

## THE CARPATHIAN EUROREGION – GEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS

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**Abstract:** The main objective of this article is a presentation of selected aspects of borders' layout and their functions in the area of Carpathian Euroregion. The problem of trans-border cooperation is an interdisciplinary issue. The geographers' participation in this kind of scientific research is said to be rather inconspicuous. Mass media quote that an agreement was reached "on platform" in trans-border integration issues or similarly, that the compromise was achieved "on platform". However, euroregions are concrete geographical spaces where natural conditions can play vital, stimulating or impeding role in trans-border cooperation processes. Those problems were analyzed on the base of Carpathian Euroregion. It differentiates the area of 160,000 square kilometers and comprises territories up to five countries. The special attention was paid to several geographical aspects concerning the borders' layout and their functions performed.

**Key words:** Euro-region, trans-frontier cooperation, the Carpathian Euro-region

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The processes of integration constitute the field of interest to scientists as well as are a common subject of political discussions or polemics in the press. However, the perceptible growth of interest in those issues nowadays does not signify that it is a new phenomenon. It can be easily claimed that the beginnings of the European integration are, using pompous words, hidden "in the mists of time". The ideas of integration were not unknown to the Romans, the French, Roman Ceasars of German Empire, the Habsburgs, Napoleon, Hitler or Stalin and some of those figures are willingly embraced by euro-enthusiasts these days who stress the unity of European culture and its Hellenic foundations. Among the theories formed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it is worth pointing out the claim made by Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi which called for a unification of European countries within the framework of the so-called Pan-Europe. Its territory was to cover all European countries except for Great Britain, which was much more concerned with its global empire, and Russia, which was considered a Eurasian country.

In 1929, the French concept of the integrated Europe was presented in the forum of The League of Nations. It assumed a close cooperation without interfering in the sovereignty of individual states.

In the post-Second World War era, European integration was characterized by its dualism. In the east of the continent, countries affiliated with or, rather, subordinate to the Soviet Union formed one bloc, later to be called the Outer Empire. On the other side of the Iron Curtain the process of integration was taking place within the framework of the European Economic Community. The territories of the countries belonging to the aforementioned blocs virtually coincided with the zones of the military pacts of NATO and Warsaw Treaty.

However, it was only after the collapse of communism when the milestones in European integration took place with the European Union playing the dominant role in the process. Many forms of integration can be observed which include various social and economic activities varying with regard to their respective territorial range.

## **2. NEW ERA OF DEVELOPMENT OF EURO-REGIONS**

The aforementioned processes of the new stage of European integration provoked interest among Polish scholars representing various fields of science, including geographical studies. At this point it is worth reminding J. Smoleński's (1931) opinion who postulated that 'laws governing groups of countries and the role of the countries within these groups should be examined.' In the first post-war decades, the lack of interest in the issue of integration can be accounted for by the stagnation of Polish Political Geography (Grzeszczak, 1993). Certain changes in that respect took place not sooner than in the late 1980s when the omnipotent censorship ceased to interfere in all kinds of activities and political modifications on the map of Europe encouraged geographical analyses and interpretations.

What geographers were particularly interested in was the creation and functioning of Euro-regions. The term euro-region contains one of the "fundamental geographical concepts" (Miszczuk, 2003), namely region, a notion as important as controversial. Opinions and arguments of dedicated supporters of region are as common as those rejecting any scientific value of this notion whatsoever. However, the presented arguments are at times a result of emotions rather than logical reasoning. Perceiving region as an objectively existing reality has provoked various argumentations leading to criticism. The objection has been made that 'appropriate manipulation of the choice of appropriate physical-geographical moments (...) makes it possible to build the geographical base of any freely selected geographical unit.' (Piskozub, 1970). The concept of region was firmly criticised by S. Berezowski (1964) who wrote that 'geographical region is not a fact existing in reality. It is, of course, possible to write about different non-existent notions but they can hardly be found scientific.' There have been claims that region is an 'ideologically marked notion' (Harvey, 1973). Among Polish geographers, Z. Rykiel (2001) points out that 'opinions with regard to regionalization (...) might have been the result of loyalty towards the state authorities'. This observation, obviously, refers to the communist period in Poland.

Another problem which was encountered while first Euro-regions in the Polish borderland were created. Some politicians opposing this initiative threw accusations of "dismantling borders" or "rolling the country up", etc. Newspapers also echoed those sentiments. It suffices to quote titles of some articles: "Euro-regions – the latest partition of Poland" (Pawłowski, 1993), "Euro-regions row" (Waniec, 1993). On the surface, the claim that what works (i.e. Euro-region) on the Dutch-German border does not have to be necessarily implemented on the Polish-Ukrainian border might seem a convincing argument. Poland was also accused of imitating indiscriminately Western Europe. Words of a poet were quoted: 'you were a peacock and a parrot among nations.'

