

BORDERS AND BORDER REGIONS IN EUROPE – EUREGIOS AS A MODEL OF CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION FOR EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE?

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Abstract:

The present article deals with forms of cross-border co-operation that were established along the Dutch-German borders since the 1950s. They were testing grounds for new regional forms of governance and consolidated as one level within the European multi-level governance system. These so-called Euro-Regions also served as model in East-Central Europe after the collapse of the Communist system. The article intends to show similarities and differences between these traditional Euro-Regions and the later foundations in Eastern border-regions. It also aims to shed light on their potential to stabilize the system of open borders within the EU.

Keywords: Borders; border regions; cross-border co-operation; Euro-Regions; governance.

Today there is hardly any border region in the European Union where there exist no initiatives of cross-border co-operation. The umbrella association of such initiatives, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), lists more than 200 organised co-operations. They are different in size and range, they look back to different traditions and pursue different objectives. They reach from small, bilateral co-operations in immediate border regions as far as to European Groupings of Territorial Co-operation covering the territories of several states.¹ This co-operation is supported by the European Commission which provides quite considerable funding from the INTERREG programme. Started in 1990, the latter

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¹ On the list of AGEG members see: http://www.aebr.eu/de/mitglieder_regionsliste.php
Birte Wassenberg/Bernard Reitel, *Territorial Co-operation in Europe. A historical perspective*, 2015 [http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2015/territorial-co-operation-in-europe-a-historical-perspective/], 9/3/2018.

serves as a structural fund for the support of cross-border, trans-national and trans-regional co-operation for the purpose of reducing economic disparities in the Union, of equalising living conditions and of strengthening the economic cohesion of the domestic market. For the current period 2014-2020, 6.6 billion Euros have been provided for co-operations in immediate border regions alone.²

In the context of this territorial co-operation, the *Euregios* or *Euro-Regions*, as the cross-border regions are called, are of particular significance. It is not only that they were the first and earliest examples of cross-border co-operations, starting out from the German-Dutch border region. Also they served as the model for other initiatives and, in contrast to many other ways of trans-national co-operation, they were characterised by a high degree of being institutionalised and statutorily regulated. Initially they were founded to solve local and regional functional insufficiencies. Then in the course of the domestic market project they gained influence on the EU's regional policy which, from 1990 on, also intended to support cross-border co-operation. Thus, the *Euregios* were both a driving force of the territorial strategy of the EU's regional policy and beneficiaries of INTERREG as a financing tool, allowing for the extension and continuation of cross-border co-operation.

If at the end of the 1970s there were just twenty *Euregios* or similar structures at the internal borders of the then European Community (EC), until the end of the 1980s their number grew moderately by another twelve regions. In the 1990s there happened a real boom of foundations: 54 new formations, most of all – but not only – at the borders to the states of Central and East Europe which, after the fall of the Iron Curtain and in the course of the intended eastward enlargement after the turn of the millennium, were supposed to be led towards the European Union. Today, European regional policy cannot be imagined without the element of the *Euregios* along Europe's interior borders. Of all the above mentioned ways of co-operation, 73 are called *Euregio* or *Euro-Region*. These are small-scale units, reaching as far as to 100 km into the respective hinterland at the most. They have established reasonable spheres of action as well as a more or less close co-operation aiming at growing into one consistent cross-border region.

The here presented contribution will introduce these border regions by their double function: on the one hand, they represent a specific way of cross-border governance allowing for efficient politics in these regions. On the other hand, they have developed into an important intermediary element within the European multi-level system. This shall at first be explained by the example of the *Euregios* of the Dutch-German border region which, in a way, were a blueprint for

² http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/de/policy/co-operation/european-territorial/, 9/3/2018.

the formation of further Euregios. After the collapse of the Communist systems, a number of Euro-Regions developed also in East-Central Europe. The existing Euro-Regions served as models for cross-border co-operation but could not be copied, due to the completely different situation.

