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**Cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine.
From the alienated to the interdependent border through
the European Neighborhood Policy**

-Abstract-

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Contents

Introduction.....	8
1. Relevance of the research topic.....	8
2. Research contribution to the field of international relations.....	9
3. Aim and objectives of the research.....	14
4. Research questions.....	16
5. Temporal and geographical delimitations.....	16
6. Theoretical framework.....	16
7. Research methodology.....	23
8. Structure of the paper.....	28
9. Limitations of the paper and further research directions.....	29
Chapter I. Conceptual Delimitations.....	32
1.1. Defining the concept of frontier.....	32
1.2. Cross-border cooperation	37
1.3. Cross-border region.....	40
1.4. Integration of the cross-border area.....	48
Chapter II. Developments in relations between Romania and Ukraine.....	50
2.1. Romanian-Ukrainian relations between 1917 and 1923.....	50
2.2. Romanian-Ukrainian relations in the period 1923-1991.....	56
2.3. Romanian-Ukrainian relations 1991-2022.....	63
2.3.1. The period 1991-2000.....	63
2.3.2. The period 2000-2014.....	76
2.3.3. The period 2014-2022.....	83
2.3.4. Cooperation agreements and mechanisms between Romania and Ukraine.....	88
Chapter III. European Neighborhood Policy - an instrument of Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation.....	94
3.1. General considerations on the European Neighborhood Policy.....	94
3.2. European Neighborhood Policy instruments.....	105
3.3. Regional Dimensions of the European Neighborhood Policy.....	114

3.3.1. The Union for the Mediterranean.....	114
3.3.2 The European Union's Eastern Partnership.....	116
Chapter IV. The role of the European Neighborhood Policy in Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation.....	126
4.1. The alienated border region.....	130
4.1.1. Context of bilateral relations.....	131
4.1.2. External factors.....	135
4.2. The coexisting border region.....	138
4.2.1. Context of bilateral relations.....	139
4.2.2. External factors.....	142
4.2.3. The influence of the European Neighborhood Policy on the Romanian-Ukrainian border.....	146
4.3. Interdependent border region.....	162
4.3.1. Context of bilateral relations.....	163
4.3.2. External factors.....	165
4.3.3. The influence of the European Neighborhood Policy on the Romanian-Ukrainian border.....	168
4.4. Integrated border region.....	175
4.5. Comparative analysis of cross-border regions.....	179
Conclusions.....	186
Bibliography.....	193
Annex 1.....	211

Keywords: cross-border cooperation, European Neighborhood Policy, Romania, Ukraine, bilateral relations, typologies, evolution.

PhD thesis entitled "Cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine: From the alienated to the interdependent border through the European Neighborhood Policy" is a research framework dedicated to understanding the dynamics of cross-border cooperation between the two countries, the evolution of the typologies of the cross-border region as well as the identification of the factors acting within it.

The problem from which this research started is the difficult start and the slow evolution that marked the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine. The good cooperation that could be cultivated in 1991, when bilateral relations were initiated, turned into a total closure of borders that lasted until 2004. In view of the blockage that arose in the way of cross-border cooperation during this period, we believe that there were factors that helped the two countries to overcome the obstacles that arose so that they would be more attractive for investment, economic exchanges and the implementation of joint projects. The factors we refer to are both internal, linked to the historical context of the states and their interest in cooperation, and external, represented by the geopolitical context and the mechanisms used by the European Union to bring the two states closer together and encourage cross-border cooperation.

In this context, our research aims to provide an innovative perspective on cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine by applying the model of cross-border region interaction proposed by Oscar J. Martinez, in order to identify the evolution of Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border region typologies and analyze the current state of cooperation. Such an analysis provides a detailed plan of the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, neighboring states that share a common history and important geostrategic interests for the Eastern European continent. Concluding the analysis will enable us to formulate a series of recommendations for the stakeholders engaged in enhancing Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation. This aims to finalize the integration of the cross-border region and enhance the efficiency of cooperation. The final aim of our research approach is to highlight the influence of the European Neighborhood Policy on the evolution of typologies within the cross-border region addressed. By achieving this, the paper will provide a comprehensive perspective on the complex interaction between the bilateral context, the European Neighborhood Policy and regional dynamics.

