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SPATIAL COOPERATION OF SERBIA AND BULGARIA

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Abstract: This paper contains the aspects of spatial cooperation between the two neighboring countries - Serbia and Bulgaria. The projects of cooperation in the 1990s have been specified, as well as those taking part in the final phase of European international cooperation in the period 2007-2013. In the last period two spatial integration aspects stand out - cross-border and transnational cooperation, as well as cooperation based on Euro-regions - border associations of neighboring countries that have defined the development projects of mutual interest. Possibilities for future cooperation will largely depend on external factors initiated by the European Union, and initiatives of local actors from the border areas of both countries.

Keywords: cooperation, programs, sustainable development, Serbia, Bulgaria

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Introduction

The idea of modern Europe is in a politically and economically united continent, and thus an attempt to create the prerequisites for inclusion of the peripheral position of certain neglected areas within the European countries in the intense process of sustainable development and integration into the wider European area of complex interstate and inter-regional interconnection.

There are numerous examples of successful cooperation between the regions of neighboring countries, mainly in Western Europe (in some cities in neighboring Scandinavian countries and cities in the border area of France and Spain or Belgium and the Netherlands there is cooperation in sharing public service and utility equipment, defining a common strategy for tourism development, information exchange, mutual planning of spatial development, etc.).

Regardless of the aggravating circumstances in the process of integration into the European environment (inadequate legislation, the unstable political situation, a number of cross-border problems, lack of standardized information exchange, insufficient transport interconnection, lack of initiative, etc.), Serbian politics holds an opened and clear goal leading to membership in the European Community.

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Union (EU) and the acceptance of all aspects of the spatial dimension of international regional cooperation.

Unlike other areas of the EU, trans-border and interregional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe is poorly existent (Smith, 2005). The attitude of the state, citizens' attitudes, and unresolved national issues may restrain the process of European integration (Gabel, 1998; Pinheiro, 2009). In contrast, public opinion can positively influence the development of the EU by determining the nature of integration process with the support of various projects (Garry, Tilley, 2009).

**Characteristics of the border area between Serbia and Bulgaria**

Unfavorable development potentials of border area of Serbia, and especially of its eastern and south-eastern part neighbored with Bulgaria arose out from peripheral geographic position in country, which caused its functional isolation, in relation to economic centers and development axis, and resulted with its slower development. The border region between Serbia and Bulgaria can be considered as a specific geographic area with a certain unity of the natural base, economic and cultural ties of the population, common infrastructure, as well as historical, ethnic and cultural traditions (Grčić, 1991).

Geomorphologic characteristics of the terrain, traffic isolation of mountain areas (especially in winter), the historical conditions and tradition have influenced the lower developmental characteristics of border region of Serbia with Bulgaria in relation to the central parts of the country.

A very important geo-strategic position of one part of the area is reflected in the branch of Corridor Xc (Niš-Sofia-Istanbul), which is separated from the main route of Corridor X, which connects the major European centers with Asia Minor. This route offers over 200 km shorter connection than any other alternative route between Central Europe and the Middle East. (Derić, Atanacković, 1999). Serbia is yet to undergo the completion of the highway on the arm of Xc (Niš - Sofia). This path follows the railway line, which, likewise, waits for reconstruction.

In geomorphologic terms, the broader band of the border area includes part of the Carpathian-Balkan Serbia and parts of the Rhodope Serbia. There is larger part of the Timok basin, part of the Lower Danube in the north and mountain area to the south. The variety of terrain, partly of the karst terrain and landscape makes this area attractive and interesting. Major part of the border is in line with ridges of the Stara planina mountain, which forms the most imposing morphological structure (the highest peak is 2.169 m above the sea level Midžor), then Vidlič, Ruja and Miljevska planina in Serbia (Marković, 1970).