Borders – border regions – cross-border co-operation

There is no doubt that the removal of borders within the European Union is a “uniquely European achievement”³ which cannot easily be transferred to other parts of the world. Borders as political, administrative and territorial delimitations are still an indispensable fact, and globally seen they have not lost their significance. On the contrary: since the end of the Cold War their number has even increased.⁴ Insofar, what is happening in the European Union is a reverse development compared to other regions of the world.⁵ The history of Europe demonstrates that borders may delimit yet connect. Cross-border co-operation requires the existence of borders. National borders cut through regions, establish division lines and literally make regions move to the fringes.⁶ At the same time borders allow for contact-making which, after all, has become necessary only because of the specific border situation. They develop border milieus, with actors cooperating formally or informally, they create networks and new, regional identities. This phenomenon, which has been described as the “border paradox”⁷, is quite a suitable description of cross-border co-operation in the Euregios. In the six founding states of the European Coal and Steel Community, soon coexistence in the immediate post-war period developed into a degree of interwovenness, going as far as to today’s “integrated border regions”, so that national borders have hardly any separating effect anymore.⁸ On the other hand, for decades the

³ James Wesley Scott, “European Politics of Borders, Border Symbolism and Cross-Border Co-operation”, in: Thomas M. Wilson/Donnan, Hastings (Edits.), *A Companion to Border Studies*, Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2012, p. 83-98, here: p. 85.

⁴ Wilson/Hastings, *Borders and Border Studies*, in: *ibid.*, p. 1-25, here: p. 1.

⁵ However, this way rigid border regimes have not been removed but shifted to the EU’s exterior borders. Scott, *European Politics of Borders*, S. 85.

⁶ Viktor Freiherr von Malchus, “Benachteiligungen in europäischen Grenzregionen - Ansätze und Initiativen zu grenzüberschreitender Zusammenarbeit”, in: *Entwicklungsregionen in der EWG - Ursachen und Ausmaß der wirtschaftlichen Benachteiligung*, Bad Honnef 1973, p. 31.

⁷ Erik van der Vleuten/Torsten Feys, “Borders and Frontiers in Global and Transnational History”, in: *Journal of Modern European History*, no. 14, 1, 2006, pp. 29-34, here: p. 29.

⁸ Referring to the four interaction types - „alienated“, „coexistent“ , „interdependent“ and „integrated borderland“ – described by Oscar Martinez. Oscar Martinez, *Border People: Life and Society in the US-Mexico Borderlands*, Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1994, p. 6-10. Extended and completed by the typing of the chronological development in Michiel Baud/Willem van Schendel,

proverbial “Iron Curtain” was a strict division line at the eastern boundary of the European Union which did not allow for any kind of cross-border contact. However, even between the officially allied Socialist states there were no cross-border contacts in border regions. This way there developed “alienated border regions” which experienced a sometimes difficult rapprochement only after the end of the Cold War.

Traditionally, historical research has perceived the existence of national borders an indisputable political fact which served for describing the international order but was no independent subject of analysis. Parallel to the establishment of constructivist approaches of nationalism research, also the border has become an *explanandum* instead of an *explanans*. This way, the dynamics of the processes of establishing borders and the development of border regions move into focus. As borders are nothing natural but manmade, the same holds for the reverse process of structural and functional change, from being a “tough”, impregnable, to becoming a “soft”, politically-legally more permeable border.⁹ In contrast to “traditional” ways of international co-operation, such as by way of international organisations, in the context of which national borders are overcome in the sense of practical co-operation without these borders being the point of reference for co-operation, cross-border co-operation in the Euregios shows an actual, spatial and topical reference to the border. It is an alliance of neighbouring regions whose actors come together on the basis of a certain purpose of their interaction. Among this there count, in the stricter sense, the removal of the border as a physical entity, in particular border controls, and a higher permeability of the border itself. However, among this there also count steps aiming at joint regional planning. Overcoming the border and its delimiting effect is both reason and goal of cross-border co-operation, thus the border is the main topic of co-operation. However, cross-border co-operation is only possible if the border is permeable to a certain degree while at the same time, as it is a national border, being an obstacle for a region’s potentials for development, so that these obstacles are supposed to be removed by way of cross-border co-operation. As the actors of this cross-border co-operation are local and regional administrative bodies, sometimes semi-public or private actors, according to international law they are no legal entities, that is they cannot conclude any international treaty.¹⁰ The more formally the encounters, the

“Toward a comparative history of Borderlands”, in: *Journal of World History*, no. 2, 1997, p. 211-242, who speak of „embryonic“, „adolescent“, „adult“, „declining“ or „defunct borderlands“.

