interrelated. Hence, the sustainable development of the country's border areas necessitates further research of the described issue.

Research methods

To meet the aim of this study, the author has used the general scientific and special research methods. Admittedly, the method of system analysis has been resorted to in the research as well; with its help, the author managed to study legislation as an integrated mechanism. The comparative method has been employed to comprehend and identify similarities and dissimilarities in the joint operating programs of cross-border cooperation and activities of local authorities. An important method applied in the study was the method of analysis for studying the classification and theoretico-methodological approaches to understanding the basic concepts and views of scholars on specific issues related to cross-border cooperation). In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with heads of border villages and towns in the Transcarpathian region.

Results

According to the Ukrainian legislation, the aim of cross-border cooperation is establishing good-neighborly relations and improving interaction of entities and participants of cross-border cooperation that promotes the joint solving of problems related to local and regional development based on the following principles: respect for the domestic policy of the states; respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; mutually beneficial cooperation; respect for state sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of the borders of the states; taking into account, when concluding agreements on cross-border cooperation, the powers of entities and rights of participants involved in cross-border cooperation; the agreed elimination of political, economic, legal, administrative and other obstacles to mutual cooperation (Article 2; 'Zakon Ukrainy' 2004). Cross-border cooperation in Ukraine is implemented at the following levels: local and regional

policies of cross-border cooperation (any official cross-border cooperation of villages, cities, districts, regions), national policy for cross-border cooperation (this is how the government supports cross-border cooperation) and the policy of the European Union's cross-border cooperation (funding). Each of these levels is important, and the harmonization of their activities is the key to the successful implementation of ideas and projects. Another dimension of interaction, not supported by the state, is the policy of cross-border cooperation between non-governmental organizations (non-profit sector), various local bodies (chambers of commerce, development agencies, etc.) and local businesses. For example, funding from the EU for cross-border projects provides opportunities for cooperation in different sectors of society, and the ideal triangle of cooperation includes authorities, business and the public. The spheres in which this cooperation is implemented most frequently are: environment and natural disasters, fighting against organized crime, migration issues, cultural cooperation, education and research, tourism and recreation, etc.

In the scientific literature, the concept of cross-border cooperation has different interpretations. The subject matter of our study is cross-border cooperation as the direct co-operation between regional and local authorities across the borders in all spheres of life, which engages in its activities a variety of entities. So, as we see, the key role in this at the most effective level of implementing local and regional cross-border cooperation policies is played by communities led by local governments. This is due to the fact that the latter ones bear responsible for local and regional development and implement cross-border partnership, mainly through project implementation and direct contact. In the conditions of decentralization and the new state regional policy in Ukraine, this function is becoming even more important as the heads of the united territorial communities have even more powers. To support this, in 2018, amendments to the Law of Ukraine *On Local Self-Government* were introduced. According to those amendments, the competences of village, settlement and city councils have been expanded. They may now: approve agreements on the association of Euroregional cooperation, make decisions on the formation of associations of Euroregional cooperation, make decisions on joining such associations or withdrawing from them, approve the statute of the association of Euroregional cooperation and introduce changes thereto. They also have the right to cooperate with the respective local authorities of the member states of the Council of Europe ('Zakon Ukrainy' 1997). Depending on the capability of regional and territorial leaders to use this instrument of cross-border cooperation, opportunities are created for immediate access of local councils to the funds of international organizations, which, in turn, enhances their financial independence.

