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PhD Thesis
Romania and the European Territorial Cooperation
(ABSTRACT)

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(ABSTRACT)

When I receive like a proposal, this topic for the realization of my PhD thesis by my coordinator, professor Dr. Ioan Horga, I was put in doubt because I had a little to do with this new topic, given that CBC Programme between Romania and Bulgaria took as a starting point 2007 and currently is underway, with the end of it in 2013. Such theme in a doctoral thesis did not seem easy at all, but I boosted by its elements of novelty, timeliness and originality.

We opted for the choice of this research theme for the novelty field of study and for the absence of a systematic review of it in Romania, based on the implementation of the policy of territorial cooperation at national level. In addition, our country is in the programming period of implementation 2007-2013, requiring a deeper theoretical analysis of territorial cooperation policy and their implementation schemes in the European Union, from the perspective of an improvement of the absorption and performance in achieving strategic objectives.

Since I put somewhat aware of this issue, I actually found my future goals theses. With amazement, I realized that domestic literature in this respect, has treated less¹, this very important topic today, in the relations between the member states of the European Union. Most sources on the subject are purely informative approach, many of them only online, presentations, surveys, articles, etc.. making it quite inaccessible to the treatment and understanding of this phenomenon.

For this reason, I wanted, and this is the central objective of the thesis, to present how objective cohesion is achieved at territorial cooperation in general, at the CBC in particular, with the case study Cross Border Cooperation Programme Romania - Bulgaria 2007-2013. For this purpose, during the thesis I presented what is the meaning of the concept of cohesion policy, how it acting within the territorial cooperation objective how to implement the composition of cross-border cooperation at the Romania-Bulgaria border. For this latter aspect, I used the knowledge offered by science and public policy program evaluation and analysis of documents related to Cross Border Cooperation Programme between Romania and neighboring Bulgaria

¹ Ioan Horga, Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, Adrian Ivan, Mykolia Palinchak, Istvan Suli-Zahar, *Regional and Cohesion Policy, Insights into the role of the Partnership Principle in the New Policy Design*, University of Debrecen Press, University of Oradea Press, 2011; Ioan Horga, Istvan Suli-Zakar, *Cross-Border Partnership, with special regard to the Hungarian-Romanian-Ukrainian Tripartite Border*, University of Debrecen Press, University of Oradea Press, 2010; Alexandru Ilieș, *România. Euroregiuni*, Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea, 2004; Diana Cărmaciu., Gabriela Csűrös, Carmen Domocoș, Cristian Miheș, Mihaela Pătrăuș, Mircea Ursuța, Mariana Zainea, *Stadiul actual al reglementărilor naționale și comunitare în domeniul cooperării transfrontaliere*, proiect implementat de fundația "Forum", Oradea, 2009; Gheorghe Iordan Barbulescu, *Politicile extinderii*, Editura Tritonic, Bucuresti, 2007; etc.

and realized its on- going evaluation of CBC RO- BG, based on a model provided by my coordinator Professor.

First of all, I thought it is necessary, as through an analysis widest studies, based on analysis of the concept of international cooperation between states as a fundamental principle of international law, to do a brave history of European regional policy, from the foundations of the current " European construction " and so far, because without a historical approach is quite difficult to understand a contemporary phenomenon.

Secondly, the comparative analysis of the literature on the concept of cohesion policy (or regional cooperation) adopted by the European Union, I've proposed to explain its importance in the European Union, in terms of socio -economic development. In addition, I hope that my attempt, will help to a better understanding of the phenomenon of European Territorial Cooperation in the (academic and otherwise) internally, thus contributing to the few local specialty papers that try presenting the concept of cohesion in terms of European territorial cooperation.

Third, I want to approach the central subject, of great interest of this paper, namely CBC concept and how it is implemented in Romania. Also, I will give increase importance to the goals, the means used and objectives of this new level of European territorial cooperation.

Considering the purposes listed above, *research topic*, is therefore a theoretical and practice study of the concept of European Territorial Cooperation and its major objective aimed at strengthening cross-border cooperation. In this sense, as a case study, based on research, I made a pertinent *on-going* evaluation of the CBC Programme, carried out actually between our country and neighboring Bulgaria.

Structure of the thesis

I divided my analysis into four parts, with a logic that goes from the general to the particular.