⁹ David Newman, “The lines that continue to separate us: borders in our ‚borderless‘ world”, in: *Progress in Human Geography* no. 30, 2, 2006, pp. 143-161.

¹⁰ Markus Perkmann, “Cross-Border Regions in Europe. Significance and Drivers of regional cross-border co-operation”, in: *European Urban and Regional Studies*, no. 10, 2, 2003, pp. 153-171, here. p. 156.

more they were thus happening within a legal grey area, from which there resulted the specific ways of institutionalised co-operation which shall be described in the following.

Cross-border co-operation in the context of the EUREGIO (Rhine-Ems-Ijssel)

The Euregio was founded in the German-Dutch border region in 1958, and it is the oldest cross-border alliance. It developed on the initiative of municipalities, cities and districts on both sides of the border which agreed on cross-border co-operation. In 1965 the name EUREGIO pushed through which, from then on, has been common for this way of cross-border co-operation and has been copied along the German-Dutch border.¹¹ Parallel to this pioneering name, the municipal associations, which initially had only developed informal networks, started to cooperate more closely in the context of the EUREGIO, for the purpose of adjusting regional development on both sides of the border and of influencing the decision-making processes at the respective national levels. The structural change of the textile industry as well as the insufficient connection to the respective national traffic networks were a problem both on the German and the Dutch side of the border. However, for efficient cross-border action the municipal actors were lacking the necessary legal competences. Furthermore, there was a general lack of concepts and expertise of cross-border regional development. Cross-border regional development was a difficult topic whose legal boundaries were defined at the national levels. Not only the understanding of regional development and the thus connected competences was different on both sides, regional development was also considered a national task, and the inclusion of a sovereign neighbouring state's territory into one's own regional development was impossible as long as it required bilateral treaties. But even the Deutsch-Niederländische Raumordnungskommission (German Dutch Commission on Regional Development), which met since 1976 as the result of an agreement between the two governments, had no competences going beyond mutual information, cross-border stock-taking of the regional situation and adjustment.¹²

The actors from the Euro-Regions did pioneering work in every respect, and while doing so they faced a number of obstacles. They had to develop the necessary expertise at all, they had to work out co-operation projects and to plan

¹¹ Euregio Rhein-Waal 1971, Euregio Maas-Rhein 1976, Ems-Dollart-Region 1977 and Euregio Rhein-Maas-Nord 1978. See also: <http://www.aebr.eu/de/mitglieder/mitgliederliste.php>, 9/3/2018.

¹² *Staatsgrenzen überschreitende Zusammenarbeit des Landes NRW*, edit. by Institut für Landes- und Stadtentwicklungsforschung des Landes NRW, Dortmund 1984, p. 12.

their implementation. For this purpose, teams for economy, labour market and regional planning were established which consisted of public administration servants from both countries and met every two months. An independent commission was in charge of socio-culturally bringing together the people on both sides of the border. By cross-border co-operation the actors meant more than just the removal of economic obstacles. The border regions were perceived as a kind of miniature Europe where the growing together of Europe was supposed to be anticipated at a small scale, by way of organising encounters of the people.

At the same time, legal and institutional foundations for this co-operation were established. The Euregios worked out a statute defining their goals: the support of cross-border development in the fields of infrastructure, economy, culture, leisure time and other societal tasks. As the most important body, the so called EUREGIO Council was established in 1978, which may be considered the first cross-border parliamentary municipal institution at the regional level. It equally consists of Dutch and German members. They are directly elected by those municipal parliaments and regional bodies as being members of the Euro-Region. Thus, their political structure reflects the political power relations of the cities and municipalities.¹³ The EUREGIO Council has never had – and does not have still today – any law-making function. It is an advisory and coordinating body and may thus be characterised as a “para-parliamentary body”.¹⁴ However, it provided the Euregio with a democratic basis and legitimation and gave expression to the EUREGIO becoming increasingly politicised. A joint office, located on the border and with German and Dutch full-time employees, pulls at the administrative strings.