A vivid example for studying cross-border cooperation with EU countries is the Carpathian region, where Transcarpathia occupies an important place. This is primarily due to its special location. In Europe, it is barely possible to find a region that would have such a unique geographical location at the intersection of the borders of five countries (Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania). It is these countries that are determined as priorities for Ukraine in terms of cross-border cooperation ('Derzhavna prohrama' 2016). Some border towns and districts of Transcarpathian region border on the two countries, and this, as a matter of fact, directly affects their functioning and opportunities for development. Residing in the vicinity of the border are 415 thousand citizens of Ukraine, and the length of the state border within the limits of Transcarpathia is 467.2 km, of which 32.6 km is in the Ukrainian-Polish area of the state border, 97.6 km – in the Ukrainian-Slovak border area, 133.1 km – in the Ukrainian-Hungarian border area and in 203.9 km – the Ukrainian-Romanian border area. The communities of the region simultaneously participate in several EU-funded cross-border cooperation programs. The proof of this is that, as of 2013, the Transcarpathian region had the largest number of cross-border projects at the regional level – 80, while the neighboring border areas had only between 30 to 50 (Kravtsiv 2015: 6). This trend continues. The ethno-cultural and civilizational dimension of centuries-old peaceful coexistence of many ethnic and sub-ethnic groups of Transcarpathia should be added to the geographic and geopolitical factors, which is an important component of security in this European mega-region and generally in Europe. In the context of relations between countries, it is unequivocal that their state-wide reality, in particular, historical events, and current relations between governments, affects cross-border cooperation. Less influential are cultural, religious and ethnic differences since the history of Transcarpathia in certain historical periods was interwoven with the history of the neighboring countries. The factors influencing cross-border cooperation, which should be taken into account in accordance with the scientific-analytical report of the Dolishnii Institute of Regional Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, are: the level of intensity of ties between the entities and participants of cross-border cooperation; the barrier function of the border; the frequency of changing of the territorial authorities and their hereditary succession; the differences in the legal environment of cross-border cooperation; the level of development of the infrastructure of cross-border cooperation; the creativity of entities and participants of cross-border cooperation; the symbolic dual citizenship; ethnic and cultural factors; the common historical past; external financial aid; development strategies of the states; state regional policies; common strategies and programs; subjective factors; external influences; the level of socio-economic and ecological development of regions; the awareness level, etc. (Kravtsiv 2015: 27).

Special attention in cross-border cooperation is to be paid to the national minorities that are represented by public national-cultural associations and the country's support of its representatives abroad. As an example, in 2007 in Transcarpathian region there was developed *The Regional Program of Cooperation with Ukrainians and Ruthenians abroad for the Period up to 2010*. It was found out by the author that the main ways of development of cooperation with the Ukrainian Diaspora are: implementing special programs of cooperation between Transcarpathian region and the border regions of the neighboring states; celebrating the days of good neighbourly relations; exchanging artistic collectives and their participation in various cultural and artistic events; supporting the publishing and information activities, etc. Nevertheless, this list could be much longer. In respect of members of the national minorities, who are often in the spotlight in Transcarpathia, these are the Hungarians. As practice shows, the activity of the Hungarian national minority is the key factor in the Ukrainian-Hungarian external political and cross-border relations (Baranyi 2016; Sik & Szeitl 2015). Another important mechanism of Ukraine's cooperation with the neighboring countries is the activity of bilateral intergovernmental commissions on issues of securing the rights of the Ukrainian-Hungarian, Ukrainian-Slovak and Ukrainian-Rumanian national minorities. It should be stressed that the borders between Ukraine and these states are in the Transcarpathian region, and therefore the main provisions are implemented on the territory of the region within the competences and powers of the local authorities (Melehanych 2012: 12). As noted by V. Hoblyk, Transcarpathia has the opportunity to work productively on the implementation of Ukraine's integration strategy, in particular, by means of engaging investments, improving cross-border cooperation and the mechanism for the stabilization of the interethnic relations in the areas of compact residence of the national minorities. It is the practice of improving the parts of the mechanism of integration processes, its effectiveness in many cases makes it possible to apply and implement the gained experience in other regions of the state, to introduce timely corrective measures and respond to shortcomings (Hoblyk & Hoblyk 2019: 67).

Beneficiaries of all cross-border projects are the residents of the border communities. Those residents, who live close to the border, have the opportunity of taking advantage of the proximity of the border on a daily basis. This right is predominantly exercised by the inhabitants of the settlements who have economic, family or cultural ties on the other side of the border and who are constantly crossing the border crossing points (transport, railroad and pedestrian crossings). These groups of Ukrainian citizens who are the residents of the border communities are the most aware of the meaning of cross-border cooperation from experience.

