

„BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY
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FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND
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SUMMARY

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DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND
SECURITY STUDIES
FIELD: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND EUROPEAN STUDIES**

**Evaluation of Cross-border Cooperation at the North-
Eastern border of Romania through the lens of Joint
Operational Cooperation Programs**

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Abbreviations

AA - Audit Authority
AA- Association Agreements
ACIS – Authority for the Coordination of Structural Instruments
AEBR – Association of European Border Regions
AM- Management Authority
AN – National Authority
ARM-Armenia
AZE-Azerbaijan
EBRD- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
BLR-Belarus
BRCT – Suceava Regional Office for Cross-Border Cooperation
CADSES- Central, Adriatic, Danubian and Southeast European Space-bar
CBC - Cross-Border Cooperation
CCM – Joint Monitoring Committee
CCS – Joint Selection Committee
EC – Council of Europe
CE – European Commission
CEE- Central and Eastern Europe
CM – Monitoring Committee
CNSR – National Strategic Reference Framework
CoR - European Committee of the Regions
CSNR- National strategic frameworks of reference
CT – Cross-Border Cooperation
CTJ - Communauté de Travail du Jura
CUE – Council of the European Union
DCTFA- Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (Association Agreements)
EUR- Euro currency
FC – Cohesion Fund
ERDF - European Fund for Regional Development
EAGGF - European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund
ESF - European Social Fund
GEO-Georgia

HG – Government Decision

ENI - European Neighborhood Instrument

ENPI - European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument

IFOP - Financial Guidance Instrument in the field of Fisheries

IMM – Small and medium enterprises

Instr. Eur. for life and partnership 2007-2013-European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument 2007-2013

ISPA - Instrument for Pre-Accession Structural Policies

LACE – Liaison and Cooperation Assistance for European Border Regions

MD- Republic of Moldova

MDA-Republic of Moldova

MDLPL- Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing

MFP – Ministry of Public Finance (Romania)

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NSI – Newly Independent States

NUTS – Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics

NGO – Non-governmental organization

PA- Action Plans

PAE - Eastern Partnership

EP – European Parliament

PEC – European Cohesion Policy

ENP - European Neighborhood Policy

Phare CT - Phare Program for Cross-Border Cooperation

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

POC RO-UA - Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine

POC RO-UA-MD- Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova

OP-Operational Program

OP-Operational Programs

Progr.Coop.Transf. Rom-Ucr-Moldova 2007-2013-Romania-Ukraine-Moldova Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013

Prog. Coop. Transfer. Rom-Ucr 2014-2020- Romania-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2014-2020

POR – Regional Operational Program

RO - Romania

STC – Joint Technical Secretariat

USA- United States of America

SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

TACIS CBC - Technical Assistance for Cross-border Cooperation of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States

AU-Ukraine

UKR-Ukraine

EU – European Union

USD- American dollar

INTRODUCTION

The present theme of the doctoral thesis focuses on the in-depth but also comparative analysis of the cross-border cooperation management of the Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova Cross-border Cooperation Program 2007-2013, respectively of the Romania-Ukraine Cross-border Cooperation Program 2014-2020.

If we were to dwell on the justification of this topic, the essential argument could be the fact that, at the beginning, when the Coordinator, Professor Ioan Horga, proposed to me to approach this topic, I was quite reluctant, being a subject of current affairs, especially against the background of the recent problems on the stage of international relations that Ukraine is experiencing and not only.

The novelty, the importance, but also the absence of a systematic analysis of the Joint Operational Programs in the two states involved (related to the implementation of the Territorial/ Cross-border Cooperation Policy at the national level), determined us in choosing the mentioned theme.

Another reason why we chose to closely analyze this topic is the fact that during the Master's degree I graduated (*Regional Development and Institutional Communication in the EU*, Faculty of International Relations, Political Sciences and Communication Sciences, Oradea) , we studied/ analyzed the Romania-Ukraine-Moldova Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013, a study used, otherwise, as a starting point in our efforts, building on its foundations, this paper.

At the moment both states, respectively Romania and Ukraine overlap the exercise of implementing the 2014-2020 programming period and we believe that a deepening of the theoretical and practical analysis in the field of cross-border cooperation policies and their implementation systems in the countries is necessary of the European Union, in terms of improving the absorption rate and performance in achieving strategic objectives.

1. Research objectives

The theme of the research, therefore, is a theoretical but also practical deepening of the concept of European cross-border cooperation, implicitly of the *Cohesion Policy*, of the ENP, respectively its primary objective aimed at strengthening cooperation at the cross-border level, respectively studying the level of interaction between Romania and Ukraine through the *POC RO-UA-MD 2007-2013* and *POC RO-UA 2014-2020* programs. Thus, the case study consists of an ex-ante, intermediate (on-going) and ex-post analysis of the Romania-Ukraine-Moldova Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013, but the ex-ante, intermediate evaluations regarding the POC RO -AU 2014-2020, of course as much as the resources and factors in question allowed us. At the same time, at the end, a

comparative study was made of the two cross-border cooperation programs, analyzing in detail their effects and sustainability.

Transposed in another way, *the general objective* of this study is given by the impact that the joint operational programs, aimed at cross-border cooperation, have on the eligible areas in the cross-border regions, but also by the effects and the degree of sustainability with which the projects and programs contribute to the socio-economic development of the area and not least on the security and safety of the borders.