The observed area belongs to underdeveloped, economically and demographically depressed regions of Serbia. Unfavorable demographic processes are reflected in the expressed low population growth and emigration of the popu-
Spatial cooperation of Serbia and Bulgaria

...ulation (municipalities with the largest drop in population in Serbia, the average annual 6.4 per 1,000 inhabitants, are situated in this region). Employment is below average employment in Serbia (index 0.8), and income per capita in this region is one of the lowest in Serbia (in some municipalities, only 15% of national average; Opštine u Srbiji, 2007). In the economic production the low-stage processing products with declining development role of industrial are prevailing (decrease of employees in industry to 40% in some municipalities in relation to 1991). The area has agricultural and animal husbandry and forest features with natural and tourist values. There are important sources of water, mineral and ore resources. The area is characterized by poorly developed transport and other technical infrastructure, lack of availability of public services, particularly in the mountainous part of the area (RPP Timok, Official Gazette 51/11). Poor quality roads and underdeveloped infrastructure, as well as neglected valorization of available resources (natural and manmade) in total contribute to the low level of social standards of the population in this region (Tošić, Miletić, 2002).

Previous projects of Serbia and Bulgaria in the process of cooperation

Cooperation between the two countries in order to improve the development processes took place during the recent history with varying intensity and success. The wars, unfavorable historical circumstances in the Balkans, as well as a number of unresolved political issues, were the limiting factor for defining joint projects until the end of the twentieth century.

Cooperation initiative is driven by the EU as an external factor. The first projects were for transnational cooperation, or cooperation of several countries which have participated in Serbia (SR Yugoslavia) and Bulgaria. The first major project that included six states (what was then SR Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Macedonia and Greece, which at that time was the only EU member) is Estia, and partner institution in our country was the Institute for Architecture and Urban Planning of Serbia. As one of the main results of the project, two documents were created: Spatial Planning Systems and Agencies and Spatial Planning Priorities. The project was conducted within the field of transnational CADSES and initiatives Interreg IIC (1994-2000). Another important project in which both countries participated was Vision Planet, which included all states transnational area CADSES. Major partner was the University of Trieste, and partner of Serbia

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2 Central European, Adriatic, Danube and South-east European area, or area of Central and South-East Europe, which includes 18 countries, is related to transnational cooperation of countries, regional and local authorities, and the priorities are: spatial development, management of natural and cultural heritage and landscape, environment protection, management of resources and prevention of dangerous situations.

3 In its second cycle (1994-2000), Interreg C initiative of EU comprised international cooperation for seven areas, and the number was extended to 13, in the period 2000-2006.
was Faculty of Geography, University of Belgrade. The main document, as a result of this project was *Strategies for Integrated Spatial Development* for the CADSES area. In the next period, 2000-2006, these projects get their heirs, Estia-Spose or Planet Cense, with inclusion of even greater number of countries in the region.

Cross-border cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria began to take place in 2004 through the "Neighborhood Policy". Since then, dozens of projects were signed until 2006, within the CADSES. Small cross-border infrastructure projects, cross-border economic cooperation, actions related to ecology, tourism, culture, agriculture, education, research and development, employment and institutional cooperation were usually financed. In the past period the Neighborhood Program Bulgaria - Serbia which was financed by the CARDS⁴ fund in Serbia and the PHARE⁵ fund in Bulgaria was successfully implemented. Until 2006 five public calls for amendments were announced and 700 such amendments were reported. Cross-border projects between Serbia and Bulgaria, started by CARDS fund, were extended until 2009. 11 projects with the participation of various institutions and municipalities in Serbia and suitable partners from Bulgaria were signed. The projects covered a variety of areas of cooperation - cooperation between socio-economic and regional development, cooperation among youth, rural tourism, women's entrepreneurship, the development of SME competitiveness, waste management, healthy food production, promotion of cultural heritage etc.

