

Transborder Cooperation in the Pannonian Plain – Case Study of “The Euroregion Danube-Drava-Sava”

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Abstract

Within the new “European state architecture”, based on the policy of the Western countries that encourage transborder cooperation, the last decade of the second millennium was characterised by considerable “mutations” in the countries of the former Eastern block. With a strong logistic and financial support, that European project was quickly accepted in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. Linking of transborder regions by means of direct cooperation, leaning upon the legal framework that allows the official competence of local and regional authorities, with obeying of national laws, is the basis and the main reason for acceptance of this European policy, which precedes the real European integration. One of such regions, formed in the southern part of the Pannonian plain, is the “Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion” that links Hungary, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with north-western Bačka, which still has the status of the observer.

Key words: transborder cooperation, regional changes, Euroregion Danube-Drava-Sava

Introduction

Theoretical strongpoint of Euroregions formation lies within the basic idea of politically and economically united Europe, as well as in the intention that stagnant, peripheral positions of border regions in European countries are transformed (by valorization of their “new” geo-position) into “bridging” positions between the neighbouring countries. This would make the prerequisites both for their faster general development and for stronger complex inter-state linking thanks to their existence. Analysis of the experiences of most of the existing Euroregions points to the conclusion that the common starting point is the fact that border areas generally have peripheral positions within their countries, both geographically and in terms of development. Linking with neighbouring border area, in the conditions of European integration, transforms the former peripheral position of many border regions into a central position within Europe¹. However, Europe simultaneously struggles for respecting of the differences, that is different social and national characteristics of regions from both sides of the border.

Forms of transborder cooperation include a very wide range of modalities of partnership-cooperation: from fraternization of towns to cooperation along the main water communications (for example the Danube Community), or within the greater connected spatial units.

One of the aims of a successful transborder cooperation is a sector integration (horizontal connection) between the states, as well as a vertical connection (between the administrative spatial units), but this high degree of cooperation is found only in very developed Euroregions. Apart

from the most common, infrastructural problems, the tendency of cooperation is directed towards the environmental protection, growth and development balance control, integration policy and partnership (Šećerov 2004).

The first form of transborder cooperation that actually had the attribute “Euroregional” was formed at the German-Netherlands border in 1958 under the name EUREGIO. Among the first Euroregions was “Reggio Basillensis” (nowadays named TriRhena), in the border region between Switzerland, Germany and France. In the Rein valley, the transborder cooperation started in the seventies, between Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg), France and Germany. Afterwards, this kind of associations have spread on intensively, and now there are about hundred and fifty such cooperation structures, from the Atlantic coast to the western parts of the former Soviet Union (Ilies, 2004). The examples of western countries have shown that the role of a border area is to strengthen the harmonization in functional border region in both integrated areas. Based on the examples from Western Europe, starting from the end of the 20th century, a number of Euroregions have been formed in Central and Eastern Europe as well. The first such example was “The Carpathian Euroregion” (Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Poland).

In South-Eastern Europe, the number of Euroregions is much smaller. They are only in first phases of establishment – mutual identification and determination of interests, which results from hystorical dynamics of the region and distinctive differences. All Euroregions of the South-Eastern Europe are faced with the EU which enters into their areas. That is why the EU tends to support the border areas. Financially, through various funds, together with the political “pressure”, it helps their formation, development and consolidation (Batt 2001). Formation of Euroregions is particularly important for the EU enlargement by inclusion of new members – tran-

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¹ According to the 2002 data of the European Committee, 40% of the EU territory and 25% of its population are situated within the border areas. These areas are the key development factor of European integration, as well as of establishing of economic and social connections. (European Communities, 2002, pp.6.)

sition countries from Central and Eastern Europe.

Although stabilization is a special goal of formation of Euroregions in the Balkans, with regard to former unstable border areas and international relations, the Euroregions will be operational only when high level of stability is obtained in the region, and the interests of sub-state cooperations are recognized.

In border areas of Serbia five Euroregions have been formed, encompassing the parts of neighbouring countries as well. These associations were formed at the end of the 20th and at the beginning of the 21st century, but none of them has achieved a considerable level of cooperation yet (Todorović et al. 2004). Aiming to "soften" the north-western borders and to improve the cooperation, a great challenge for Serbia is a formal joining of Vojvodina municipalities to the Euroregion Danube-Drava-Sava, which encompasses southern part of the Pannonian plain and a part of its rim.

Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion

Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion is one of the most active, functionally most consistent, spatially and populationally bigger transborder regions in the contact zone of macro-units of Central and South-Eastern Europe. Its formation, functioning and development are based on several essential elements of connection between its parts: a) historical heritage of common (and complementary) strong development along the axis Pecs-Osijek; b) well developed network of (natural) corridors (rivers Danube, Drava and Sava) which have continuously connected this area with the big development centres in the wider surroundings

(Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade); and c) since the second half of the 19th century, strong functional relations with the area of North-Eastern Bosnia.