From the main essence of the general objective, two more secondary objectives of this research branch out, which aim at the factors, the context and the interdependence in which these programs are carried out and implemented, because, as we have well observed during the research, when the these two essential aspects in the programming, launch and implementation cycles of programs, efficiency and relevance cannot be perceived at the highest standards.

Achieving the objectives depends on several factors and can be achieved from several perspectives, but in our approach we chose to combine theoretical aspects with practical ones, as well as with empirical studies, resorting to specialized books on the basis of which we were able to undertake the three cycles of the evaluation of the two programs.

In our approach, we resorted to different methods to help us respond as efficiently as possible to the objectives and working hypotheses, thus, we considered it necessary to focus on the normative evaluation of the documents issued by European, regional or local bodies and institutions in order to obtaining information and interpreting it, but also understanding the environment and the factors that exercise particular importance for cross-border cooperation.

The central hypothesis of this study is given, therefore, by the level of performance and sustainability that the Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013, respectively, the Romania-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2014-2020 have on the eligible area also aimed at evaluating the degree of development and living conditions in the cross-border area, as well as the impact they have on the intensification of cooperative relations between the two states and maintaining the security of the eastern borders of the European Union. Addressing the subject of cross-border cooperation requires clarifications and answers regarding the degree of implementation of the program, what exactly improved the partnership of the countries involved, what are the results of the cooperation between those involved. Here, then, is the central hypothesis of the present research - what impact did/have the programs carried out. Regarding the central hypothesis of the study, we also find other questions connected to it, such as the obstacles arising from the lack of public information and data sources/official reports will prevent conducting an objective analysis of the research? When it is based on an effective and viable level of relationship between communities (be they on a national, regional or even international level) an effect will be

produced aiming at an important degree of interaction with regard to the states of the European Union and those outside this one? Thus, is it possible to design safer and more developed space? We tried to find the answers to this central hypothesis in the form of the case study undertaken in the last chapter.

Another working hypothesis started from the assumption - *what are the necessary factors and conditions for a cross-border cooperation program to be considered successful?* Considering that there is a great interconnectivity and interdependence of the concept of cross-border cooperation and with other notions that must be taken into account, but also with the level of decentralization/regionalization of the states involved (Romania and Ukraine), I considered that highlighting certain aspects regarding the *European Neighborhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership*, cross-border relations, they can agree with this need and respond to the second hypothesis that corresponds to the second chapter.

Another hypothesis to which we tried to find answers through the first chapter refers to the *premises that created the concept of cross-border cooperation*. Euroregions and communication play an important role in cross-border collaboration and cooperation. The development of the institutional structure and the creation of socio-economic and humanitarian projects on the territory of the Lower Danube and Upper Prut Euroregions remains a beneficial direction for Romanian-Ukrainian bilateral cooperation. As the business environment, research, education and cultural exchanges know a beneficial period because of them.

We conclude that this central concept of our research, cross-border cooperation, in countries close to the European Union supports the advancement of an orderly and unified practicability of local amplification, addressing general challenges, guaranteeing the respective effectiveness of foreign border security as well as encouraging local cooperation. Thus, cross-border cooperation programs have emerged as solid financial and cooperation instruments, aiming to respond to common needs.

2. Theoretical framework

Taking into account the fact that the present research addresses issues related to the European Union and concepts such as those related to European policies, borders, cross-border cooperation, etc., we believe that the theoretical integration through the prism of international relations could be done starting from the paradigm of institutionalist neoliberalism.¹ At the same time, we note the fact that we can also find analogies with the theory of constructivism² because cross-border cooperation

¹ Helen Millner, Andrew Moravcsik, *Power and Interdependence. And Nonstate Actors in Worlds Politics*, Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 15

² Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe. Social Purpose & Saate Power from Messina to Maastricht*, Routledge, London & New York, 1999, p. 28

is practically used as a tool for European unity, an aspect achieved by financing projects that can positively accelerate the standard of living in a cross-border area and they can intensify communication and collaboration between the states found at the borders. Seen from the point of view of integration theories, we find some influences from the theory of intergovernmentalism.

3. Research methodology

In our approach, we started from the general to the particular, thus we considered it appropriate in the first stage to analyze the various concepts that need to be known in order to understand the basic theme of the research, such as cross-border cooperation, international cooperation, regional cooperation, *Cohesion Policy*, *ENP*, *Eastern Partnership*, etc. Afterwards, I approached the central subject by following the aims, means and objectives of cross-border cooperation, a matter achievable by calling on specific tools and sources such as annual/biannual/monthly newsletters, official reports of various authorities/bodies and institutions of the European Union as well as some researchers in the field, statistics, figures and developments, the aim being to show the contribution of the two programs, which targeted the Joint Romanian-Ukrainian border, on the lives of the citizens of the eligible area as well as the absorption of the allocated funds or in certain cases their insufficiency. I also considered it appropriate to study the issue of Ukraine on the stage of international relations, namely the attempts to get closer to the European Union and the relinquishment of the hegemonic power that Russia exercises over it through various methods and factors. In the third chapter, which practically contains the case study, we carried out the analysis of the evaluation of the programs from the perspective of objective evaluation, ex-ante evaluation, on-going and ex-post evaluation (only in the case of POC RO-UA-MD 2007-2013) as well as the SWOT Analysis.

Based on the complexity, multiplicity and characteristics of the study, we built this research by combining two large dimensions of research, namely we resorted to the "*qualitative*" and the "*quantitative*" method.