The Danube River is the backbone of international cooperation and spatial integration of states through which it flows. Among the many completed and ongoing cooperative activities, involving Serbia and Bulgaria, are as follows: 1) *The Danube Commission*, which was formed in 1948 in Belgrade and is engaged in the regulation of navigation modes and 2) the *International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)*, established in 1998 with the aim of implementation of the Convention on the Protection of the Danube signed in 1994 in Sofia. Given that the international river Danube has a transnational character, it was the subject of several projects under the Interreg initiative of the European Union - in the context of transnational CADSES area. In the period from 1994 to 2000 those were the projects Arge Donau and the Cultural Route Danube, and from 2000 to 2006 there were project such as Donauregionnen - Danube regions, DaNewBe Data - linked to the GIS and Donauhanse - the cooperation of the Danube cities (Šećerov, Nevenić, 2004), as well as other sectoral projects. Danube, in the broad sense, is the subject of various areas of cooperation - economic and tourism development, infrastructure development, and especially the protection of natural resources and environment.

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⁴ Former assistance of Union for renovation, development and stabilization of countries of West Balkans

⁵ Former initiative of EU for providing assistance to countries of Central and SE Europe
The current trans-national cooperation between the two countries

The final stage of spatial cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria in the period 2007-2013, involves a more active role and more responsibility for the region, and the backbone consists of Process of cooperation in South-eastern Europe (SEE) and the Regional Cooperation Council. The main objective of the Process is to transform the SEE into region of stability, security and cooperation in accordance with European integration streams. 11 countries, as full members, participate in the Process, (the Western Balkans, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Moldova and Turkey). Regional Cooperation Council, which officially started work in 2008, and also includes 11 participating countries, will be focused on realization of projects in six priority areas for regional cooperation: economic development, infrastructure development, justice and internal affairs, security sector, strengthening human resources and parliamentary cooperation (MFA, 2007, NPI, the Government RS, 2008).

The introduction of the program for 2007-2013 will divide former CAD-SES transnational area of cooperation into two program areas: Program of cooperation in Central Europe - CENTRAL (Central Europe Program) and South East Europe Cooperation Program - SEES (South East European Space), which is the most important transnational form of spatial cooperation, with the participation of Serbia and Bulgaria. Program aims to foster a balanced territorial development and territorial integration in the areas of cooperation. Areas of support were expressed by the four priorities with defined measures within each of them: 1. developing of innovative approaches and entrepreneurship, 2. protection and enhancement of the environment, 3. improving accessibility and 4. development of transnational cooperation to establish a field of sustainable development.

Serbia and Bulgaria continued initiated joint cooperation with other Danube countries, as regards the development and regulation of waterway transport on the Danube, as well as cooperation concerning the protection of the Danube River. Organization of Pan-European Corridor VII has determined the specific rules that should provide faster improvement navigability, establish uniform rules of the fleet and port development and rules of functioning of the internal transport. In the Trans-European Networks Danube wa-

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6 In 2008 the Council took the role of former Stability Pact for SEE, which was established in 1999 and included eight countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Romania, Moldova and Turkey), aiming towards long-term stabilization, security, democratization and economic regeneration and development of a region with a tendency towards inclusion in European and Euro-Atlantic integration (EU, NATO).

7 SEES area includes 17 countries with approximately 270 million of population and presents one of the most various and most complex area of cooperation in Europe (Gojković, 2008).
terway is defined as one of the priority projects in infrastructure development of SEE with focus on development of an information system for the river itself. International Scientific Forum "Danube - River of Cooperation" has supported development of a comprehensive strategy for the Joint Danube countries (EU Danube Strategy), which is important not only for the Danube region, but also for wider cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria. The priorities of cooperation in the Danube area are transport, environment and economic development (Tošić, Zivanović, 2011).