The opponents of euro-regions overlooked one significant fact, i.e., Poland having long tradition in formation of trans-frontier regions did not need to copy any other country. When West-European countries built or strengthened the Maginot or Siegfried Line in the 1920s or 1930s, Poland initiated Tourism Convention with Czechoslovakia regulating free cross-border tourist movement along tourist routes which was signed in 1925. This document referred to pedestrian tourists and skiers who were entitled to free movement on presenting Polish Tatras Society Card. The formation of the Pieniny Trans-frontier National Park in 1930s, first such an entity in Europe, and second in the world, is another forgotten Polish initiative in the field of euro-regions. After the Second World War, when "the borders of peace and friendship" were closely guarded, Poland and Czechoslovakia established the Zone of Tourism Convention in the Tatras and Karkonosze Mountains which was a phenomenon in the whole bloc of European Socialist Countries.

### **3. THE CARPATHIAN EURO-REGION**

Emotions ran particularly high during the formation of the Carpathian Euro-region. In the Polish Sejm, Minister K. Skubiszewski presented comprehensive information, answered questions and accusations, and, tried to dispel various doubts related to this project on two occasions, namely, on February 20 and March 30, 1993. In spite of that, MPs refused to accept the government's information regarding the Carpathian Euro-region. Local veteran organizations (e.g. in Przemyśl) also opposed the establishment of the Euro-region.

The Carpathian Euro-region Project was severely criticized by some scholars, geographers as well. Profesor P. Eberhardt (1993) wrote that 'a region of an incoherent internal structure and an accidentally delimited frontier was formed' pointing out that 'those are totally isolated areas', and, concluding that the project is 'doomed to failure.'

While refraining from delivering a judgement on the formation of euro-regions it is worth considering some solely geographical aspects of the establishment of the Carpathian Euro-region. The first of them concerns the geographical conditionings of border delimitation of the Euro-regions in the Polish borderland. Delimiting anthropogenic borders of any territorial units usually arouses controversy as was the case with the discussions accompanying successive administrative divisions of Poland or polemics on the regionalization of whatever territory (continents included). This helps to accept disagreements over the borders as a natural thing which, in fact, encourages geographers to probe into this issue.

It seems obvious that the primary factor to be taken into account when defining the land area and borders of euro-regions should be their accordance with the statutory goals of the Euro-region. And that is when the first doubt arises. The regions of the Polish borderland cover 33% of the Poland's total land area. Does, in fact, 1/3 of the Polish territory constitute regions of trans-frontier cooperation? It is difficult to present arguments justifying this claim. Do the inhabitants of the Carpathian Euro-region who dwell in towns on the Vistula River as well as on the Dniestr share common interests? It is unlikely that the frontiers of the territory of 160,000 sq km (the land area of the Carpathian Euro-region) are somehow functionally linked to a distant state border.

When analyzing the borders of the Carpathian Euro-region one can notice a striking paradox; some stretches are delimited along rivers, sometimes big rivers, such as the Vistula, the Cisa, the Pruta, or, the Dniestr, not to mention numerous smaller rivers. More than a hundred years ago, a renowned Polish geographer, E. Romer (1901), wrote that 'the river is not a natural border.' This frequently quoted statement is justified by geographers in many ways, often by supporting it with suggestive examples. J. Barbag (1974) points out that 'the river valley constitutes a natural geographical entity.' W. Probek and H. Heffner (1981) share this belief claiming that 'the river, being one of the elements of the geographical environment, in certain conditions, can become the foundation for the coherent development in a given region.' Dividing rivers with borders of euro-regions contradicts the basic rules of water management which are enforced in most European countries in the, so-called, hydro-economic regions. That is how experts in the field of water management define a functional spatial system covering water resources of the whole river basin together with hydrological constructions related to their utilization.

Another paradox of the Carpathian Euro-region borders is a contradiction between statements included in its statute and the reality regarding the problem of nature protection. One of the primary objectives Euro-regions have to meet is the environment protection and formation, which can be found in their statutes usually as the top priority. This claim is clearly denied by a specific situation in the Carpathian Euro-region where the province border cuts across protected territories such as national parks, landscape parks and others. As examples one can point to Puszcza Solska Landscape Park, Południoworoztoczański Landscape Park, Magurski National Park, Bekes-Szoros Nature Reserve. How the statutory objectives of the Euro-region and the Areas of Protected Wildlife are pursued in such conditions remains a secret of the executives running those institutions.

When studying closely the map of the Carpathian Euro-region astonishing differences between numerous scholarly texts and the situation in the Euro-region become prominent. For instance, the study entitled "The functioning of the Carpathian Euro-region" (Niedźwiecka, Pytel, 2003) contains the following statement: 'cooperation includes regional development with a special focus on spatial planning and stimulating economic activity.' This claim is clearly contradicted by the situation when the Euro-region border separates nearby towns which have been linked by various forms of economic cooperation for many years, and, which have complemented their functional structures. Along the Polish stretch of the Euro-region border towns such as Sandomierz and Tarnobrzeg, Tarnów and Dębica, or, Gorlice nad Jasło are separated. In the Ukrainian territory, a complex of towns renowned for their tourists value is divided by the Euro-region border. While Chocim belongs to the Euro-region territory, Żwaniec and

Kamieniec Podolski remain outside its borders. Similar examples can be found in the territories of all the countries which are cut across by the Carpathian Euro-region border.