Regarding **the methods of quantitative analysis**, in order to transpose the particular framework of relations between the two states, the data analysis was directed to the study of books, volumes and reference articles in the field of international relations, respectively the observation of press chapters in the field. These methods or sources gave us the opportunity to assimilate knowledge on the concepts related to the central theme of the paper, to understand that the situation and the context are two essential considerations that must be taken into account when we discuss the management of joint cooperation programs, these can greatly influence the quality of project implementation and the development of the eligible area.

Thus, for **the qualitative evaluation method**, we resorted to the analysis of official documents and databases, of reports issued by the authorities, institutions or bodies in charge of programming,

launching, implementing, monitoring or auditing implemented programs and projects. At the same time, we followed the newsletters officially published by BRCT Suceava or by the official website of the two analyzed programs, in order to have first-hand information, which we can research, interpret and transpose into our own graphs and interpretations as I thought it would add value to this research. On the other hand, we appreciated that the official information sent by the "Regional Office for Transfrontier Cooperation Suceava" could help us complete the present study with important data, which is why we contacted this body in order to receive reports and communications first rank. I also undertook several visits to the program's eligible area, on the occasion of work/personal trips, in order to analyze, from afar, the visible effects of the implementation of the projects related to the Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013 cross-border program. We were therefore interested in sources or mediums where the information was also collected by the evaluators, and then interpreted by the few researchers, and for the current POC RO-UA 2014-2020 program, we will (further) follow the publication of the information, and then we will disseminate them for evaluation purposes as they are published and available. At the same time, we resorted to the comparative analysis of the various calls within the POC Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013, respectively analogies (of course, as much as the context and sources allow) between the two compared programs.

The present work proposes the evaluation of the Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013 and the Romania-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation 2014-2020 according to the **objective evaluation model**. Thus, it was considered, among other things, the identification of the objectives of the program, the determination of the objectives that were achieved in practice and the establishment of the degree by which the program was promoted or denied until the end of the doctoral cycle.

At the same time, for the POC RO-UA-MD 2007-2013, a complex evaluation cycle was carried out, using ex-ante, on-going and ex-post evaluation. Regarding, however, POC RO-UA 2014-2020, considering that the program was officially admissible only in December 2015 by the European Commission, and the first two calls for submitting projects closed in May 2018, this program was analyzed only from the perspective of the ex-ante evaluation, trying to initiate an on-going evaluation, of course, as much as the sources and the stage of the program allowed. It was also attempted to analyze the two programs after evaluating the evaluation criteria (*relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, pragmatism and management and monitoring arrangements*).

In order to highlight this program much better, we chose to use both graphics created directly by the author based on official statistical data, but also some made by competent institutions and organizations.

4. Structure of the paper

Regarding the structuring of the study, we chose to build the research on a logical chain, starting from the general to the particular.

Thus, first of all, we paid attention to the aspects related to the introduction, theoretical framing of the research topic, working methodology, sources, the limits of the research, and the study being structured in three large chapters.

First chapter, *General considerations on cross-border cooperation. Regional development and cohesion policy* contains general information, necessary for understanding the concept of cross-border cooperation and the interdependencies that form around it. In the sub-chapter *Conceptual delimitations and genesis regarding cross-border cooperation*, we focused on the general aspects regarding the genesis, borders, legislative levers of cross-border cooperation, but also on the types and principles of cooperation in order to understand the differences between cross-border and interregional or transnational cooperation. It is necessary to pay more attention to the border concept because it is a dynamic element that influences the whole cross-border process. The second subchapter, *Cross-border cooperation. Concept and meanings*, provides the necessary framework for the assimilation of knowledge related to the central concept of the topic. *Euroregions: possible engine of cross-border cooperation?* brings into discussion issues related to cross-border regions and its various facilitating instruments, one of them being the Euroregional structures. In our opinion, the euroregions have created the premises for the intensification of cross-border cooperation, they represent a disinterested association, but in close accordance with the rules, norms and legislation of each state involved, but also at the international level on different levels: social, administrative, political, economic having as and the essential purpose of preserving a harmony regarding the center and the suburbs in other words, represents a more advanced stage of functional territorial structures. In fact, it is intended to protect and encourage good neighborliness.³

After the fall of communism, there appeared a firm and structured commitment of the EC/EU in the sense of expansion towards the states that emerged from communism, once started, this process was carried out in a tortuous manner both on the part of the EU and on the part of the candidate states. European unification about which has been talked about for more than a century has been achieved,

³ Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, Mircea Brie, Nicolae Toderaș, *Cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, respectively between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Opportunities and challenges for the period 2014-2020*, European Institute in Romania-Strategy and Policy Studies, SPOS, Bucharest, 2016, no. 2, p. 21, study found at the address http://ier.ro/sites/default/files/pdf/St%202020_Cooperarea%20transfrontaliera_final.pdf

therefore by expanding the EU towards the center and east of Europe, changing not only the European order, but also the transatlantic relationship, in a key to progress and stability.⁴

As Romania is a member of the EU and Ukraine is a state that is gradually approaching the EU, we considered it appropriate to approach this topic from the perspective of the *Cohesion Policy in Europe, respectively the New Cohesion Policy 2014-2020*, but we also highlight the *Regional Development in Ukraine* as well as the reforms that the Ukrainian status has undertaken along the process of rapprochement with the New Europe.