The current cross-border cooperation

The cross-border cooperation programs are the traditional instrument of the EU for promotion of friendly neighboring relations and harmonization of socio-economic development of border areas. In the period 2007-2013 the cross-border cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria is carried out using the last instrument that replaced the former instruments for cooperation. The legal basis for the establishment of the IPA (Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance) instrument was established by the Regulation of EU Council (2006). Republic of Serbia as the candidate for EU membership is entitled to use all five components by the end of this period (1. support in transition process and institution establishment, 2. cross-border cooperation, 3. regional development, 4. human resource development and 5. rural development) within the resources of this fund.

Table 1 - Data on the border area between Serbia and Bulgaria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Area of the border area</th>
<th>The population in the border area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>km²</td>
<td>The share of surface area in the state in %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>18.909</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>20.551</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL:</td>
<td><strong>39.460</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Defined area of cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria, which is covered by the program, is 39.460 km² where 47.9% is part of Serbia (21.4% of the territory of Serbia). Total population is 3.3 million. 32.3% of the population of the area belongs to Serbia (15.2% of the total population of Serbia according to Census 2011.). As the Sofia region is involved in the Bulgarian part of the border area, it is significantly larger share of the population of this area of the Bulgarian population (Table 1).

The program covers six districts in Serbia (Bor, Pirot, Zaječar, Nišava, Jablanica and Pčinja), with a total of 33 municipalities. On the Bulgarian side the fol-
lowing regions are included: Vidin, Montana, Sofia, Sofia region, Pernik and Kyustendil (fig. 1).

Figure 1 - Scope of cross-border cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria, which is defined by the IPA fund (see on page 56)

Priorities and measures of the program are:
1. The development of smaller forms of infrastructure
   - Physical and information infrastructure
   - Infrastructure designated to environmental protection
   - Assistance for project preparation
2. Improving the capacity for joint planning, problem solving and development
   - Establishing connections and networking at institutional, commercial and educational level
   - Sustainable development through the efficient use of regional resources
   - Activities "people to people" (small projects - direct cooperation)
3. Technical assistance
   - Administrative and program evaluation activities
   - Publicity and communication

EU Council Regulation defines the operational structure of the program, as well as the means for its realization. The total fund of programs of cross-border cooperation between Bulgaria and Serbia for the period 2009-2011, for which organizations from Serbia and Bulgaria could apply, is 12,998,000 EUR (Lazarević, Knežević, Božić, 2011).

There are numerous examples of projects of Serbia and Bulgaria, which took place as part of above mentioned Neighborhood Programme, by earlier Structural Funds, and as a part of current program. One of these examples is, e.g. related to the promotion of successful knowledge and skills for sustainable economic development in the border area, the second - for women entrepreneurs in cross-border cooperation, the third - to create conditions for the formation of a business zone in the border area. Both countries have signed the Memorandum on cooperation in the financial market which, among other things, specifies that the relevant Committees will cooperate in exchanging informa-

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8 The competent authorities are Ministry of finance of Republic of Serbia and Ministry for regional development and public works of Republic of Bulgaria. It was proposed for common Technical Secretary to be located in Sofia, while the “antenna” office in Serbia should be located in Niš. In 2007, bilateral agreements on economic cooperation, cooperation of cross-border police forces and opening of two new border crossings. Memorandum on cooperation regarding environment protection was adjusted, and it is being discussed about adjustment of document of Agreement on local border trade, Agreement on cultural-educational cooperation and Agreement on initialization of cultural-informational centres.
tion and professional consultation in the areas of securities, and to protect the market against financial crime. In the Regional Program, there was also an open competition for both countries for projects in the areas of activity "people to people" and sustainable development and the objectives are to promote a sustainable development of the border region through economic valuation of their own potential and creation of new cross-border partnerships.

**Euro-regional cooperation**

Euro-regions are voluntary interest association, formed at the regional and local levels, covering the border areas of neighboring states in order to foster cross-border cooperation to promote economic, social and cultural needs and demands of environmental protection. With this type of cooperation Serbia and Bulgaria are included in the regional associations.