Apart from overcoming the national border, whose significance was, in a way, supposed to be downgraded to a sheer administrative border between the two border regions, the guiding principle of the Euro-Regions provided for the creation of a distinct regional unit, an independent cross-border region. The Euro-Regions defined themselves as functional regions being in charge of solving problems in the fields of labour, housing, and leisure time, while at the same time, however, also creating a regional consciousness and contributing to European integration. One intended “the broadest possible, intensive encounter and merging of Dutch and German experiences, knowledge and ideas as a regional input into the integration of Europe. The long-term objective is a bilingual population, free access to all public services, developing into a cross-border and not just national region based on joint organisation.”¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁴ Markus Perkmann, *The emergence and governance of Euroregions: the case of the EUREGIO on the Dutch-German border*, Paper presented at University of Barcelona, 2005, pp. 157-181, here: p. 165.

¹⁵ From a report by the Mozer Commission, quoted after Verena Müller, *25 Jahre EUREGIO-Rat. Rückblick auf die Arbeit eines politischen Gremiums im „kleinen Europa“*, Gronau/Enschede, 2003, p. 25.

Accordingly, at first the improvement of the infrastructure was in the fore: connecting waterways or reviving cross-border railway connections which had been abandoned after World War II; making it easier to cross the border in the stricter sense – the extension of opening hours at the border checkpoints alone could be such a measure – and in the wider sense the removal of the problems of border commuters and cross-border work relations such as exchange rate issues, the recognition of educational qualifications, receiving public payments such as child allowance, to give just a few examples. Different national regulations and administrative practices as obstacles for cross-border business relations were on the agenda, just like cross-border co-operation concerning environmental issues, or energy and water supply. Finally in 1987 the great number of individual projects resulted in a cross-border action programme which was supposed to cover a planning period of 20 years. In 1989 this action programme was for the first time funded by the European Structural Fund and then, from 1990 on, transferred into the INTERREG programme. The EUREGIO was one of the first model regions to be funded this way.¹⁶

The INTERREG programme marks a break for the border region as well as for the work of the EUREGIO. At first it improved and stabilised the financial basis. From now on it was about bigger amounts of money which could be spent based on long-term planning, which led to an extension of the agendas and made work more professional. Accordingly, the institutional structure became more differentiated. For the current funding period 2014-2022, the EUREGIO alone has been provided with 30.4 million Euros of INTERREG funding¹⁷, to which the same again must be added from national and regional funding. The loss of significance of the established Euregios, which was feared as a result of the fall of the Iron Curtain and the rapid growth of Euro-Regions at the borders to East Europe, has not happened, which also holds for the concern that funding for each cross-border region might be reduced. The EUREGIO in particular has gained significance because apart from its regular tasks it has also been entrusted with the regional programme management of European funding.¹⁸ It is in charge of project development and administration, of collecting funds, and of cross-regional co-operation with other border regions.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 21.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 55

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 6. The so called certification authority INTERREG V A as well as „First-Level-Control-Authority“ for the INTERREG V A program belong to the EUREGIO.

¹⁹ EUREGIO - Unterschiede verbinden, Imagebroschüre, o.D.

[<http://www.euregio.eu/sites/default/files/downloads/EUR110404%20Imagebrosch%C3%BCre%20web.pdf>], 9/3/2018.