The second chapter, *Cross-border relations and the European neighborhood policy at the eastern borders of the EU. Rethinking the circumstances of the Eastern Partnership (EaP)* because we believe that the stabilization of the region, namely cross-border cooperation, in political, socio-economic and security terms, is precisely at the center of the European neighborhood policy. The EU is committed to supporting the economic development of its partner countries and improving the aspirations, hopes and prospects of local people, while focusing on decent governance, democracy and the rule of law. This commitment is translated through actions to implement sustainable regional and bilateral programs and projects on the ground. At the same time, the ENP represents the origin of the concept of cross-border cooperation and with the help of the *European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument 2007-2013*, respectively through the new European Neighborhood Instrument, the European Union provides financial support and not only to the states in the immediate vicinity of the EU. The sub-chapter *International transport corridors Romania-Ukraine, a key element for cross-border cooperation*, highlights the state that Ukraine has in relations with Romania and implicitly with the European Union. This is a key state also in the relations that the EU has with the Russian Federation, and from the point of view of transport, we find that the Ukrainian state plays an essential role for the management of relations between the two parties.

At the same time, in the second chapter we also addressed the mission that Small and Medium Enterprises have in cross-border areas, thus the sub-chapter *Increasing entrepreneurial skills and capacities for SMEs in the Romanian-Ukrainian border area*, aims to put highlighting the beneficial effects these structures have on cross-border cooperation and regional development. The level of the economy and the effectiveness of the units in the border area, placed at the external border of the European Union, play a significant role in the promotion of the EPI and national and local security.

The second sub-chapter concludes with considerations on *Romanian-Ukrainian cooperation relations*, Ukraine's accession aspirations bring to the fore the concept of cross-border cooperation because the development of cross-border regions has a positive impact on the strengthening of

⁴ Jordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, *New Europe. Volume 2. A political history of European (re)unification*, Polirom Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021, p.23

Romanian-Ukrainian cooperation relations and the dialogue between the two states is an essential factor in the development of bilateral relations.

The last chapter, the third, *Evaluation of the level of Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation through joint operational programs at the north-eastern borders of Romania*, practically represents the case study of this research, being focused on the evaluation of the Romania-Ukraine-Moldova Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013, respectively, of the Romania-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2014-2020. Its first sub-chapter transposes the cross-border cooperation of the two analyzed states, namely Romania and Ukraine, because it represents an effective tool in the process of their rapprochement, and the joint operational programs strengthen and develop these collaborative relationships. The sub-chapter *Evaluation - basic element of the European process of programming, launching, implementing and monitoring the Joint Operational Programs*, presents the importance of the evaluation process of cross-border cooperation programs because through the various evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, pragmatism, etc.) the degree of (non)performance of the projects implemented within the program and implicitly of the latter is determined. Moreover, evaluation cycles, namely ex-ante, on-going (intermediate) and ex-post evaluation, are tools often used to measure the level of development in the eligible areas of the cross-border areas concerned.

The sub-chapter of the Romania-Ukraine-Moldova Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013 was designed with the aim of an incursion into the Romanian-Ukrainian bilateral collaboration relations transposed through the prism of the creation of related programs, starting from its presentation, and along the way applying the criteria of relevant evaluation as well as the performance of the three evaluation cycles, and finally determining the degree of its performance. Given that the implementation of a program follows the impact it has on the targeted area in the long term, it is imperative that a program be sustainable, therefore in the sub-chapter *Sustainability of projects financed by the POC RO-UA-MD 2007-2013. What happens to them after funding ends?*, we tried to emphasize premises that contribute to the long-term performance of a program.

The penultimate subchapter was dedicated to the Romania-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2014-2020. As in the case of its predecessor, I considered it necessary to give an overview of the program and implicitly the eligible area and then, based on the information available at the time of the research development and taking into account the current context, I carried out a SWOT analysis, going to we practically apply the principles of ex-ante and intermediate evaluation and where possible, analyze this project through the lens of ex-post evaluation, considering that the projects of this program are still ongoing and we cannot properly quantify all the effects that they have them on the eligible area. But, following the analyzes carried out, we can confirm, with certainty,

that this program is a strong bond of cooperation between the two states involved, which, although they also went through the difficult period caused by the ruthless virus, still proved that there can be understanding and help through communication from both sides.

In the last chapter of the *Cross-Border Cooperation Program Romania-Ukraine-Rep. Moldova 2007-2013, vs. Romania-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2014-2020*, a comparison of the two program cycles was attempted to observe if the observations/corrections that were applied to the 2007-2013 period were basic elements in the programming and launch of the *POC RO- AU 2014-2020*. Graphs were made to highlight these aspects.

The last part of the study was dedicated to the **Conclusions**, noting that this cross-border cooperation is carried out at all levels (local, regional, international) but also in all sectors: economy, research and development, education, innovation, environment, culture, politics, social environment, etc. This cannot be seen as an end in itself and for the creation of a harmonious and secure environment it is necessary for all actors, institutions, authorities or other bodies to collaborate, to actively participate in the activities involving cross-border cooperation, and the operational programs supported by structural funds and cohesion is an increasingly common tool in regional development in Romania, respectively in Romania's cooperation with the neighboring state, Ukraine, at the same time accelerating the level of convergence with the European Union. These programs aim to capitalize on the internal potential of the regions as well as the socio-economic rise of the regions involved on the three national, local and regional levels, respecting the principle of subsidiarity and sustainable development. The implementation of the European cohesion policy at the level of our country attracts numerous investments that lead to the development of the Romanian economy, the modernization of the infrastructure, the creation of new jobs, while also encouraging the competitiveness of SMEs.

Last but not least, we distinguish an important role of cross-border cooperation, respectively, it uses the necessary levers in order to maintain, security and safety of the European borders (especially the eastern ones), and Ukraine and Romania seem to be viewed with special interest. These considerations must be taken into account especially now, when the issue of safe borders is affected by the worldwide pandemic that is pressuring and can distort the effects of implemented projects.