In order to achieve the proposed aim, we have identified three research objectives that focus on identifying, analyzing and explaining the factors acting on cross-border cooperation. The first objective proposes the analysis of the evolution of bilateral relations between Romania and Ukraine in the period 1917-2022, focusing on the key events that shaped these relations and influenced cross-border cooperation. The second objective is to examine the European Union's Neighborhood Policy and its mechanisms, aiming to comprehend its role in enhancing cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine. The third objective involves examining the factors that have driven changes in the Romanian-Ukrainian border region, leading to structural transformations, and identifying the present condition and categorization of the border.

After clearly establishing the research aim and objectives, the next step in the methodological process is to address research questions that will act as a guide, assisting us in the substantiating the research outcomes:

1. What are the internal and external factors that have acted on cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine?
2. What is the current typology of the Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border region?
3. Are there prerequisites for the full integration of the Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border region?

When it comes to the theoretical framework, we have chosen to use the neorealist theory in order to identify and explain the reasons behind Romania's and Ukraine's decisions on bilateral and cross-border cooperation over time. The main theorist of neorealism, Kenneth Waltz, proposes an approach according to which the structure of the international system constrains actors to make certain decisions, to this end, in our paper we have followed three key concepts of neorealism, namely the status of dominant power in order to identify the main states or alliances of states that dominate the international system, the balance of power and the alignment with the dominant power (bandwagoning), concepts that can explain the actions of Romania and Ukraine in the bilateral relations.

To conclude the research methodology, we opted for a qualitative analysis, emphasizing various research techniques, as outlined below: historical research technique, explanatory technique, semi-structured interview, comparative analysis and the model of cross-border regions interaction. Data collection will be carried out through literature consultation and examination of primary sources, which include interviews with regional decision-makers in Romania's border regions with Ukraine. This data collection process will be reinforced by the use of

secondary sources represented by treaties, regulations, directives and agreements issued by Romania and Ukraine or the European Union institutions.

Thesis structure

The research paper is structured in four chapters, which contribute to the achievement of the research aim and objectives and answer the stated research questions.

In the first chapter, "Conceptual Delimitations" we aim to set the theoretical framework of the paper, clarifying the key concepts used in this research. This chapter addresses the key issues of borders, border regions, border integration and cross-border cooperation, enabling the reader to understand both the evolution of these concepts over time and the definitions provided in the literature. At the same time, by conceptualizing the terms used, we will highlight their functions and their importance both internally, for the state and its citizens, and externally, in relation to other states.

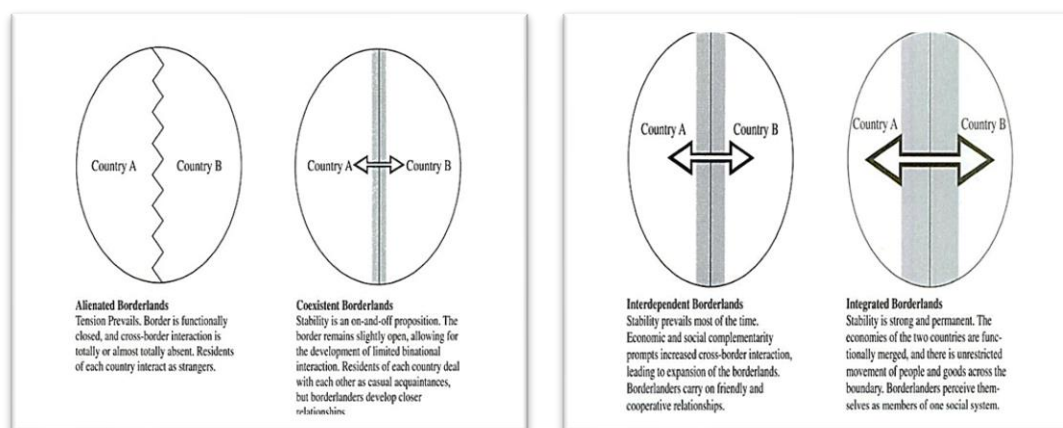
The second chapter of the research, entitled "Evolution of relations between Romania and Ukraine", presents, from a historical point of view, the evolution of bilateral relations between Romania and Ukraine. This chapter is structured in three sub-chapters, which analyze the key events of the cooperation relations between the two states from a neo-realist perspective during the period of the creation and functioning of the first modern Ukrainian state (1917-1923), the period of expansion, control and break-up of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1923-1991), as well as the post-communist period (1991-2022). Identifying, explaining, and interpreting significant events in the bilateral relations between Romania and Ukraine are crucial to accomplishing the goals of our study. This is particularly important as historical reverberations significantly influence the states' openness to cross-border cooperation. The neorealist perspective through which we analyzed bilateral relations allows us to explain the decisions taken by Romanian and Ukrainian leaders at turning points in the cooperation, while helping us to identify whether these decisions were taken on the basis of national interests or whether they represented constraints of the structure of the international system.