One of the significant linking elements, important for the formation of this Euroregion is its present position on the European multi-modal Corridor X which, as a part of communication network of continental order – links the Baltic region with the Adriatic area.

Since the time of the Roman Empire in this part of Europe, the largest part of the present Euroregion was situated within the administrative-territorial unit Pannonia Inferior, in which the towns Sopianae (Pecs), Mursa (Osijek) and Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica) represented not only a part of well developed network of urban centres of the Empire, but also the functional centres (administration, law, military function, trade, craftwork, et cetera) dominating in this part of the Empire. The area of North-Eastern Bosnia (southern part of the present Euroregion) in that period was a part of the Second Roman Province (Illyricum) and did not have so well developed network of towns like the Pannonia Inferior (The Times Atlas, 1984). The fall of the Roman Empire and formation of Middle Ages states did not bring many geopolitical changes to this area. The northern and central parts of the present Euroregion (Hungarian part of Baranja and Eastern Croatia) were a part of the Hungarian kingdom till the beginning of the 16th century, when this area became a peripheral part of the Turkish Empire and strategically important region for the planned conquest of Vienna. Only at the end of the 17th century this area was lib-

erated from the Turkish government and returned under the Hungarian kingdom (Habsburg Monarchy), which was a milestone in its development. Being at the same time demographically relatively empty, but strategically very important, this region was continually inhabited with the population from the other parts of the Monarchy, which also included a strong economical development. The leading towns in that area became the centres of strong manufacture production: Pecs (glass, ceramics, metals) and Osijek (silk, wood processing, shipyards). Thanks to the development of other functions (trade, traffic, banking, education, etc) they were turned into real (multifunctional) nodal centres of the large gravitating area (southern Hungary, eastern Croatia, northern Bosnia). Fertile land, waters, woods and even small ore deposits (in the northern part of the Euroregion), as well as significant exploitation of nonmetallic raw materials (in the southern part) have been the significant resources for the development of this area, specially intensified in the second half of the 19th century (industrialization, railroad construction², expansion of river traffic). This resulted in the development of the network of strong secondary centres both in northern (Kaposvar, Szekszard, Barcs, Mohacs) and central (Slavonski Brod, Vinkovci, Vukovar, Požega, Koprivnica, Virovitica, etc.), as well as in southern part (Tuzla, Brčko).

Breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 resulted in huge geopolitical changes in the area. This political-economic space was divided by the state border of newly formed state unions of Hungary and Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Also, such situation had a negative impact to development process, especially in case of nodal centres Pecs and Osijek, which became peripheral centres with considerably reduced gravitational spheres. The situation did not significantly change even after the World War II, except the fact that all three leading centres of the Euroregion (Pecs, Osijek, Tuzla) were growing in population and functions, developing the role of nodal centres in the new gravitational space. In that way, Pecs and Osijek have partially compensated their relatively unfavourable position in the new geopolitical space. Growth and development of central and southern part of the Euroregion was interrupted in the nineties of the 20th century by the breakup of former Yugoslavia and the consecutive war conflicts which were the most intensive particularly in this area, with numerous tragic conse-



Fig. 1 Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion

² Railroads Pecs - Osijek and Osijek - Subotica - Szeged were constructed in the period 1869/78 and are among the oldest in this part of Europe (Dinić 1996).

quences. Formation of new states (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) resulted in new border lines which (in combination with the consequences of the war) represented a new obstacle to integration of the area and to continuation of its dynamic development. Overcoming of these new obstacles is one of the main motives of "The Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion" formation.

"Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion" was formed on November 28th 1998, when the Statute was signed in Pecs. The founders and the first members are Baranja County, the town of Pecs and Pecs-Baranja Trade and Industrial Chamber (Hungary); Osiječko-Baranjska County, the town of Osijek, Economic Chamber of Osijek (Croatia); and Tuzlansko-Podrinjski Canton, Tuzla Municipality and Economic Chamber of Tuzla Region (Bosnia and Herzegovina). At the end of the year 2000, a number of new members joined the Euroregion, so that nowadays this transborder regional union spreads over the area of 28.284 km², encompassing 2.243 settlements, with the total population of 2.454.091 (87 per km²). The region is formed of 11 regional units of the order NUTS 3 (counties and cantons), and 713 units of local self-management – NUTS 4 and 5 order (www.ddseuro.org).