Start of implementation of **Euro-region "Danube 21"** is related to the beginning of 2001, when the Mayor of Vidin, the Mayor of Calafat (in Romania) and the Mayor of Zaječar (in Serbia) reached an agreement on establishing the Euro-region in Vidin in Bulgaria.

In Serbia, the following eight municipalities belong to Euroregion: Kladovo, Negotin, Majdanpek, Bor, Zaječar, Boljevac, Sokobanja and Knjaževac. In Romania, those are the municipality of: Calafat, Poiana Mare, Desa, Ciupercenii Noi and Cetate, and municipality in Bulgaria are: Vidin, Belogradchik, Lom, Ruzhintsi, Chiprovtsi, Dimovo, Makresh, Kula and Novo Selo. The total area of the Euro-region is 10.157 km². In that area there are about 420,000 people in more than 400 settlements (2011). Serbia accounts for about 53% of the total population and about 65% of the total number of settlements in Euro-region. Nearly a third of the population and settlements of the area belongs to Bulgaria, and only 10% of the population and 3% of the settlements of Euro-region – to Romania (Ilies, 2004).

Euro-region requires huge administrative structure for the overall population. The slow bureaucracy on both sides of the Danube and strict centralist traditions are also an obstacle to development, networking and involvement in projects that "ignore" national boundaries. Geomorphologic characteristics of the terrain, traffic isolation on the periphery of the three countries, the historical conditions and traditions have influenced the lower economic characteristics of these areas in relation to the central parts of the country (Todorović, Tošić, Stojanović, 2004). With joint work and efforts a better chance of overcoming the various problems in the fight against crime⁹, illegal trade etc. were created and many possibilities for cooperation in economy, culture, education etc. were opened.

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⁹ In SEE countries there is no efficient system for fighting crime on a regional level which maintains control over border and undertakes many functions which shouldn’t be in hands of state authorities (Athanassopoulou, 2004).
Appropriate summit and adoption of resolutions in Gamzigrad Spa (2007) specified some of the priorities of this interstate association: the construction of highways from Vidin through Zaječar to Paračin, and railroad across the hydroelectric power plant "Iron Gate 2", the liberalization of visa regime and the establishment of a common university.

Last year, however, have not led to significant progress in achieving the set goals and the cause of this is in local authorities and which has an inert relation to the necessary activities.

**Euro-region "Eurobalkans - Niš-Sofia-Skopje"** connects Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia and was formed in 2002. In the Euro-region less than 5 million people over an area of almost 60 thousand km² lives in a large number of cities and municipalities that gravitate towards the three centers. Objective of its formation is the organization and coordination of activities of cross-border cooperation in the fields of economy, ecology, culture, science and education, in order to achieve the necessary conditions for the integration of the given space in the contemporary European trends. Ten municipalities have joined the city of Niš and municipalities that have established this Euro-region. Serbian part of the Euro-region covers a quarter of Serbia's territory and it has a population over 1.4 million people in 2011 (29% of the population Euro-region).

Bulgarian section includes the following regions: Blagoevgrad, Pernik, Kyustendil, Sofia area and City of Sofia, Plevan, Vratsa, Vidin and Montana. The area in Macedonia includes the municipalities of Skopje and municipalities: Berovo, Delčevo, Kriva Palanka, Kumanovo, Novo Selo, Pehčevo and Veles.

The biggest geostrategic advantage of Euro-region Niš-Sofia-Skopje is its geographical position, primarily due to the passing of Pan-European multimodal Corridors IV, VIII and X. The countries, however, have lack of necessary financial support, as well as inadequate infrastructure, the problem of crossing the border etc. (Dimitrov et.al. 2003; Totev, Boyadjieva, 2003). It indicates a special interest for all three parties to cooperate, and the first major project should be the construction of Nis-Sofia highway, as well as the Skopje-Sofia railway. The project is scheduled to be open to new, modern border crossings. Within the region cross-border cooperation between local authorities and NGOs in the field of culture, education, science, economy, etc should be established. The plan is to formulate strategic projects for the following areas: development of regional policy, development of SMEs and inward investment, then a youth, educational and cultural cooperation in the field.