5. Sources

The bibliographic sources used in the course of our research combined a dimensional variety of primary and secondary sources. Thus, the primary sources were given by the first-hand documents issued by the competent authorities and institutions of the European Union, official reports (annual, biannual, monthly, occasional), statistics found on the official website of the two analyzed programs, interviews, the electronic newsletters issued by BRCT Suceava, reports on cohesion policy, regional development but also those concerning the effects of the implementation of cross-border cooperation

issued by local and regional authorities, but especially the basic documents on which the two programs analyzed at the Romanian-Ukrainian border. Making a selection on the primary sources used, we mention *Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine-Moldova 2007-2013*, *Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020*, *European Framework Convention no. 106/1980 on cross-border cooperation*, etc.

Regarding the *secondary sources*, I used specialized books and articles (including online), such as those found in the *Eurolimes series*, in the *Annals of the University of Oradea*. *RISE series* as well as electronic sources. Through them, we researched the information found in order to create a general context for the actual analysis, but also for the accumulation of pertinent observations from the specialized literature that provided us with the theoretical basis from which we started in the case study.

Among these secondary sources, we mainly focused on the volume, *Evaluation of Cooperation. Cross-border crossings at Romania's borders.*, whose authors are three valuable researchers from Oradea, respectively Ioan Horga, Constantin-Vasile Țoca, Florentina Chirodea, *Regional and Cohesion Policy – Insights Into the Role of the Partnership Principle in the New Policy Design*, Ioan Horga, Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, Adrian Ivan, Istvan Suli-Zakar, Mykolia Palincsak, another volume coordinated by the distinguished professor Ioan Horga and the late Istvan Suli-Zakar, two of the most valuable researchers of the concepts of borders and cooperation respectively. Another secondary source of great help to us was the one developed under the auspices of the European Institute in Romania, which incorporates the ideas and conceptions of other valuable researchers, Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, Mircea Brie, Nicole Toderaș, "*Cross-border cooperation. between Romania and Ukraine, respectively between Romania and Republic of Moldova. Opportunities and challenges for the period 2014-2020*". Also, the two important volumes that guided us in the present writing, respectively, Bărbulescu, Iordan, Gheorghe; *New Europe. Identity and European model*, and Bărbulescu, Iordan, Gheorghe; *New Europe. Volume 2. A political history, of European (re)unification*, were a real help on a topic initially approached by few researchers. At the same time, we are lucky that the scientific research on cross-border cooperation and the borders of Europe by the coordinating professor, Mr. Ioan Horga, was of real use to us in our endeavor.

This enumeration could continue with other examples of volumes and articles that contributed to the variety of sources used.

In another sense, **direct sources** were used, such as the official website of the program, other official reports of other organizations and international institutions in order to have first-hand information that does not contain the interpretations of other authors, but also **indirect sources**, such as books by great authors, reports by different specialists, etc.

6. Research limits

We are aware of the limits of our research, therefore we affirm the fact that this writing is exhaustive, it can be continued in the near future, analyzing the central theme from another perspective, but also by adding the evaluation of other joint operational programs such as the one on the western border of Romania, respectively POC Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine (2007-2013/2014-2020) but also the one aimed at cross-border cooperation Romania-Republic of Moldova 2014-2020.

At the same time, the programming, approval and launch of the two analyzed programs constitute one of the major limits of the research. *POC 2014-2020* being admitted and voted only in the last month of 2015, it was expected that the first invitation to submit projects was established in the second decade of 2016, but due to the international context and especially the Ukrainian issue (reason for which we chose to study in particular the north-eastern border of Romania with Ukraine), the first two calls were launched only in May 2018.

The official reports regarding the implementation of the projects are published late, a fact that put the current research in great danger. We also faced the lack of transparency of official information, incomplete information on websites regarding the positive/negative effects of many projects implemented on account of *POC RO-UA-MD 2007-2013*, web addresses of which content has been moved/deleted, the lack of contact details of those who were the beneficiaries of the projects (invalid email addresses, etc.) in order to query them regarding the effects that the projects had on the eligible area.

Another identified limitation is the absence of a common base and the updating of information for all the projects implemented through the operational programs aimed at cross-border cooperation. This system would help researchers interested in this matter and provide them with the necessary framework for making statistics, comparisons, etc.

Although cross-border cooperation is a relatively well-known topic, there are few researchers/evaluators who have addressed the analysis/evaluation of joint operational programs, in order to have a starting point, i.e. a well-defined theoretical and practical framework.

We believe that we could add value to the present work if, as the official information is published by the competent authorities and bodies, we will continue our research, even being able to carry out a complex comparative assessment of the 2007-2013 budget year and the current one, 2014-2020 at the north-eastern Romanian-Ukrainian borders.

CONCLUSIONS

The most important objectives of the European Union are aimed at promoting peace, providing the well-being of its citizens within safe borders where there is sustainable economic development, access to health infrastructure, support from society and authorities for the field of research and innovation. At the same time, the objectives aim at social inclusion, non-discrimination, equal opportunities for the workplace, etc. Ensuring peace on the European continent was one of the fundamental goals of the tours of the European institutions. We believe that the central theme of our research, especially cross-border cooperation, was created precisely to support the aspirations of the European Union and is the priority of the Council of Europe and the European Union.

As we have discussed during our research the concept of cross-border cooperation, in a complex way we would like to believe, we find that it is not a really new one, developing along the evolutions in certain forms and has surpassed the so-called "barriers" of cooperation.

