

**INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE OF TRAMES
“REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES OF EU BORDER
REGIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN
THE EU AND COUNTRIES OF ITS IMMEDIATE
NEIGHBOURHOOD”**

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The land border between the EU and the countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has increased since 2004 from 1300 to 5100 kilometres. This border demands efficient management and security measures; but it is also characterised by the history of economic and cultural cross-border contacts that need to be preserved and developed further for the sake of cohesion. ENP aims to create a new cooperation framework for the EU and thus combines two sets of goals – external policy objectives to keep good neighbourly relations with countries located on EU borders and EU Regional Policy’s quest for social and economic cohesion in the European peripheral regions in the context of enlargement. ENP also discusses the need for cooperation in the fields of security (e.g. migration and readmission agreements), although this is seemingly a lesser priority. Central to the EU enlargements and ENP has always been the notion of conditionality – a system of carrot and stick where soft and open borders constitute a reward for progress in meeting European standards. Well-behaving neighbours can count on better market opportunities in a more stable economic and political environment.

As the EU’s boundaries has shifted geographically, it is necessary to investigate the extent to which meaningful forms of conflict prevention, problem-solving and other forms of collective action are emerging in Central and Eastern European border regions. In what ways could cross-border regionalisation in these countries contribute to European multilevel governance? As enlargement presents a major political, economic and social challenge for the EU it has also far-reaching effects

on the acceding countries (and their regions) which, while striving to adopt the *acquis communautaire*, have to deal with fundamental societal transformations and rapid structural change. In the course of several enlargement waves (e.g. Greece 1981, Austria, Sweden, Finland 1995, Big Bang 2004 with inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007) the EU has reached the borders of the Balkans, Turkey and Russia. It is mostly at the regional level where the manifold challenges posed by EU enlargement, including institutional adaptation, conflict prevention, as well as diversity of interests and heterogeneity, come together with magnified intensity. As such, border regions appear to be key elements in facilitating the European integration and enlargement process. They are seen as flexible vehicles for cross-border mobilisation of collective action in addressing social, economic and environmental issues. In cases where new borders have emerged or the old ones tightened, euroregions, economic partnerships, twin-city initiatives, cross-border urban networks and similar forms of interaction have also come into being. These cooperation patterns reflect the attempts to use border as a resource for economic and cultural exchange as well as for building coalitions for regional development purposes.

The first cases of cross-border cooperation (CBC) within the European Community appeared already in the 1950s and since then CBC has developed into a variety of institutionalised forms. In the course of time and due to the continuous European enlargement process, similar activities attempting to transcend the barriers to trade and people-to-people contacts have emerged more intensively at the external borders. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that regions at the EU's eastern borders represent a considerable challenge to national development policies as well as to European cohesion. These regions are, by and large, peripheral areas, not only far from the dynamic European core but often distant from prosperous national centres. Many of them continue to suffer from out-migration, de-industrialisation, and negative demographic trends. In addition, neighbouring regions on the other side of the border are similarly disadvantaged, resulting in 'double peripheries' within a wider European context. The regions under consideration are thus potential areas of serious social and economic unrest. In some cases, the imposition of visa restrictions on non-EU citizens has posed new obstacles to cooperation, bolstering fears of an emerging "Fortress Europe" that divides the continent. At the present and future external borders of the EU it has become necessary to find mechanisms that mediate between external pressures and local concerns and transcend socio-economic, political and systemic asymmetries.

This special issue of TRAMES contains papers presented at a conference on *Regional development challenges of EU border regions in the context of the interaction between the EU and countries of its immediate neighbourhood* that took place on 16–17 June 2008 in Tartu, Estonia. The conference discussed regional development challenges and opportunities of the EU's easternmost regions in the context of the interaction between the EU with the countries of its immediate neighbourhood – Russia and other CIS countries – Belarus, Moldova, and

Ukraine.¹ It was organised by the Institute of Government and Politics, and Eurocollege at the University of Tartu; Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation, Estonia; International Center for Black Sea Studies, Greece; Institute of Advanced Studies, Austria; and Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, Estonia. The organization of the conference was supported by Estonian Gambling Tax Council, Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, Open Estonia Foundation, the European Commission FP6 research project “EUDIMENSIONS” (Contract 028804), FP7 research project ENRI-East and INTAS project (Contract 05-1000006-8446).