However, as still today “cross-sub-regional” or cross-border adjustment concerning the intended sustainable regional development “happens only partly”²⁰, basically the tasks are still the same: advice for border commuters, advice for enterprises and citizens about living and working in the neighbouring country, cross-municipal and cross-regional co-operation, and the support of encounters in the context of so called “people-to-people” projects. Economic and social objectives definitely balance each other. We can only partly speak of a shift of priorities, away from idealistic motivations at the beginning of co-operation and towards economisation under the influence of INTERREG.²¹ Even if the structure has been adjusted to funding by the EU and the benefit of being funded by the European Regional Development Fund is undebated, there are many indications that the EUREGIO, just like other older Euregional structures, have developed an identity of their own and would have developed further even without money from Brussels.²²

This is suggested both by the high share of regional co-funding and by the early institutionalisation of cross-border co-operation. Apart from internal cohesive factors, however, indeed also exterior factors influence the development of the Euro-Regions and characterise the specific profile of this way of cross-border co-operation. In terms of funding, it was the EU Commission which provided much of the material resources. Furthermore, the European Council played quite a significant role as a supporter of cross-border co-operation, providing the legal foundations for regional co-operation across national borders. One of the greatest problems of cross-border co-operation was its legal form and the search for a legal entity which would be valid on both sides of a border. Concerning this, by the Madrid Convention of 1980 the European Council passed a framework agreement on cross-border co-operation which formulated legal regulations which, however, became valid only by way of several bilateral implementation agreements. How difficult implementation is in each case becomes obvious by the fact that only as late as in 1993 Germany and the Netherlands, by the Anholt Convention, agreed on such a bilateral regulation which allowed public bodies to make agreements under public law also across borders.²³

²⁰ See the critical remark in the Annual Account 2016, *ibid.*, p. 45.

²¹ The situation is different on the Upper Rhine. Birte Wassenberg, “Qu’est-ce qui motive la coopération transfrontalière dans l’espace-franco-germano-suisse? Approche historique”, in: dies. (Edit.), *Vivre et penser la coopération transfrontalière* (Vol. 1): les régions frontalières françaises, Stuttgart : Steiner, 2010, p. 95-115.

²² Müller, 25 Jahre EUREGIO-Rat, p. 36.

²³ On this see Matthias Niedobitek, *Das Recht der grenzüberschreitenden Verträge. Bund, Länder und Gemeinden als Träger grenzüberschreitender Zusammenarbeit*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001, p. 107 f.

Governance in the EUREGIO and with the EUREGIO

Since their founding, the Euro-Regions have been subject to a constant process of differentiation and institutionalisation. A great number of actors at the various levels have been involved in this, and they interacted in each specific ways. The driving force was the functional flaws in the respective regions where the traditional structures were no longer sufficient for solving problems, which was why the actors believed it to be necessary to develop new ways of co-operation. If at first governance is quite generally defined as a „process of steering society and the economy through collective action and in accordance with common goals“²⁴, certainly this applies to the Euregios. Furthermore, governance processes are characterised by growing from below, that is they develop in the course of a “bottom-up” process. The first contacts for pursuing common interests in the border regions were sporadic, unsystematic and case-related. After there had been first successes and ideas for joint projects had successfully been developed, this initially network-like co-operation was extended and institutionalised.

As in the Euregios governance is clearly geography-related, it may as well be called “regional governance” or be characterised as “network-like, intermediary ways of regional self-control”.²⁵ However, we may speak of governance only when, beyond ad-hoc solutions for individual problems, co-operation is institutionalised in a region-related way, combined with a steering claim for the entire region. This can be exemplarily observed by the example of the EUREGIO which, starting out from initially being an only weakly institutionalised functional, i. e. referred to actual problems, institution, developed a long-term strategy for the entire region on both sides of the border.

However, not any cross-border co-operation inevitably develops into governance of a cross-border region. Factors supporting such a process are on the one hand already existing cross-border common grounds. These may be historical or cultural traditions or long-time socio-economic interdependencies.²⁶ The EUREGIO likes considering itself a region which, even after the Netherlands had gained their independence in the 17th century, formed a linguistic, cultural and

²⁴ Jacob Torfing/Eva Sørensen, “The European debate on governance networks: Towards a new and viable paradigm?”, in: *Policy and Society* no. 33, 4, 2014, pp. 329-344., here: p. 334.

