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ROMANIAN EUROREGIONS IN THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION - CASE STUDY OF THE SERBIAN BORDER

1. THE GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION OF ROMANIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

Cross-border co-operation is one of the most important processes of European integration. At the moment, when stable, institutional forms of co-operation, such as Euroregional authorities, associations, secretariats, etc., are being formed, cross-border co-operation increasingly takes the shape of Euroregional co-operation. The 'Euroregion' is a formalised structure of cross-border co-operation among regional or local government bodies. It extends across at least one national border, comprising at least two socio-political areas, which are co-operating with each other. The Euroregion establishes institutions on the basis of agreements between national, local and governmental organisations. The goal of this article is to provide detailed descriptions of the individual Euroregions of Romania, as well as to highlight the need to create a new Euroregion that would stimulate stronger European bonds. The existence of Euroregions provides opportunities for economic growth in the country's border areas, thanks to the improvement of the border infrastructure. Euroregions also tend to reduce the negative impacts of international borders.

Romania shares borders with five neighbouring countries: Bulgaria to the south, Serbia and Montenegro to the south-west, Hungary to the west, Ukraine to the north, and Moldavia to the north-east. The south-western coast of the Black Sea also belongs to Romania. After gaining sovereignty in 1991, Romania faced the need of adjusting the relationships with its old

neighbours, Hungary and Bulgaria, and to establish relations with the new ones, Ukraine and Moldavia. This situation became very important due to the fact that till 2001 the XIV Russian Army stationed in Moldavia, and this strongly influenced the political and economic scene of the country (Wendt, 2005). Furthermore, Ukraine was economically dependent on Russian energy resources, and Russia also uses its Black Sea naval bases to exert control over Ukraine.

Romania's current problems with entering into political relations are caused by its complicated history. In Moldavia, which was previously part of Romania, the majority of citizens are of Romanian origin, although the origin is officially called Moldavian. To the Moldavian government, this suggests that Romanian authorities wish to join the two countries. As a result of this fear, Moldova accused Romania in 1993 of training terrorists as an effort to instigate a revolution. Additionally, Ukraine is concerned over Romania's territorial claims to Northern Bukovina, Hertza region, and Snake Island. All three regions were part of Romania until 1947. Snake Island, with the area of 17 ha, is located to the east of the Danube delta. It was occupied by the Soviet Union after the Second World War. It can no longer be returned to Romania, because of a major military surveillance station located there. This station covers Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Middle East, and Northern Africa to Libya. Finally, Romania continues to ineffectively claim the right to the treasures of Romanian culture and art that were stolen by Russia during the First World War (Wendt, 2004).

Despite the difficulties that were complicating the process of enhancing its foreign relations, Romania has achieved a lot. Following the resolution of the Minister's Committee, on 4 October, 1993, Romania was admitted to the European Council. Later on, an agreement on co-operation with the European Economic Community (EEC) was signed. The United States granted the so-called Most Favoured Nation status to Romania, and another sign was the agreement on military co-operation. At the end of 1993, the countries belonging to the Organization of Black Sea Economic Co-operation created the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), modelled on the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). In February 1995, an agreement between Romania and the European Union came into force establishing January 2007 as the date of Romania's and Bulgaria's accession to the EU structures. In March 2004, Romania, together with Bulgaria, became a members of the NATO, and from May 2004 Romania now borders the European Union. At the moment, the primary goal of Romania is to become a member of the European Union in 2007. Popular support for accession exceeds 90 per cent. According to some politicians, this may be result from Romanian citizens' unawareness and enormous expectations of

every day life improvement. In order to adjust the regulations to match European Union standards, many legal regulations in Romania have been modified and many new bills have been passed.

Furthermore, it is necessary to introduce a new legislation on environmental protection, provide better health care to the handicapped, and speed up the process of returning the property confiscated by the communists. However, Romania's greatest achievement after 1990 was the creation of eleven Euroregions: 'Carpatica', 'Dunăre-Criș-Tisa-Mureș', 'Prutul Superior' or 'Prutul de Sus', 'Dunărea de Jos', 'Siret-Prut-Nistru', 'Dunăre-Dobrogea', 'Giurgiu-Ruse', 'Danubius', 'Dunărea de Sud', 'Bihor-Hajdu Bihar', and one region defined as the association of cross-border co-operation, 'Dunărea 21'. Moreover, on the historical grounds of Maramureșului, negotiations are being held to create a new Euroregion in this area.