The present members of this transborder regions are:

- Counties in the Republic of Hungary: Baranya, Somogy. The towns: Pecs, Kaposvar, Szekszard, Komlo-Mohacs, Barcs.
- Counties in the Republic of Croatia: Brodsko-Posavska, Koprivničko-Križevačka, Osiječko-Baranjska, Požeško-Slavonska, Virovitičko-Podravska, Vukovarsko-Srijemska. The towns: Osijek, Slavonski Brod, Vinkovci, Vukovar, Koprivnica, Požega.
- A part of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Tuzlansko-Podrinjski Canton, Posavska County, Brčko District, Tuzla Municipality.

Apart from these administrative-territorial units, the members of the Euroregion are: Pecs-Baranya Trade and Industrial Chamber (Hungary), Croatian Economic Chamber – with head offices in Osijek, Vukovar and Slavonska Požega (Croatia), as well as the Cantonal Economic Chamber Tuzla (B&H). Since 2002, the municipalities from Serbia and Montenegro – Apatin, Bač, Sombor and Subotica – have the status of observers. Regional institutions are: Assembly, President, Executive Committee, Working bodies and Supervising Board. The goal of the Euroregion is finding the optimal model of the management and the application of the model in order to make profitable, useful, serviceable and efficient transborder zone in this part of

Pannonian Plain. Beside, this transborder association is based on the following basic goals and activities (www.ddseuro.org):

- Common geographic connection between the members which directs them towards common use of natural resources, as well as to mutual valorization of the position in the European infrastructural network,
- Historical connections and relations between the members of this regional association,
- Mutual interest for the improvement of the position of national minorities and
- Interest for supporting and successful realization of international and regional projects.

Based on the defined general goals of formation and functioning of this transborder region, the activities of its members are directed to realization of the following tasks:

- Establishing and developing of mutual relations between population and institution of this area, as pre-requisites for better knowing, understanding, cooperation and friendship,
- Creation of conditions for better movement of experiences and knowledge,
- Creation of expert basis for realization of the concept of sustainable development in the Euroregion, by usage of common and particular material resources, with preservation of natural values and protection of environment and
- Determination of common development interests (preparation, determination and according of mutual development strategy within the home countries).

For realization of these goals, the Euroregion organizes various activities, from marketing to the activities directed to inclusion of mutual projects to programmes and financial mechanisms of the EU. Among these activities is realization of the project "European Corridor Vc", which has a particular importance for that area, because this European multimodal corridor is the main development axis of this Euroregion.

In physical-geographic structure of this transborder region, three main water courses dominate (Danube, Drava and Sava), after which the Euroregion was named. Both northern (the area of southern Hungary) and central part (eastern Croatia) have the similar physionomic and landscape characteristics: plains dominate (as parts of a great Pannonian plain), although in the middle of the Hungarian part of Baranya there is Mecsek Mt. (682 m a.s.l.), and in the western part of the eastern Croatian plain there are Slavonian

mountains (Psunj, 984 m a.s.l.). The southern part of the Euroregion (on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina) is mostly a hilly-mountainous area, except the narrow plain belt along the Sava River. Favourable morphological (and especially pedological) characteristics enabled the development of all kinds of intensive agriculture, in practically all parts of the Euroregion. Apart from soil and water, a considerable resource of this area (particularly in its central and southern part) are extensive woods. Together with agricultural resources and mineral wealth (in the northern part – uranium, anthracite, kaoline, and in the southern part – coal, salt, magnesite), these were the main elements of relatively early and intense industrial development of that area.

In the spatial structure of the transborder region Danube-Drava-Sava, *three sub-units* are situated. The *northern sub-unit* is formed of two Hungarian counties (Somogy and Baranya) and the town Szekszard. Its surface is 10.378 km², which is 36.7% of the total surface of the Euroregion. In 1999, its population was about 608.000. As the town Szekszard, which belongs to Tolna County (population 38.000), is also a part of the region, the total population of the northern sub-unit is 646.000 (26.3% of its total population). The *central sub-unit*, which is formed of six Croatian counties between the rivers Drava and Sava (Slavonia macro-region) spreads over 14.233 km² (50.3% of the total Euroregion surface). In 2001, it had a population of 1.016.000 (41.4% of the total Euroregion population). The third, *southern sub-unit* is formed of three Bosnian-Herzegovinian political-territorial units, with the surface 3.673 km² (13% of the total Euroregion surface). The estimations point that in the year 1996, the region had the population of 792.000 (32.3% of the total Euroregion population) (www.tk.kim.ba).