It is hard to explain another feature of the Carpathian Euro-region frontier, i.e., the situation when the Euro-region territory does not cross the state border of neighboring countries but only adjoins it. This can be observed along the Polish-Ukrainian border between towns Hrebenne and Dołhobyczów where the territory of the Euro-region lies... only on the Ukrainian side of the border. The same thing occurs along the stretch of the Romanian-Hungarian border, where the territory of the Euro-region lies solely on the Romanian side. How trans-frontier cooperation, which is mentioned in virtually every point of the statute of the Carpathian Euro-region, functions in these conditions remains a mystery of its creators.

Lack of delimited smaller territorial units within the borders of Euro-regions, that could form a basis for certain economic activities, constitutes a significant, geographical aspect of the way Euro-regions function. What is particularly important is the trans-frontier delimitation of regions adjacent to state borders. It would remain in accordance with the professional obligation of geographers as well as with practical necessity. The former is concisely defined by J. Beaujeau-Garnier (1971) who writes that 'the object of geography is to discover spatial structures based on connections between the environment and the character and efficiency of human activities.' Along the state borders which cut across the Carpathian Euro-region "discovering" such territorial units should not pose a problem. It is enough to mention the valleys of border rivers such as the San, the Poprad, the Prut, or a number of smaller ones. The necessity of the moment demands that many of them be put under protection in nature reserves.

Another reason why it is necessary to delimit trans-frontier regions within such a vast territorial unit like the Carpathian Euro-region is that state borders cut across mountain ranges or forests. The latter frequently constitute lairs of wild animals which are not so common in Europe nowadays. According to foresters, wild animals choose border backwoods because of low population and urbanization of the area. Many foresters draw attention to another fact, which is less known but also very important to this issue. It is no secret that poachers cause great damage to wild animals dwelling in the whole Carpathian range. However, in order to avoid risking an encounter with armed border guards, poachers steer clear of the areas in the direct vicinity of state borders. There is one more reason for the primeval character of the wildlife in the frontier territories and that is the existence of border zones which restricted economic activities in all countries of the Carpathian Euro-region for many years prohibiting even their tourists exploration. In this situation, delimiting territorial units of protected wildlife in frontier areas becomes a matter of urgency and must precede much publicized investment boom in the border belt.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In the light of remarks presented in this paper, to ensure effective trans-frontier cooperation within the Carpathian Euro-region it seems necessary:

- ♦ to revise its borders so that they do not impede the realization of statutory objectives of that institution, particularly, with regard to nature protection and formation

- to delimit regions cut across by state borders that could constitute territorial units of protected wildlife, at the same time not postulating the division of the whole territory of the Euro-region into smaller "problem" regions.

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## Euroregion Karpaty – aspekty geograficzne

### Resume

Celem opracowania jest prezentacja wybranych, geograficznych aspektów położenia, granic i funkcji Euroregiony Karpaty.

Problem regionalnej współpracy transgranicznej jest zagadnieniem interdyscyplinarnym. Udział geografów w tych badaniach należy ocenić jako skromny. Znamienne są sformułowania środków masowego przekazu, że w kwestiach integracji transgranicznej osiągnięto porozumienie „na płaszczyźnie...” lub osiągnięto kompromis „na platformie...”. Jednak euroregiony to nie „płaszczyzna”. To konkretna przestrzeń geograficzna, gdzie uwarunkowania przyrodnicze mogą odgrywać istotną rolę stymulującą lub utrudniającą procesy współpracy transgranicznej.

Te właśnie problemy ukazano na przykładzie Euroregionu Karpackiego. Wyróżnia się on znaczny powierzchnią (160 tys. km<sup>2</sup>) i tym, że swym zasięgiem obejmuje terytoria aż pięciu państw.

W opracowaniu zwrócono uwagę na kilka istotnych aspektów geograficznych dotyczących przebiegu jego granic i sprawowanych funkcji.

- Istotna jest delimitacja granic euroregionu. Ich przebieg nawiązuje najczęściej do granic jednostek administracyjnych pierwszego rzędu w poszczególnych krajach. Wiąże się to z faktem, że często przebiegają one wzdłuż rzek, nawet dużych jak np. Wisła, Dniestr czy Prut. Utrudnia to statutową działalność euroregionu, tj.

racjonalne planowanie przestrzenne i wykorzystanie zasobów środowiska przyrodniczego zgodnie z założonymi celami.

- Innym paradoksem jest rozdzielania granicami euroregionu obszarów przyrody chronionej, jak parków narodowych czy krajobrazowych.
- Granice Euroregionu Karpaty rozdzielają więzi funkcjonalne położonych blisko siebie miast np. Tarnów – Dębica czy Gorlice – Jasło
- Plany rozwoju współpracy transgranicznej w euroregionie określają zasady współpracy w zakresie poszczególnych form gospodarki. Nie uwzględniają natomiast zróżnicowania regionalnego dużego terytorium Euroregionu Karpackiego. Jest to istotne w przypadku niewielkich, transgranicznych regionów o wspólnych cechach środowiska przyrodniczego czy jedności etnicznej.