Cross-border cooperation is carried out at all levels (local, regional, international) but also in all sectors: economy, research and development, education, innovation, environment, culture, politics, social environment, etc. This cannot be seen as an end in itself and in order to create a harmonious and secure environment, it is necessary for all actors, institutions, authorities or other bodies to collaborate, to actively participate in activities involving cross-border cooperation.⁵

Cross-border relations contribute significantly to the achievement of the revised Lisbon strategies. The assistance from the European Union will be focused on the main priorities that support sustainable development from key points of view, especially from the perspective of the needs and problems of that cross-border area.

Territorial, cross-border or other cooperation cannot be considered as an end in itself. Cooperation is a tool through which the individual, a social being, aims to achieve objectives related to improving the quality of life. From this perspective, cooperation needs to be deepened regarding precisely its actual results, because without such results the inherent costs involved in any kind of cooperation will lead either to its weakening to a minimum level, or even to its disappearance.⁶

In our opinion, the euroregions have created the premises for the intensification of cross-border cooperation, they represent a disinterested association, but in close accordance with the rules, norms and legislation of each state involved, but also at the international level on different levels: social,

⁵ Ioan Horga, Ana Maria Costea, *Eastern Partnership between the permeability and impermeability of EU Eastern Borders*, in Carlos E. Pacheco Amaral, Gaga Gabrichidze, Ioan Horga, Anatoliy Kruglashov, Ewa Latoszek, Marta Pachocka, Vasile Cucerescu, *EU relations with the Eastern Partnership Strategy, Opportunities and challenges, Chişinău-Chernivitsi-Tbilisi*, pp. 217-218

⁶ Ioan Horga, *The unaccomplished decentralisation or formal decentralisation in the EUMS from Central and Eastern Europe*, in the *Annals of the University of Oradea. International Relations and European Studies Series vol. 6, 2014*, p. 17

administrative, political, economic in order to take the necessary steps for a balance between the center and the suburbs, in other words, it represents a more advanced stage of functional territorial structures. In fact, it is intended to protect and encourage good neighborliness.

Within the euroregions, the cross-border activity of local government institutions, self-governing bodies, and civic-community organizations is intensifying.

Euroregions play an important role in cross-border collaboration and cooperation. The development of the institutional structure and the creation of socio-economic and humanitarian projects on the territory of the Lower Danube and Upper Prut Euroregions remains a beneficial direction for Romanian-Ukrainian bilateral cooperation. As the business environment, research, education and cultural exchanges know a beneficial period because of them.

During our research, we also followed the concept of Cohesion Policy because, this seems to be an essential and comprehensive policy of the European Union because it aims to reduce the economic, social and territorial gaps and disparities within the EU member states. We chose to bring up this concept as well because we believe that it overlaps in some places with cross-border cooperation because it often targets common areas of development such as education, research, the creation of a sustainable and competitive economy, the creation of new jobs, etc., but if the cohesion policy is addressed to the states that are already EU members, cross-border cooperation is practically alongside the "European Neighborhood Policy" an element of support or compromise at the external borders of the union for the states that intend to join the "European Union". There is a fine line between the two concepts and it is necessary to understand the context to which they are addressed. It is important to note that the "Cohesion Policy" does not finance individual projects, the allocated funds go to multiannual national programs of already EU member states.

Simultaneously with the central subject of our theme, we distinguish another concept of particular importance, that of the European Neighborhood Policy, which is practically the origin of cross-border cooperation. It has in mind the good collaboration with the states located on the external border of the union, as is the case with Ukraine, during the research studying it closely because we believe that the tensions, instability and reforms within the state have a significant impact on maintaining security at the European borders but also on EU relations with Russia because the latter has a remarkable mission in this matter. During the research I highlighted that although thanks to the efforts of Ukraine but also the support offered by the European Union and the neighboring states, perhaps as is the case with Romania, the interior of the Ukrainian state is cadenced by conflicting states, a concrete case being the cyclical tensions in the Donbass that started since 2014, which smolder latently without attracting the full attention of the West which is preoccupied with the great world alerts (Syria, North Korea, etc.). Meanwhile, Russia is closely following the crises in eastern Ukraine, participating in them from the shadows, with a view to the slow degradation of the political-

economic situation and looking for advantages to use at the expense of others. All these issues affect cross-border cooperation at the eastern borders of the European Union, but also implicitly the two programs that we analyzed in the last chapter of our research.

As for Ukraine, it is seen as a key state within the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), with particular support from the European Union both financially and with assistance in areas that require serious reforms to align with standards EU (social, political, etc.). At the same time, the Ukrainian state is also part of the Eastern Partnership in order to reduce threats from its borders, because with the massive expansion of the EU, the Ukrainian border presents a major necessity in order to secure it.

Cross-border relational alliances acquire a progressive relevance on the stage of international relations, implicitly in the sector of cooperation policies developed by the European Union, regarding the member states or European neighborhood policies.

Cross-border relations are therefore getting a new lease of life, and the borders are taking on a new shape, the relations at the Romanian-Ukrainian borders are becoming closer in the context of the ENP, of the Euroregions, but also through the European Union instruments used to support cross-border cooperation.

The EU capitalizes on Ukraine in order to ensure solid and democratic prospects at the level of the entire territory and for all its citizens, and the programs and operations represent an effective element for this objective. Even if the internal situation of Ukraine is ground by conflict situations, party movements or other factors that represent imminent threats to the Ukrainian state and its security, but also to that of the European Union at its external border, this country is still viewed with great interest, because it is a strategic corridor for the EU due to the transport of Russian gas that supplies the entire European continent.