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10 Bela Palanka, Bor, Bujanovac, Kladovo, Knjaževac, Lebane, Preševo, Vladičin Han, Zaječar and Zitorada
11 Aleksinac, Babušnica, Blace, Bojnik, Bosilegrad, Vlasotince, Vranje, Gadžin Han, Dimitrovgrad, Doljevac, Jagodina, Kruševac, Kuršumlija, Leskovac, Majdanpek, Medveda, Merošina, Pirot, Prokuplje, Ražanj, Soko Banja, Surdulica, Svrljig, Trgovište and Crna Trava.
Regardless of the clearly defined goals in the last few years there was no significant cooperation within the Euro-region.

**Euro-region "Stara Planina"** is a bilateral cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria aiming to the development and the preservation of that region. Euro-region is formed in 2006 and in its composition entered the municipalities of Pirot, Dimitrovgrad, Knjaževac and Zaječar on the Serbian side and Chiprovtsi, Chuprene, Berkovitsa, Belogradchik, Georgy Damianovo, Godetch and Vrshets on the Bulgarian side. In 2007 Euro-region was inducted into the association of AEBR\(^\text{12}\).

Area of Stara Planina has been declared in Serbia for the Park of Nature in 1997 and therefore was placed under state protection as a natural resource of great importance, and classified in the first category. By the Spatial plan for the Park of Nature and the tourist region Stara Planina area (Službeni glasnik RS, no. 115/08) the area is treated as an area of special natural and tourist values of national importance on which the protection zones I, II and III degree of protection of the Park of Nature were established, and areas of interest for the development of tourism and recreational activities. As the dominant economic activity tourism development in accordance with the protection of nature is proposed, and as the dominant form of tourism stationary and excursion type of tourism is designed.

Due to its rich natural heritage, in 1996 the governments of Bulgaria and Serbia have signed a memorandum on the creation of trans-border "Peace Park". Forgotten area of the mountain, however, was in the spotlight, for which the "culprit" is tourism. Plans, whose implementation has already begun, include construction of trails for alpine skiing (capacity of 14.000 skiers, 40 km ski lifts and 100 km of ski runs). A stay of tourists is necessary to provide adequate accommodation facilities. Despite some claims that the mountain has a capacity for a large number of guests and that it will not harm the natural habitat, nature lovers justified fear of uncontrolled development and all other forms of degradation space.

Development strategy for 2008-2013 in this area\(^\text{13}\) includes joint work of expert teams of four Serbian and seven Bulgarian municipalities gravitating towards Stara Planina. The project aims is the development of the region and encouragement of cross-border cooperation, and priorities are grouped into five categories which will provide: the reconstruction of existing and construction of new infrastructure, sustainable tourism development, measures to promote agriculture, environmental protection, through the proclamation of the Stara Planina as Biosphere Reserve and measures in the field of culture and sports. Last Euro-

\(^{12}\) Association which was established in 1971 in Bohn aiming towards initiating cooperation and networking of cross-border regions of countries which doesn’t have to be members of EU. Membership in this association provides access to European funds.

\(^{13}\) For this are PPPN of Nature park Stara Planina was made, as well as Master plan for Stara Planina.
region activities are related to agriculture, and certification of dairy products (cheese). The biggest dilemma for the future is to define the priorities - the protection of areas or tourist development?

**Euroregion "Nišava"** formed in 2005 between the two regional associations of citizens - Pirot area in Serbia and regional associations of the area of Sofia in Bulgaria. Serbian municipalities within the region are: Pirot, Bela Palanka and Babušnica, Dimitrovgrad, and municipalities in the Sofia area are: Svoge, Kosin Brod, Slivnitsa, Bozhurishte, Godetch and Dragoman. The area is 9.820 km² (28% in Serbia), with about 370,000 inhabitants (73% of Bulgaria, since it contains the Sofia area). Euro-region is admitted to the AEBR in 2007.