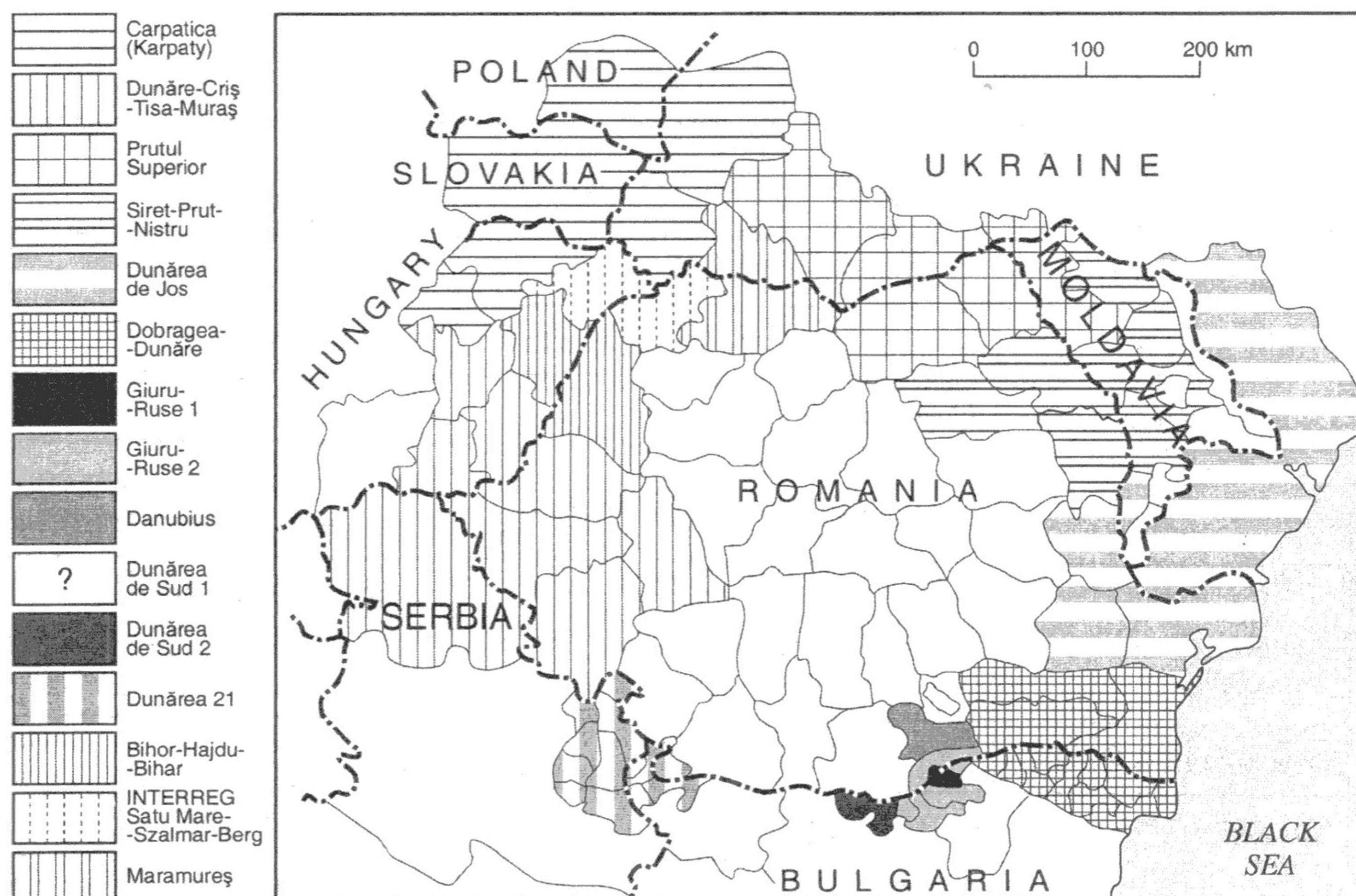


Fig. 1. Euroregions at the Romanian border

Source: Wendt, 2004.

Romania started to create the transborder structures with a considerable delay compared to, for instance, Poland. The delay was caused by a set reasons, the most important of which was that Romania's neighbours appeared rather little attractive. Poland did not have such problem having Germany as a neighbour. In addition to that, none of Romania's neighbours did not

belong to the EU until the year 2004. The transborder structure formation was unfortunately deprived of EU financial support prospects, what together with the local poverty, made the project uncertain. A very clear example of such situation is the Black Sea Bank of Trade & Development which was to enlarge its activity but did not manage to do it, although Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece took part in that venture. Some geopolitical circumstances of Romanian location and a complicated history are also important factors which have blocked the transborder region's formation.