The Joint Operational Programs that promote cross-border cooperation in which the two states take part have a special merit. Both countries are beginning to coordinate their efforts more actively in the field of cooperation in the Black Sea, overcoming threats to regional security, especially in the field of fighting drug trafficking, illegal migration, resolving the Transnistrian conflict, etc. Solving these issues would significantly contribute to the proper stabilization of bilateral relations. Finally, it can be hoped that the rapprochement and cooperation between the two countries will become a normal and stable European partnership as Ukraine implements its European and Euro-Atlantic intentions. The latter depends on Romania's friendly attitude towards Ukrainian aspirations towards the west and their support.

The operational programs supported by the EU structural and cohesion funds represent an increasingly common lever in regional development in Romania, respectively in Romania's cooperation with the neighboring state, Ukraine, at the same time accelerating the level of

convergence with the European Union. These programs aim to capitalize on the internal potential of the regions as well as the socio-economic rise of the regions involved on the three national, local and regional levels, respecting the principle of subsidiarity and sustainable development. The implementation of the European cohesion policy at the level of our country attracts numerous investments that lead to the development of the Romanian economy, the modernization of the infrastructure, the creation of new jobs, while also encouraging the competitiveness of SMEs. At the same time, the cohesion policy is a lever used for the general strengthening of public administration institutions, taking into account the benchmarks at the European level aimed at transparency, professional skills, combating acts of fraud as well as efforts against acts of corruption. Concluding the above, we are of the opinion that the decentralization and reforms that the Ukrainian state must consider for an opening to democracy, represent a long and arduous road, but one that would have many positive effects on Ukraine. Cross-border cooperation programs in which Ukraine takes part could be a beneficial tool that could help an opening towards democratization and economic sustainability.

After a long time, the Romanian-Ukrainian relationship began to improve and to see each other as neighboring states that must contribute to the creation of a prosperous space whose borders become secure. The two operational programs *Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013*, respectively, *Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020* have the role of strengthening the relationship in cross-border areas and involving actors from both borders in joint actions that pursue the objectives of the creation of the European Union.

Regarding the analysis of the *Operational Programs Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013 and Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020*, we used as a tool, the evaluation under the 3 cycles has its own (of course, as much as the sources and the period in which the programs are found -allowed), respectively, the ex-ante, on-going and ex-post evaluation, but also the evaluation criteria and SWOT analysis for the ex-ante analysis of the programs in order to determine the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and also their impact on the eligible area .

The Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013 was subsidized with the help of IEPV, being an effective tool for the economic and social situation within safe borders, within which the necessary premises were created in order to intensify cross-border cooperation under all its aspects, which is why this trilateral program continued through 2 bipartite actions, namely Romania-Republic of Moldova and Romania-Ukraine, the evaluation of the latter being one of the central themes of this research.

Even if, for the most part, the POC RO-UA-MD 2007-2013 fulfilled the purposes for which it was created, factors such as the delay in launching the program and related projects, their implementation in different territorial administrative units in what regarding size, typology, the use

of different procedures for regulation and authorisation, poor logistics equipment, lack of qualified human resources, inadequate communication, different perceptions and cultures but also misunderstanding regarding project management have prevented the strengthening of the level of project implementation culture. Although at the beginning there were prerequisites for the launch and completion of this program in the established terms, it turned out that the most important subversive factor was the domestic, regional or European context. These issues can also jeopardize future programs.

The Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova Cooperation Program 2007-2013 supported the development of the involved states and the relations between them, which is why this path was continued by launching two bilateral programs for the current period (2014-2020), respectively, *The Romania-Ukraine Cooperation Program 2014-2020* and the *Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova Cooperation Program 2014-2020*.

The continuation of the program confirms the strengthening of cross-border cooperative relations and the idea that this responds to the development needs of the area as a whole.

Regarding the current budget exercise, 2014-2020, in the context of the review of European policies, the "European Neighborhood Instrument" subsidizes cross-border relationship projects in the member nations and their neighboring states. This aspect once again demonstrates the beneficial and ongoing effects of the ENP. These programs aim to support by financing coop.transfr. found at EU borders. Multiannual joint programs are being considered whose main purpose is the regulation of border cooperation, they contain priorities of the actors involved which can be carried out through the involvement and support of the European Union but also through the intensification of relations between the actors in the eligible area. Based on the principle of partnership, the parties involved will select the common actions that will be supported by the EU through the cooperation programs.

Moments of political instability, centralized character, government alternation, internal political conflicts between parties and other aspects influence the cross-border cooperation between the two states and at the same time the implementation of the RO-UA POC 2014-2020.

Based on the available information as well as the analysis of the two programs, we can consider that the 2007-2013 budget program had a significant role for economic development, on the other hand, the most recent one that targeted the period 2014-2020 focused more on large infrastructure projects, on social life, on health, development of cultural heritage, projects aimed at security, development of social assistance.

We consider it important that the European Union, local and regional authorities must respond to the current challenges and the context created by them, in order to find the most effective solutions through which cross-border cooperation can support the member states and those in their immediate

vicinity. Basically, where there is collaboration and involvement from all actors, problematic issues can be fixed more easily.