Nodal midpoints of this area are at the same time demographically greatest centres: Pecs with the population of 158.000 in 1999, Osijek with the population of 139.000 in 2001, and Tuzla with the population of 132.000 in 1996. Two towns in the region – Kaposvar (77.000) and Slavonski Brod (65.000) have a population exceeding 50.000, and the network of secondary centres (with population ranging from 20.000 to 50.000) is rather developed as well: the towns Barcs, Komlo, Szekszard and Mohacs in the northern part of the region; Koprivnica, Virovitica, Požega, Đakovo, Vinkovci and Vukovar in the central part; and Brčko in the southern part of the region). All these centres are also the strong economical centres with the developed industrial, trade and communications functions, while three nodal midpoints also have the central functions that ensure

their dominance and developmental role in the region – Universities, and financial, health and cultural institutions of macro-regional order (Davidović 2000).

For the present spatial structure of “The Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion”, and for its future development, the infrastructural systems (in traffic, energetics, etc.) have a significant role, and are well developed in the area. The main traffic axis of the region is the European multimodal Corridor Vc. Presently, the road E-73 is situated along that track, in the direction: Budapest-Szekszard-Osijek-Sarajevo-Ploče. Through Budapest intersection, it is connected with the road E-77 (Budapest-Gdansk) and links the Adriatic and the Baltic Sea. Along that Corridor, there is also the railroad Budapest-Pecs-Osijek-Ploče. At the Szekszard intersection, the international road E-661 (Szekszard-Pecs-Barcs-Virovitica) diverges from the Corridor Vc. The road Osijek-Sombor-Subotica-Szeged (E-662) also belongs to the network of international roads in the region, and represents the shortest (transverzal) connection between the Corridors Xb and Vc. Communicational importance of the region is also shown in the fact that to the south of Osijek, the Corridor Vc is crossed by the Corridor X (direction Salzburg-Zagreb-Belgrade). Moreover, one of the main elements of traffic connections of the region with its surroundings is the European Corridor VII (the Danube River). In the traffic network of the region, the communicational direction Osijek-Vinkovci-Županja-Tuzla has an increasing importance, because it is the shortest link between all three nodal centres of the area. A part of the European Corridors network (for example segment of the Corridor X passing through the region) is technologically well equipped (highway and railroad suitable for trains exceeding 100 km/h), and a part is actually being equipped (highway Budapest-Osijek is under construction, railroad of the Corridor Vc is being modernized and electrified, etc.).

Recently, the river traffic infrastructure in the region is being completed (especially that of the Danube River), by modernization of the present ports (Osijek, Vukovar, Brčko). Moreover, the construction of the Danube-Sava River Channel is about to start; the importance of this channel is not only regional, but extends to the whole continental system of inner river traffic. The basis of the transport-energetic system of the Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion, and the main determinants of its favourable traffic position, are the Adriatic pipeline (Krk-Slavonski Brod-Opatovac) and the network of high-voltage (410 kV) power line, which (through the trans-

forming knot Ernestinovo, close to Osijek) links the electro-energetic system of South-Eastern Europe with the electro-energetic systems in other parts of Europe.

The important element of traffic connections between “The Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion” and its surroundings is the air traffic as well. Nowadays, there are two commercial airports in the region: international airport of Osijek, and a smaller one close to Pecs, while the third airport in Živinice close to Tuzla, which presently has a military function, should soon be transformed for civilian air traffic.

Traffic connections between particular parts, and especially between the nodal centres of the Danube-Drava-Sava transborder region are very important for its functioning. Osijek and Pecs are well connected by public transport (bus, railway), while the connection between Osijek and Tuzla is a bit reduced (only by bus). It is specially important that the administrative procedure of crossing the state borders is minimized, so the citizens that live in the Euroregion need only the identity card to cross the border (between Hungary and Croatia, and between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Conclusion

The *formal definition* of Euroregion, as a territory for transborder cooperation, is related to the fact that the associations are based on free will, with national and international legal framework, territorial-administrative unity, with the main goal to eliminate territorial isolation, to develop neighbouring culture, and to enable balanced economic development of the countries both at their central and peripheral parts. In the higher phase, the goal would also be to form development-functional territorial systems in border areas. Apart from this, the high phase is, together with the improvement of good neighbouring relations, a condition for integration of those countries to the European Union.

The countries from the area of South-Eastern Europe are seriously late, both in the process of regional differentiation and formation of new spatial-functional structures, as one of the initiators of regionally balanced development; and in the establishing of complex (regional) relations with the surroundings.

As for Central and Eastern part of Europe, one of the goals of transborder regions forming – “softening” of international borders - is in a great deal realized in “The Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion”. Important results in functioning of this region are evident also regarding strengthening of relations between its parts in the

segments of economical, scientific, cultural and other ways of cooperation. Municipalities in Western and Northern Bačka (Apatin, Bač, Sombor and Subotica) should aim to transform from the observation status to the full members of this Euroregion. This will contribute to overcoming of antagonisms which appeared as consequences of war and political conflicts in this part of Europe. On the other hand, this will considerably contribute to transborder cooperation not only in economical but in any other way.

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