Table 1. Romanian Euroregions 2006

Euroregion	Date of foundation	Romania's partners	Judet / communes included in the Euroregion
Carpatica	29.04.1997	Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine	Bihor, Botoşani, Harghita, Sălaj, Maramureş, Satu Mare
Dunăre-Criş-Tisa-Mureş	21.11.1997	Hungary, Serbia	Arad, Timiş, Caraş-Severin, Hunedoara
Dunărea de Jos	22.02.1998	Moldova, Ukraine	Galaţi, Brăila, Tulcea
Prutul Superior	22.09.2000	Moldova, Ukraine	Botoşani, Suceava
Giurgiu-Ruse	23.04.2001	Bulgaria	Giurgiu (commune)
Dunărea 21	18.01.2002	Bulgaria, Serbia	Calafat, Cetate, Ciuperceni Noi, Desa, Poiana Mare
Dunărea de Sud	02.08.2002	Bulgaria	Alexandria, Roşiori de Vede, Turnu Măgurele, Zimnicea
Bihor-Hajdu Bihar	11.10.2002	Hungary	Bihor
Siret-Prut-Nistru	04.12.2002	Moldova	Iaşi, Neamţ, Vaslui
Danubis	2002*	Bulgaria	Giurgiu, Bolintin-Vale, Mihăileşti (communes)
Dunăre-Dobrogea	2002*	Bulgaria	Călăraşi, Constanţa, Ialomiţa

*First agreements linked with common projects which were to create first Euroregions.

Source: author based on Ilieş, 2004.

Ignoring the low attractiveness of Romanians neighbours, the creation of Euroregions seems to be contradictory with the Romanian reason of state because of some problems with countries like: Ukraine (some controversial issues concerning Bukovina), Moldova (accused Romania of integration pressure), Bulgaria (problems with EU financial support and Dubrogea case), Serbia and Montenegro (being under UN and EU embargo) or Hungary (according to some Romanian parties and media, Hungary requested too much autonomy for the Hungarian minority in Romania).

As we can see in the table, there were two periods of building Euroregions at the Romanian border. First, before 2001, building Euroregional structure based on existing minorities at the Hungary and Moldova border; second, developing Euroregional co-operation, especially with Bulgaria.

2. EUROREGION 'DUNĂRE-CRIȘ-TISA-MUREȘ'

The Euroregion 'Dunăre-Criș-Tisa-Mureș' was established on 27 November 1997 on the border of Romania, Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro. The name of the Euroregion comes from the names of four rivers which flow through its territory (Danubis, Tisa, Caraș, Mureș). Communes of Caraș-Severin, Hunedoara, Arad and Timiș belong to the Romanian part of the Euroregion while Bacs-Kiskun, Bekeș, Csongrad and Jasz-Nagykun-Szolnok belong to the Hungarian part. Jasz-Nagykun-Szolnok belongs also to the Carpathian Euroregion. The autonomous territory of Vojvodina belongs to Serbia and Montenegro Euroregion.

The first symptoms of the transborder co-operation were noticed in 1992 when the contacts between those two administrative centres: județ Timiș in Romania and județ Csongrad in Hungary became more frequent. In 1994 the two centres extended their co-operation over three new provinces: Romanian județ Arad, Hungarian județ Bekeș and, informally, Serbian Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

The relations among the Euroregions had not only economic but also cultural, scientific and sport character and the integration goes in a very similar way to other Euroregions in Western Europe. Moreover, the co-operation in trade, transport, communication, education, tourism, culture and sports is also progress (Rieser, 2005).

The above chart shows that the Romanian part of the Euroregion is the largest while the highest population density is in the Serbian part: 94,5 people per 1 square kilometre (the European average is 64 people per 1 square kilometre). The birth-rate is positive and it is about 3,1%. Vojvodina province is divided into seven districts, which are further divided into 45 'orașe' and 422 communities.



Fig. 2. Euroregion 'Dunăre-Criș-Tisa-Mureș'
Source: author.

Table 2. Basic data on 'Dunăre-Criș-Tisa-Mureș' Euroregion in 2004

Parts of the Euroregion	Area		Population	
	km ²	%	Thousand	%
Romanian part	32,032	41.36	1,960	33.95
Hungarian part	23,921	30.88	1,783	30.87
Serbian part	21,506	27.76	2,031	35.18
Euroregion	77,459	100.00	5,775	100.00

Source: Wendt, 2004.