The management structures of this program make considerable efforts in terms of the support offered to potential beneficiaries and the European authorities consulted the two states during the programming period because the future projects will be implemented on their borders. We find that the EU authorities in charge of these programs became more involved in this budget exercise and considered that the partners on both borders know best the common challenges they face. At the same time, the delimitation of the previous three-year program into two new programs will have positive effects, because in this way the authorities and institutions as well as the decision-makers involved will focus their attention and interest on the existing challenges and opportunities. Given that there is already a similar experience gained during the 2007-2020 budget year, we believe that a broader vision of the needs of the target region and management and decisions will have to be applied in accordance with cross-border needs.

In order to obtain favorable results from the projects and programs aimed at cross-border cooperation, it is necessary that their priorities and objectives are correlated with the standards, strategies and legislation of the European Union, and with the national legislation of the states involved, but especially to take into account the context in which it is carried out, the particularities of the area, the historical-cultural and multi-ethnic diversity as well as the stage of development of the economy and the degree of political stability.

The dynamism of the context at the external borders of the European Union, especially the eastern ones, is an essential aspect in terms of the stability of the good neighborhood area and the creation of safe borders.

The role of collaboration on cross-border expansion is provided by its capabilities to activate and use in a renewable and effective way the possibilities and resources of border areas and to join the resources of the border regions of neighboring countries in order to deliberate the best solutions to the problems common and to encourage cooperation in eligible regions.

We conclude that the European Neighborhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership, the Association Agreements and the cross-border cooperation prove to be, as a whole, a means of support in terms of Ukraine's efforts towards the EU approximation process.

Romania contributes to the European path of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, the latter being considered the state that is getting closer to the European model, even if, like its neighbor, it faces internal and security problems.

The European Union offers support to member states to intensify bilateral and multilateral mechanisms in terms of cross-border cooperation with neighboring states for the purpose of economic development, a governance based on European values, the recrudescence of social and territorial

development. At its external border, through the promotion of cross-border cooperation, the aim is regional consolidation, the accentuation of structural reforms, but also the support of the states regarding the deepening of relations with the European Union.

The quantification of the results is supported by the analysis of the effectiveness of the cooperation program from the perspective of the progress achieved at the common borders of the partners involved, therefore we cannot ascertain whether *The Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020* is effective or not or if it has fulfilled the premises for which it was created.

We observe that in the states of the former communist bloc, cross-border cooperation collides with several common controversies. The large-scale need to mix the strategic policies of neighboring states with the interests and particularities of border regions seems to be a major challenge that states must manage with their own hands and policies, an aspect that makes it difficult to implement projects. Therefore, it is confused with the gaps in the required normative-legal basis, when the administrative-territorial units cooperate without indications of the subjects of international law.⁷

Now witnessing the war between Russia and Ukraine, we can say that Ukraine is more Europeanized through the cross-border cooperation programs it has taken part in with different EU member states. The Ukrainian state has managed to adapt its legislation in the sphere of public finances with EU regulations in this regard. This being a major step in its path of accession and Europeanization. The implementation of EU standards to national legislation and practice means greater decentralization of this process. Therefore, the harmonization of the realities between Ukraine and the EU in the framework of cross-border and regional cooperation will stimulate economic activity at the border regions and will create the conditions for a favorable business environment for the development of existing businesses and the establishment of new businesses in support of these regions.⁸

During the 2014-2020 budgeting/programming exercise, emphasis was placed on the growth and harmonization of infrastructure and on projects aimed at cultural acts and activities, these having an influence on the economy and development of the border regions, even if this was mostly in the form of indirect. We can conclude that if all the actors worked together and participated much more actively in cross-border cooperation (local authorities, the business environment, the academic environment, the field of science and technology/innovation but also the responsible EU bodies), the application of investment projects would help in a greater degree and would support cooperation at Europe's borders.⁹

⁷ Ihor Hrabynskyy, Romana Mikhel, *Cross-Border Cooperation as a Mechanism of Europeanization of Ukraine*, p.177, in *Studium Europy*, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Gospodarki Krajowej w Kutnie, NR 15 CZERWIEC 2021, PÓLROZCZNIK., p.190

⁸ *Ibidem* 8

⁹ *Ibidem* 9

The introduction of the compilation and processing of cross-border national statistics by Eurostat recommendations should be one of the priority measures of Ukraine, as it would allow a greater detailed and objective assessment of the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and the EU.¹⁰

It is also desirable that the countries that want to be EU members (in the case of our study, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) should be the main beneficiaries of cross-border cooperation programs, so that they have a real benefit and be a active partner within them. An example would be the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine program, within which Poland, although a full EU member country, was in the period 2014-2020, the main beneficiary of more than 70% of the implemented projects.¹¹

At the moment, consultations and analyzes are being carried out for the 2021-2027 project program, respectively for the Interreg Next Romania-Ukraine 2021-2027 Program.

During the course of the program and the publication of the official data, we will complete our research in the hope of adding value to this topic.

We believe that by showing tact, moderation, a constructive understanding of history on both sides, Romania and Ukraine can improve their cooperative relations under all its levels.

At the same time, we should take into account the context in which cross-border cooperation took place recently, now that the entire world is facing the sanitary crisis caused by the COVID 19 virus.

We conclude that this central concept of our research, cross-border cooperation, in the neighboring countries of the European Union (EU) validates supporting an orderly and unified cooperation of cross-border expansion, addressing common challenges, guaranteeing effectiveness and security at external borders and encouraging local cooperation. Thus, cross-border cooperation programs have emerged as solid financial and cooperation instruments, aiming to respond to common needs.

¹⁰ Ihor Hrabynskyy, Romana Mikhel, *read.*, p.190

¹¹ *Ibidem*

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