In 2017, the author conducted a series of interviews with the heads of the border settlements of Transcarpathia (in the project *Sharing Know-How for Better Management of the Schengen Border between Slovakia / Ukraine and Norway / Russia–CBC 01018*). Most of the interviewees indicated that the fact there is the border and cross-border cooperation for them means:

- the establishment and expansion of trade and economic relations for entities engaged in foreign economic activity, small and medium business;
- the growth of tourism and development of transit potential of Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Poland and Ukraine;
- the support of family relations;
- the economic growth and the local infrastructure development;
- the further development of cultural and educational ties through the establishment and implementation of joint projects, organizing festivals, concerts, folk band performances, conducting artist exhibitions and scientific conferences.

Despite the fact that they point out that there are generally no major threats related to the proximity of the border, it is necessary to mention rare cases of illegal migration, somewhat formal bilateral ties, the littering of the territories of the communities by people crossing the border, etc.

To improve this situation, it is advisable to work strategically on both sides of the border, together and separately. Since the time of adopting the Declaration of Ukraine's independence, there have been elaborated the development plans in the region. Since the beginning of 2000, the strategic initiatives have been introduced; they contribute to increasing the predictability of the development of the territory and minimizing the negative effects of different levels of socio-economic development on both sides of the border. The border areas have a lot of common goals, the achievement of which requires cross-border cooperation on the part of the neighboring countries, their unified approach and coordinated joint actions, in particular to prevent floods, develop and operate the transport and energy infrastructure, protect the environment and ensure security. Certain problems arising as a result of the financial and economic crises need to be solved too, in particular, overcoming economic inequality and unemployment, balancing labor migration, increasing the level of business activity and employment of the population of the border areas, as well as environmental problems, including supporting biodiversity and protecting and preserving the common cultural heritage.

Legal framework and financial support for these types of initiatives are actually provided. A fitting example was the implementation of *The State*

Program for the Development of Cross-Border Cooperation for 2016-2020. It is of high importance that the border towns and regions participate in activities provided within the framework of the joint operational programs of the European Neighborhood Instrument of cross-border cooperation for 2014-2020. It is necessary to mention such programs as *Ukraine-Poland-Belarus* (165 million EUR) *Ukraine-Hungary-Slovakia-Romania* (73.9 million EUR), *Ukraine-Romania* (60 million EUR), *The Danube Transnational Program* and other bilateral programs of cross-border cooperation with the regions. Due to this, it is possible to boost the economic development of the regions and improve the qualification of officials of local executive bodies and local self-government bodies who tackle cross-border cooperation issues.

For example, the joint Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2014-2020 is based on the joint efforts of all four participating countries and aims to create the framework for events that will contribute to more intensive cooperation between the regions of Ukraine and the regions of the EU, as they share the common border ('Rezultaty' 2018). The program covers 7 territorial units (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg in Hungary, the Košice and Prešov Regions of Slovakia, Maramureș and Satu Mare Counties of Romania,



Figure 1: The area covered by the Program and the main centers involved in the PES of the EIC Hungary-Slovakia-Romania Ukraine 2014-2020

Ivano-Frankivsk and districts of Transcarpathia, Ukraine and several adjoining regions with limited participation rights; see Figure 1).

The national or regional authorities and public sector organizations can focus on all priorities, namely: the development of the local culture and history combined with the functions of tourism, the sustainable use of the environment in the border region – the conservation of natural resources, taking measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and pollution, the development of transport infrastructure to improve the mobility of people and goods, the development of infrastructure for information and communication technologies and the dissemination of information, supporting joint activities to prevent natural and human-induced disasters, as well as taking joint measures in emergency situations, enhancing health. Even if the local self-government body is not involved in the implementation of the projects, the Program envisages its connection with national, regional and other strategies and programs in the aforementioned thematic spheres. The synergy of Cross-Border Cooperation Programs and Regional Development Strategies in Ukraine is a window of opportunities for the border regions ('Synerhiia' 2018).