The Hungarian part of the Euroregion is divided into 4 administrative-territory units which correspond to judet in Romania. They are divided into 59 orase and 272 communities. This part of the Euroregion is inhabited by 1.78 mln people which is about 30,87% of the Euroregion population and 17,5% of Hungarian population. A demographic depression is observed and the population density is 74,5 people per 1 square kilometre. The Romanian part is inhabited by 1,96 mln people which constitutes 34% of the whole

Euroregion population and 9% of the whole Romanian population. In comparison to other parts of the Euroregion, the birth-rate and the density are the lowest. The Romanian side is divided into 4 judeţ, 37 cities and 266 communities.

Theoretically the Hungarian part of Euroregion does not dominate either by area nor by number of population. However, if we consider nationality, most of them, about 60% are Hungarians by origin. From a geopolitical point of view, 'Dunăre-Criş-Tisa-Mureş' is a region with good prospects. The region itself is an area in need of transborder co-operation and unification of the three nations considering the ethnic and cultural issues. The co-operation among those three countries accelerates the process of European unification.

3. 'DUNĂREA 21' - A REGION OF THE TRANSBORDER CO-OPERATION

The association of the transborder co-operation 'Dunărea 21' was brought to life in 2002. The main factor which helped to create this Euroregion was the beginning of negotiations between the European Commission and Romania and Bulgaria on their prospective accession to the European Union. The first plans which focused on the region's transborder co-operation were created on 18 January 2002 in Vidin, Bulgaria. The plans were widely discussed among some representatives of the Romanian city of Calafat, the Bulgarian commune of Vidin and the Serbian commune of Zajecar. Formally the co-operation started on 24 September 2002. The region consisted of 21 self-government units from Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia. On the Romanian side of the Euroregion there is the city of Calafat and four communes: 'Cetate', 'Ciupercenii Noi', 'Desa' and 'Poiana Mare'. The Bulgarian part of the Euroregion consist of eight communes: 'Vidin', 'Kula', 'Belogradčic', 'Dimovo', 'Lom', 'Mokres', 'Novo Selo' i 'Rujniti'. The Serbian part includes: 'Zajecar', 'Bor', 'Negotin', 'Bolivat', 'Kladovo', 'Knjazevac', 'Majdanpek and 'Sokobanja'.

The legislative organ in the region of 'Dunărea 21' is the Council and its members come from Calafat, Zajecar and Vidin. The executive power is held by some cooperative groups whose members come from the above mentioned regions.

Two from the three member-states of the Euroregion - Romania and Bulgaria - will join the EU soon. Then, the border between Romania and Bulgaria will become an internal border of the EU, and the Serbian-Romanian border will become an external border of the EU.



Fig. 3. Euroregion 'Dunărea 21'
Source: author.

Table 3. Basic statistic data of the 'Dunărea 21' Euroregion as of 2004

Parts of the Euroregion	Area		Population	
	km ²	%	Thousand	%
Romanian part	1,033	9.93	48,7	10.0
Bulgarian part	2,237	21.51	150,6	31.3
Serbian part	7,130	68.56	284,1	58.7
Euroregion	10,400	100.00	483,4	100.00

Source: author.

There are two border terminals on the territory of the Euroregion between Romania and Serbia. There is also a very good communication link between Bulgaria and Romania thanks to the cities of Calafat and Vidin. The area possesses car, ferry and rail terminals on the road which connects the above mentioned cities. The prospective construction of a road bridge and a rail bridge will improve the transport communication in the region. The bridge project will be partly supported by PHARE funds. The Euroregion does not extend beyond the borderline between Romania and Serbia. Two road and three port terminals are included in the Euroregion but it does not encircle the Romanian territory.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The transborder co-operation on the Romanian and Serbian border is easier thanks to Romanian community living on border areas in both countries as well as Hungarian community dominating in Vojvodina in Serbia and in the Romanian parts of the Euroregion. Although the Euroregion has been established not long ago, the co-operation in the field of transportation, environment, cultural exchange and education projects has well developed. However, the intensification of the transborder co-operation with Serbia is supposed to be initiated after the accession of Romania to the EU. The co-operation in 'Dunărea 21' region progresses much more slowly than in 'Dunăre-Criș-Tisa-Mureș'. Probably the situation will change after the year 2007 when Bulgaria and Romania will join the EU. If it happens, two out of three partners in each Euroregion will be members of the EU which means they will gain much more possibilities to participate in the EU budget.

Nevertheless, it should be stated that the transborder co-operation in Romania is still in its initial phase. Notwithstanding, the Euroregions play a very important role in social and economical life. Economic development can be seen also in the countryside. New terminals, bridges, roads are being constructed, so the development of the border infrastructure appears to be crucial. Social, linguistic and cultural barriers are being eliminated by different cultural associations. The transborder co-operation enhances awareness of the inhabitants of Euroregions of their neighbours and offers a chance for the poorest and the weakest to develop and improve their lives.

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