Euro-region has its field of activity, such as regional development, economic development, tourism, sport, culture, and transfer of innovation, environment, agriculture, social cooperation, health, communication, education and others. Recently, the areas of cooperation are related to strategic planning and creating a database for GIS. Meetings of the Serbian and Bulgarian sides are committed to connecting entrepreneurs and encouraging economic initiative.

**Euro-region "Morava-Pčinja-Struma"** was founded in 2003 by Bulgaria, Serbia and FYR Macedonia with the aim of improving cross-border cooperation in the fields of communication, information sharing and networking, economic cooperation, transport and infrastructure, tourism, culture and knowledge and environmental protection. Euro-region Morava-Pčinja-Struma is full member of AEBR (Lazarević, et al. 2011).

**Cooperation between cities and local territorial units**

One of large-scale forms of cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria is the cooperation between cities and territorial cooperation of local authorities. Even since 1951, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)¹⁴ initiate activity of twinning. European initiative for cross-border cooperation of cities is defined in the Territorial Agenda for 2007-2010 that was made in Leipzig (Territorial Agenda for the EU 2007-2010), and the IPA program also helps that process.

Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SKGO) formed the basis of foreign and domestic cities - candidates for partnering. The most massive type of cooperation of Serbian cities with cities in the world is twinning, and with cities in Bulgaria is cross-border cooperation for the municipalities on both sides of the border to cooperate in resolving issues of mutual interest.

The cross-border cooperation programs have several important aspects for the municipalities that participate in them: promotion of good neighborly relations, familiarization with the procedures for usage of pre-accession EU funds

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¹⁴ The Council was established after WW2 aiming to cooperation of local authorities and regions. It comprised cooperation of all actors and all types and sizes of settlements which have interest in merging, problem solving of any kind and realization of mutual goals.
(and later Structural Funds) and resolving issues and problems of common interest to the border regions. Specific objectives were related to: encouragement of cross-border initiatives in the field of sustainable development, economy and environmental protection; encouragement of joint problem solving in the field of public health, prevention and fight against organized crime; strengthening the efficiency and security of borders; promoting legal and administrative cooperation; promotion of local activities, so called "people to people" activities.

**Possibilities for future cooperation in the period 2014-2020**

Future cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria will largely depend on the conditions that are defined by the European Union. According to EU rules, three years before the expiration of current financial program, preparation for a new program for the period 2014-2020 begins. In the period after the 2013 the EU will also be in significantly changed political conditions. The Lisbon Treaty is adopted, which aims to achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion, the EU Strategy 2020 is adopted, Action programs Europe 2020 for each member state, and Lisbon strategies on increasing competitiveness through the introduction of modern technologies (knowledge and research as a basis for economic and social progress). However, responses to monetary policy are still being defined within the euro zone and its connection with national fiscal policies of member states in order to avoid the effects of financial breakdown of individual countries (Lazarević, et al. 2011). Therefore, forms of cooperation are still not defined with countries candidates for EU membership and those countries that are not. The basis for cooperation depends on the objectives of EU cohesion policy, which has only one priority - to promote the balanced development of the EU and its regions.

Consultations on the future financial instrument to support the EU accession process are still ongoing. A public debate at which the amendments on the future development of pre-accession instrument were collected is completed, but discussion with all beneficiary countries of this assistance were not yet done. There were more initiatives that led towards common accession of the Western Balkans, the view that the new instrument should lead to a linear increase in assets during the accession process was clearly defined, in order to gradually build capacity for absorption of structural funds. A request to increase the available funds will surely be accompanied by the condition to prove that there is national capacity for its efficient use. Many authors dealing with issues of spatial integration (Renner, Trauner, 2009) considered that it is of great importance for the Western Balkan and Eastern Europe countries to have clearly defined mostly short-term European initiatives and sectoral integration, given their lack of competence for full EU membership.