The first part is devoted to the working hypothesis, working methodology and objectives and also to the introduction of the research problem, trying with the theoretical and methodological considerations, to bring more light on the understanding of the concept of European Territorial Cooperation. The aim is that starting from a foray into the regional development policy, from the foundations of the European Union, to demonstrates its crucial role to strengthen the " European construction " and especially to the harmonization of relations between the states of the European Community, finally reaching at this new level of cooperation namely Cross Border Cooperation.

In this chapter we made an overview of developments and reforms that European policy has met during 1975-2007. We also detail the general elements of the reform for the programming period 2007-2013 and its strategic role and the policy implementation of territorial cooperation objective of territorial cohesion within the european cohesion policy, EU cohesion

policy objectives, the specific of the territorial cooperation programs , and how to integrate them into regional cooperation policy of Romania.

The second part is built around the concept of cross-border cooperation as it is implemented in Europe and in Romania, primarily general analysis of its implications, presenting here the principles, specific, functioning and evolution over time and legal framework of the new European cohesion policy objective. I stopped mainly to a detailed presentation of CBC Programme RO-BG, providing significant details about the program, about the structures involved, both in Romania and in Bulgaria, about the priorities, financial resources and the functioning of the program.

Cross-border cooperation target all types of activities from local and regional communities, including economic development, spatial planning, urban planning, tourism and recreation, training, transportation, environmental protection, etc.

This type of cooperation programs covering a variety of border regions: some work with maritime areas, others with internal EU land borders or boundaries coumune candidate countries. Most are bilateral programs, but some programs consist of more than two neighbors countries (eg South Baltic Programme).

As for funding, it is granted, provided that the organizations on both sides of the border, as well as regional authorities, universities and SMEs, to collaborate in the implementation of projects related to the needs of the border region. Representatives of cooperating regions, thematic ministries and other local partners meet regularly and decide which of the projects will be supported and funded.

This unique structure is designed to lead to a sustainable partnership that will continue long after the program ends.

At the moment, there are 53 cross-border cooperation programs related to internal borders of the EU co-financed programs by up to 85 % by the European Regional Development Fund. There are 10 other cooperative programs focused on the external borders of EU candidate and potential candidate countries (Croatia , Serbia , Bosnia and Herzegovina , Montenegro , Albania and Turkey) that are funded by both the ERDF (for Partners EU) and the Instrument pre -accession assistance (for countries that are not EU partner).

Among these, it is the Cross Border Cooperation Programme Romania - Bulgaria, which is one of Programmes for the period 2007-2013, carried out under the " European Territorial Cooperation" of the European Union's cohesion policy. This Border Territorial Cooperation Programme is the first program that addressed to the border area between Romania and Bulgaria as EU internal border after their accession to the European Union on 1 January 2007. It is the first program developed based on the principles and requirements of the Structural Funds as border area became eligible to receive financial assistance from the European Regional Development Fund under the European Territorial Cooperation Objective . It is also the first program that treats border region as a whole, without distinction belonging to one of the two neighbors.

The program aims to encourage and strengthen cooperation in the border area of the two neighboring countries, Romania and Bulgaria, through joint activities leading to the interconnection of territories and of course to promote social and economic development consistent, correlated and that sustainable border region .

The program supports the development of eligible border areas , both in Romania and in Bulgaria. Seeks to create a "bridge " between the two countries in order to assist border regions, in order to solve similar problems of developing collaborative and promoting common solutions. In this way, the border, instead of separate regions on both sides of the Danube, it will unite them.

The program promotes sustainable integrated cooperation in the border area, focusing on the strategic dimension of European cross-border spatial development involving and that benefits local communities. This will be achieved by joining communities in the program area and their involvement in economic activities, social and environmental.

Overall objective of the CBC program is to bring people, businesses and communities in the border area Romanian - Bulgarian to develop joint cooperation area through sharing the benefits of human, natural and environmental and resources.

The third part of the thesis is devoted exclusively to the fulfillment of the evaluation indicators by the CBC Programme RO-BG, from the model of European policy and program evaluation and assessment of the few examples of cross-border cooperation in Europe, explaining what it actually an evaluation of these programs, how many types of evaluating exists, the methods by which the valuation is realised, finally reaching at the stage of evaluating to the CBC Programme RO-BG.