The third chapter, "The European Neighborhood Policy - an instrument of Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation", focuses on the European Neighborhood Policy, highlighting the motivation and interests of the EU Member States in creating such a policy to draw states in the proximity of external borders into cooperation. Beyond elucidating the inherent motivations of the Member States through the explanatory technique, we also expound

upon the instruments and mechanisms of the European Neighborhood Policy. This includes an exploration of their application in cross-border cooperation between Member States and non-Member States. This chapter has played a pivotal role in identifying the tools that impact cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, laying the groundwork for their examination in the case study.

The last chapter of the paper, represented by the case study, entitled "The role of the European Neighborhood Policy in Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation" is composed of five sub-chapters and follows the evolution of the typologies of the Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border region by applying the theoretical model of the interaction of cross-border regions (*Figure 1*) proposed by Oscar J. Martinez, highlighting the role of internal and external factors identified in cross-border cooperation and identifying the current typology of the cross-border region.

Figure 1. Interaction models of cross-border regions



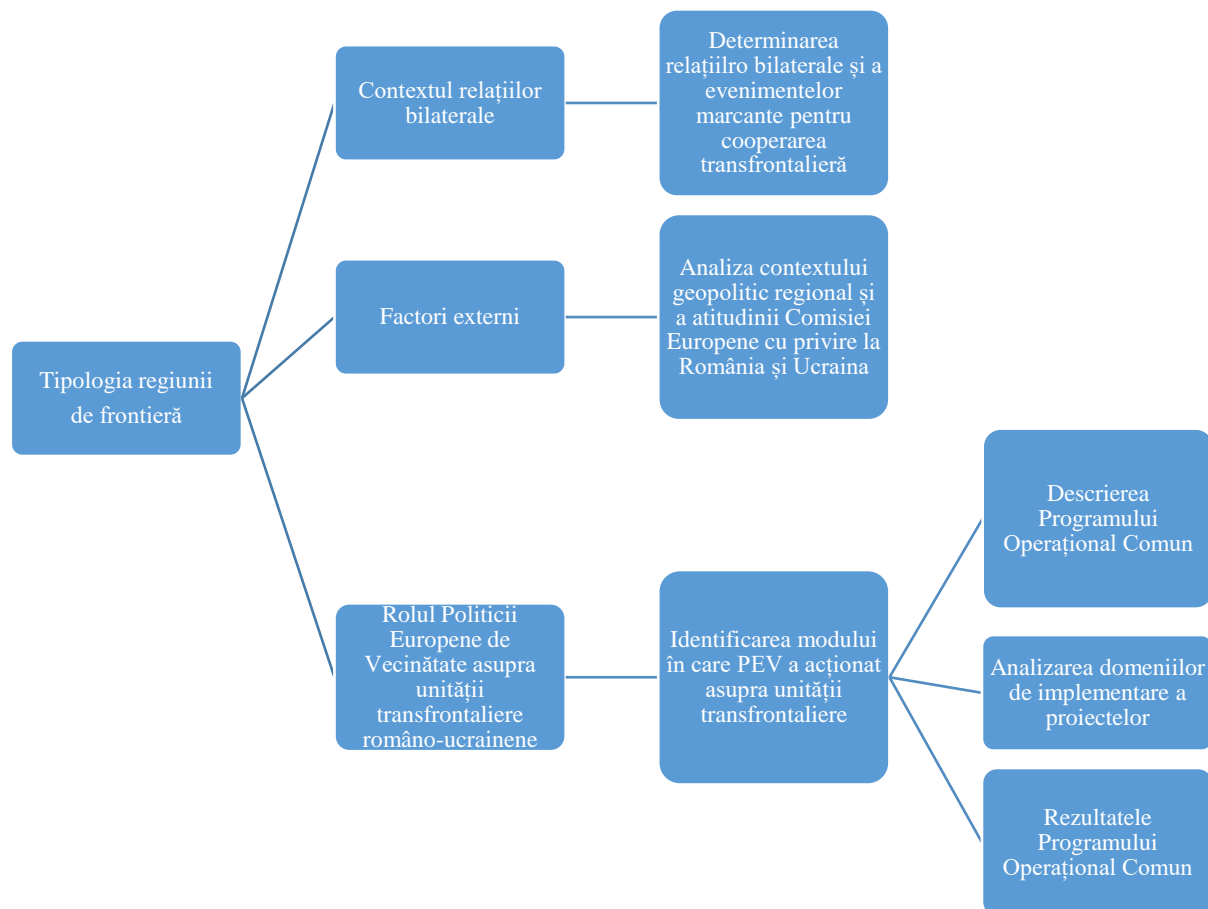
Source: Oscar J. Martinez, *Border People. Life and society in the U.S. – Mexico borderlands*¹