As regards the component of IPA cross-border cooperation, the initiatives of beneficiary countries of IPA 2 component is to strengthen this process, but also, to adjust procedures for the various programs, which until now made certain problems in their implementation.
In future a certain challenge will be to separate the transfer of responsibilities from central government to local authority institutions, even to the NGOs, in planning and implementing programs of cross-border cooperation. The programming should strive to achieve better interconnection between cross-border and regional development policies and programs. With better planning and programming it is necessary to achieve synergy between cross-border program and macro-regional strategies, particularly the Danube Strategy. It is proposed to consider the possibility for the current IPA component of cross-border cooperation to be included in the component of regional development in the future. In addition, it is essential to develop the concept of strategic projects, i.e. those large investments that have a clear cross-border impact.

The general objectives of the process of further cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria are related to the creation of sustainable spatial-economic and socially coherent development based on interregional cooperation with unique cross-border planning of usage of land. It would be achieved by valorization of border regions potentials with identifying problems with the aim of their joint emulation.

Priorities of cross-border cooperation between the two countries are related to the construction of infrastructure, modernization of road and railway line on the branch of Corridor X, but also other transport objectives (establishment of air traffic between Sofia and Belgrade, the construction of a road that connects Corridor X with Corridor IV - through Paraćin-Zaječar route, construction and modernization of road traffic that will connect Corridor X with Corridor VIII, modernization of border crossings; PPRS, 2010). In addition, the priorities of cooperation are solving common problems and sustainable development of tourism and agriculture, as well as environment protection (Stara Planina, Vlasina and Krajšte). Instruments towards achieving these objectives are:

- Formation of expert groups that presented potentials of both border regions to foreign investors,
- Forming a basis of common geographic information systems,
- Promotion of appropriate organizational, regulatory and personnel prerequisites of regional and local level,
- Raising public awareness of the importance of a cooperative process
- Introduction of international standards and quality production in line with the EU,
- Encouragement of alternative funding,
- Participation of Diaspora, etc.

Conclusion

Transnational and cross-border cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria began to intensify under influence of the European Union in the late 20th century. Until 2006, the cooperation was realized through the Neighborhood
Program, and in 2007-2013 through the European IPA fund. Euro-regional co-
operation in the trans-border area between the two countries, despite a clearly
defined goal, did not achieve a significant success. Cooperation between local
authorities and town twinning make an extra form of cooperation through pro-
grams covering different areas. Common problems in the border area between
the two countries are related to a greater distance from rich and major European
markets, intensive depopulation (except for the Sofia area), asymmetry in pro-
viding information in the two countries, different legal system, the unequal sta-
tus of the EU, lack of coordination between local and central administration,
derdevelopment and lack of interest in local authorities, etc.

The advantages offered by the cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria
are related to overcoming the problem of isolation of border areas, reducing dif-
fferences in living standards, facilitating sustainable development, environmental
protection, harmonization of legislation etc. The objectives are to improve the
transportation infrastructure (highway construction and modernization of the
Bulgarian border and railway), modernization of border crossings, encouraging
economic cooperation and cooperation on the protection of natural resources. In
addition, cooperation provides a solid contribution to regional stability, which is
necessary for this part of the Balkans.

Strategic Priorities are related to: on-time performance of previously
signed programs, urgent defining the institutional competence of regional and
local government by establishing appropriate services (especially in the case of
Serbia), immediate enforcement of action regarding the development of ICT,
and hence with international standards and trends for more effective perform-
ance of the process of cooperation.

Transnational and cross-border cooperation in the following period,
2014-2020 will be defined after individual consultation with all participating
countries in relation to assistance provided by the EU. The objectives will be
directed to respect of principle of territorial cohesion and balanced regional de-
velopment, as well as greater involvement of local authorities in implementing
the program, in particular cross-border cooperation.

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References (see on page 64)