In a special section, we have developed a mechanism for *on-going* analysis of the implementation of the projects up to reference date², with the objective to answer to the question whether and to what extent they correspond to, calls and program. A special section is devoted to the financial analysis of the program, following this situation funds (allocation, absorption and use).

After the theoretical and contextual approaches in the first two chapters, made in consultation of internal, but especially international references in terms of cohesion policy and European territorial cooperation, the database of the Institute for Euroregional International Studies, and domestic legislation in the field, official documents , studies, statistics, annex) and online sources, such as official sites of cooperation programs, to achieve and realize an *on-going* evaluation of CBC program RO- BG, in the third chapter of my thesis, for a period of 6 months, we conducted a survey in neighboring Bulgaria. Courtesy of University New Bulgarian University in Sofia, which provided me an internship academic mobility within the " Centre of Social Practices" , under the coordination of Professor Evgenii Dainov, I had the opportunity to consult multiple sources and bibliographic databases available provided by the university library and perform research at local and central institutions involved in the implementation of cross-

² 21 June 2013.

border cooperation program on the Bulgarian side, collecting such data like the number of organizations implementing projects under CBC program RO- BG (both from Romania and Bulgaria). Returning home, under the supervision of Professor John Horga, having like model an evaluation project provided by him, for the Romanian- Hungarian border, with all data and information gathered, we began a study case , namely *on- going* evaluation of CBC Programme RO- BG, as part of the European territorial cooperation policy .

In the research that we have undertaken with reference to the cross-border cooperation Programme Romania-Bulgaria 2007-2013, we focused on:

- a) evaluation of the objectives included in the program;
- b) their compliance with Community and national priorities;
- c) the way in the implementation of the program were met budgeting priorities and measures;
- d) the status of implementation of projects at the reference date.

So, I watched during my research, particularly, the annual implementation reports of CBC Programme RO-BG, which meant actually the base of my analysis, provided by the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism (now Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration) as Management Authority, in order to see if there is a convergence with the multiannual program (if mutations occurred, modifications, etc..). Also, another reference document of my review, is the executive summary of the *on-going* evaluation of CBC Program RO-BG, made in 2011 by Geo Strategy Consulting.

However, another research method consisted of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the projects chronological and by priority axis submitted by the Romania and Bulgaria, to see if these projects match to the content of the program. I watched the development of indicators - physical progress - indicators achieved to the scheduled indicators. Given the pace of implementation, can be appreciated qualitatively whether or not they are likely to be achieved by the end of the program period.

Another "key point" of my evaluation was to follow the progress of the program in financial terms, which shows the absorption and prospects to spend money. Here we analyzed the ratio of resources allocated / total calls launched / total contracted funds / total funds repaid making an analysis of the funds allocated each year to this program.

I completed my research with the analysis of the projects submitted, still in implementation or already completed, showing the most important areas of cooperation and some of the most relevant projects (annexes) and concluding with the main problems faced by the program:

1. Lack of awareness and regional identity;
2. Similar economic structure on both sides of the border;

3. EU funding does not get where it is most needed;
4. Lack of adequate infrastructure to overcome geographic barriers;
5. Lack of access to Schengen;
6. Lack of experience on both sides of the program in attracting and managing the Structural Funds³;
7. Insufficient knowledge about the specifics of the program management team during the implementation of projects contracted;
8. Delays in the contracting of selected projects;
9. Law partner states and mutual lack of it, at a sufficient level.

The last part of the thesis is devoted to presenting the conclusions we reached in the preparation of this doctoral thesis. After we present the evolution of European cohesion policy of UE and analyzed in particular, one of its major objectives, namely, the policy of territorial cooperation, focusing in the last chapter on one of the three branches of it, the cross-border cooperation, after what I did, through a case study, an evaluation of CBC Programme RO- BG 2007-2013 and saw how it was implemented in our country and neighboring Bulgaria , after I followed the financial evolution and tried to see to what extent this cooperation has achieved its objectives and was within the POR, I stopped now on a not insignificant aspect currently, that is the future of territorial cooperation in the European Union, how it, through his " three pillars "⁴ can evolve and may bring forth his contribution to the development and harmonization of the relations between the member states of the EU, at the economic, social and territorial cohesion of it.

³ ****Annual Implementation Report 2009 for the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013, p.23*

⁴ Cross-Boder Cooperation, Interregional Cooperation and Transnational Cooperation.