The first four sub-chapters analyze each of the four border typologies (alienated, coexisting, interdependent and integrated) highlighted in *Figure 1*, identifying the extent to which its characteristics have applied or continue to apply to the region we are analyzing, as well as how the internal and external factors analyzed have acted on the cross-border region. The four sub-chapters adhere to a standardized structure, aligning with the model presented in *Figure 2*, and track the same variables (context of bilateral relations, external factors, role of the European Neighborhood Policy). In these sub-chapters, semi-structured interviews collected from

¹ Oscar J. Martinez, *Border People. Life and society in the U.S. – Mexico borderlands*, The University of Arizona Press, 1994.

Romanian and Ukrainian respondents working in Romanian County Councils and Ukrainian Regional Councils in project writing and implementation departments helped us recognizing the overall impact of the European Neighborhood Policy and, specifically, the Joint Romania-Ukraine Operational Programme 2014-2020 on the enhancement of cross-border cooperation and, by extension, on the evolution of regional typologies. The fixed structure of the four sub-chapters allowed us to carry out a comparative analysis in the fifth sub-chapter to determine the role of the internal and external factors analyzed.

Figure 2. Model of analysis of the Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border region



Source: Own source

The case study allowed us to identify the existence of an evolution of border typologies, determined by the actions of internal and external factors, analyzed as variables. Examining the context of bilateral relations, external factors, and the influence of the European Neighborhood Policy within each of the four border region typologies suggested by Martinez provided us with the chance to observe the interplay of variables in the evolution of these

typologies. Additionally, it highlighted the significant role played by the European Union, particularly through the Neighborhood Policy, in shaping this process.

The study revealed that the European Neighborhood Policy has taken a leading role compared to other analyzed factors in shaping cross-border cohesion. The catalyzing impact of the Neighborhood Policy is apparent from 2004, as it played a decisive role in initiating cross-border cooperation and transitioning from an estranged cross-border unity typology to one characterized by coexistence. The policy's ability to facilitate cross-border cooperation is further illustrated during the 2008-2014 period, marked by a decline in Romanian-Ukrainian bilateral political relations. Despite this, cross-border cooperation persisted, bolstered by the financial assistance from the Neighborhood Policy. However, a crucial finding from our research emphasizes that for the cross-border unity to undergo structural changes and progress towards a new typology, all analyzed factors must exert favorable influences.

The present typology of the cross-border unit is the interdependent one, and progression towards the final typology suggested by Martinez, namely the integrated one, is currently unfeasible. This is primarily due to the ongoing conflict on Ukrainian territory and legislative restrictions between Romania and Ukraine, preventing the full liberalization of cross-border cooperation and a symbolic reduction of border functions. Nevertheless, positive bilateral relations between Romania and Ukraine, coupled with robust support from the European Union for Ukraine, are laying the groundwork for a potential shift towards the integrated typology. However, this transition is conditional on the end of the Russian Federation's aggression, the establishment of security for Ukraine's external borders, and the deepening of cooperation with the European Union, either through obtaining membership status or by consolidating the process of 'integration without accession'.

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