The opening paper on *European Union’s positive conditionality model in the pre-accession process* by Viljar Veebel focuses on the definition and application of the central method of the EU pre-accession process – the positive conditionality in the course of EU enlargements. The article offers a comparative analysis of pre-accession situation, conditionality levels and argumentation of motivation for the first five EU enlargements. The author concludes from his analysis that it is not always the case that the positive conditionality is used as a neutral evaluation of preparedness of accession states to become EU member states; often its implementation is driven by the political and economic interests of the EU member states. Despite the criticism, the author considers that the positive conditionality remains to be an important tool in the EU external relations and enlargement process.

The next paper on *Bordering and ordering the European neighbourhood: a critical perspective on EU territoriality and geopolitics* by James Scott discusses the contradictory process of de-/re-bordering on the EU external borders where security-oriented and cooperation agendas of the EU clash. This process of bordering includes, on the one hand, an internal consolidation of the EU as a political community and with that an exclusion from that process of the EU neighbouring countries. On the other hand, the bordering includes cooperation developments between the EU and its regional neighbourhood through the European Neighbourhood Policy that foresees inclusion of those neighbouring countries into the ring of ‘prosperity, stability and security’.

The paper, *Undiscovered avenues? Estonian civil society organisations as agents of Europeanization* by Eiki Berg, Kristjan Lau Nilssen and Gulnara Roll looks into the role that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play in the process of implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy promoting ‘Europeanization’ on the EU external borders. It discusses ideas of how CSOs could be involved in promoting EU external cooperation policy and specifically ENP agenda, bypassing in the process the traditional channels of foreign policy making. This all is demonstrated by practical examples of the cooperation of CSOs in the Estonian – Russian border that is the EU external border since 2004.

Euroregions as mechanisms for strengthening the cross-border cooperation in the Baltic sea region by Katri-Liis Lepik is based on the empirical study of thirty-five euroregions in the Baltic Sea Region – institutions established usually by local

¹ See more information at the conference website www.ctc.ee/CBCconference/

authorities and/or other local actors to promote the cross-border cooperation. The paper has a special focus on the euroregions involved in cross-border cooperation on the EU external borders. It analyses institutional structures and forms, legal and financial issues that affect the functioning of euroregions as organisations. The paper concludes by presenting the development opportunities for euroregions in the Baltic Sea Region.

Daniela Grozea-Helmenstein, Christian Helmenstein and Tatiana Slavova analyse in their paper *Who is the best? Insights from the benchmarking of border regions*, the attractiveness of 61 EU regions as locations for foreign direct investments (FDI). An emphasis of the paper is on Austrian NUTS-2 regions as well as border regions in the neighbouring countries. The paper proposes a novel benchmarking methodology that aims to assess the capability of a region to prevail in the international competition for (foreign) direct investment in accordance with current income and employment levels and dynamics and other aspects of regional quality.

All these papers attempt to reveal the challenges the EU border regions face after the enlargement has taken place and brought remote neighbourhoods closer to the core. Although the introduction of the New Neighbourhood Instrument (NNI) in 2006 has promised to facilitate coordination with the existing support mechanisms of Regional Policy, e.g. INTERREG, the successful policy outcome in terms of preservation and development of cross-border networks, economic and cultural cooperation is still pending. In the enlarged EU the promotion of cross-border links and cooperation can ensure cohesion and competitiveness of the EU border regions as well as preclude any instability that might result from the very different economic and social situation across the EU external borders. Only time will tell whether the EU could succeed in creating both 'an area of freedom, security and justice' and 'an area of stability and prosperity,' that would spill over the borders into the neighbouring states.

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