Judging by the coincidence of all internal and external factors, the strategic initiatives of the Transcarpathian region are closely linked with the initiatives of the European Union's border regions which are implemented within the operational programs and technical assistance programs provided by the EU. An important stage in the strategic planning of the development of the border regions is the creation of joint cross-border strategies and development programs, communication strategies aimed at strengthening the cooperation and enhancing the competitiveness of the territories. The strategic goal the enhancement of transborder and Euroregional cooperation, indicated in *the Regional Strategy for the Transcarpathian region development up to 2015 during 2007-2014* was implemented both through the project activity of the enterprises, organizations and institutions, and through organizational and contractual relations with the neighboring border regions, as well as through the development and implementation of bilateral and interregional cross-border cooperation strategies in the border regions. Such development strategies were elaborated most frequently in cooperation with Slovak and Polish representatives of both state and non-state institutions.

Cross-border cooperation in the Transcarpathian region, according to the Strategy of the development of Transcarpathia until 2020, is seen as the strategic platform for the economic, cultural and spiritual development of Transcarpathia and its communities. The list of the existing agreements on bilateral cross-border cooperation with the border regions of the neighboring countries, concluded by

the Transcarpathian regional state administration and Transcarpathian regional council at the beginning of 2018, includes the following neighboring regions: Prešov and Košice self-governing region (Slovakia), the counties of Satu Mare and Maramureș (Romania), the Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Region (Hungary), Podkarpackie Voivodeship (Poland). These joint and coordinated governing documents of the regional authorities play an important role in implementing medium-term cross-border cooperation programs of a strategic nature.

It is important that the projects of territorial cooperation are carried out, as a rule, on a grant basis. Applications may be submitted by the local and regional authorities, providers of public services (e.g. health care institutions), educational, research, sports and cultural institutions (museums, libraries, youth organizations), civil society organizations, business associations and unions. One of the conditions for being awarded a grant is that both parties participate in all stages of the project development and implementation. In addition, representatives of both parties should also be among the staff accompanying the project. Finally, funding should be shared: EU funds make up no more than 80% of the total cost of the project, 10% must be provided by the participants themselves.

Discussion, conclusions

Consequently, the local self-government bodies of the border regions, such as, for instance, the Transcarpathian region, should take advantage of their location to be able to use the full potential of cross-border cooperation, considering the external and internal factors. Borrowing EU experiences and strengthening cooperation with the neighboring countries on the way of European integration is the key to success. Particular attention is to be paid to the ability of the local self-government bodies to play the strategic role in raising citizens' living standards and the competitiveness of the regions through active cross-border cooperation (Böhm & Opiola 2019; Opiłowska 2017). This, in its turn, will promote communication, improve the welfare of the population, infrastructure and tourism development potential of the territories and facilitate the cultural and international exchange. It is the communications at the local level on which the relationship between citizens of different countries of the border territories depend and this immediately affects the official intergovernmental relations.

Hence, the main subject and object of cross-border cooperation should be the border communities that are aware of their issues and are ready to urge their efforts to develop the border territories, ensuring the protection of Ukraine's national interests and the continuation of the European integration process.

The main recommendations and topics that require the further study are: the continuous community-based training in project management and strategic planning; the attracting of the external financing to the local budgets; the establishment of the unified base of already implemented or the functioning programs of cross-border cooperation in the border regions and districts.

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Strategiczna rola społeczności lokalnych w rozwoju współpracy transgranicznej pomiędzy Ukrainą a krajami UE na przykładzie Zakarpacia

Streszczenie:

Niniejszy artykuł został poświęcony problematyce współpracy transgranicznej pomiędzy Ukrainą i państwami Unii Europejskiej. Przedmiotem szczególnego zainteresowania jest Zakarpacie, gdyż ten region graniczy z czterema państwami członkowskimi UE. Szczególne znaczenie dla realizacji różnych programów współpracy transgranicznej mają wspólnoty lokalne reprezentowane przez organy władzy samorządowej. One to właśnie powinny dysponować wiedzą i doświadczeniem, które umożliwiają wprowadzanie w życie projektów i programów finansowanych z różnych źródeł i zorientowanych na wsparcie dla regionów przygranicznych. Rozwój przygranicznych obszarów Ukrainy i ich perspektywy na przyszłość w znacznej mierze zależą od strategicznie przemyślanego sposobu wydatkowania dostępnych środków.

Słowa kluczowe:

współpraca transgraniczna, społeczność lokalna, samorząd, Zakarpacie