²⁵ Dietrich Fürst, „Regional Governance - was ist neu an dem Ansatz und was bietet er?“, in: Joachim Beck/Birte Wassenberg (Edits.), *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit leben und erforschen (Vol. 2): Governance in deutschen Grenzregionen*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 2011, pp. 89-105, here: p. 89.

²⁶ Silvia Raich, *Grenzüberschreitende und interregionale Zusammenarbeit in einem „Europa der Regionen“: dargestellt anhand der Fallbeispiele Saar-Lor-Lux, EUREGIO und „Vier Motoren für Europa“*. Ein Beitrag zum europäischen Integrationsprozess, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1995, p. 25.

economic unit and was interconnected in a number of ways, despite the border.²⁷ Also regions are socially constituted and thus require region-related action as well as an identity-creating narrative to be consciously rooted. Common grounds are an important precondition.

On the other hand, the actors contributed to the sustainable development of governance structures. In many Euregios there are most of all state actors from the sub-national level, from municipalities and regional corporations. This is the case in most of the Euregios along the German border, sometimes completed by civil-society or semi-public actors. The strong legal position of the municipalities, due to local self-government, makes them autonomous, legally responsible and thus independent actors.²⁸ Yet still, municipalities and regional corporations are no foreign policy actors. For example, they cannot enter into international treaties.²⁹ In this concern the national states have not handed over control. Neither do the Euregios displace other Euro-Regions nor do they replace other sub-national actors. And just the same, they do not pose any threat for the national state and its sovereignty, nor do they represent any territorial fragmentation. Rather, they have established themselves as an additional element of the European multi-levelled system. The Euregios are no new administrative level but a completion of existing structures, institutions and organisations.³⁰ Their role is defined by “the EU’s further differentiation, as a result of the increasing participation of the regions as well as the regionalisation of structural policy”³¹ The administering of INTERREG funding and the implementation of programmes happen at several levels, which requires a high degree of coordination and delegation of tasks to the regional level. Within this network, for example the EUREGIO has an important function.³² It considers itself a “cross-border ‘hub’” for all German-Dutch contacts and projects in the region, a task it takes over on behalf of municipalities, cities and

²⁷ This identity-creating narrative is found in many publications by the EUREGIO, see e. g. EUREGIO. *Eine europäische Grenzregion und ein Programm*, edit. by EUREGIO/Gronau 1978.

²⁸ This is different in many European countries where the provincial level is more important, such as Italy, or the national government is more significant, such as in France. See also Perkmann, “The emergence and governance of Euroregions”, p. 163.

²⁹ Niedobitek, *Das Recht der grenzüberschreitenden Verträge*, p. 62.

³⁰ On the aspect of the complementary see Joachim Beck/Eddie Pradier, “Governance in der transnationalen Regionalpolitik. Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven der Kooperationsbeziehungen in grenzüberschreitenden Verflechtungsräumen”, in: Beck/Wassenberg, *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit leben und erforschen*, 2013, Vol 2, pp. 107-135, here: p. 108.

³¹ Arthur Benz, „Governance in Mehrebenensystemen“, in: Gunnar Folke Schuppert, *Governance-Forschung. Vergewisserung über Stand und Entwicklungslinien*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2006, p. 95-120, here: p. 95.

³² *Ibid.* p. 96

districts.³³ It holds a key position, in the context of which it connects horizontal to vertical networks, manages applications by and projects of other members, and hands them over and communicates them to the next-higher authority.³⁴ Indeed, the Euro-Regions have only little legislative and only limited executive power, yet still they have an important coordinating governance function. Meanwhile this institutionalised way of cross-border co-operation, which here has been exemplarily presented by the example of the German-Dutch Euregios and their historical development, runs around the Federal Republic of Germany like a „paragovernmental tier of transnational co-operation“.³⁵

Euregios as a role model for East Central Europe?

During the Cold War the boundary between the East and the West was an insurmountable barrier preventing any cross-border contact in the border regions. However, even between the Socialist “brother states” there were no such contacts. Also this had to do with historical burdens. For example, territorial restructuring after World War II produced the result that on the German-Polish border many cities were separated along Oder and Neiße. Resettlements on the Polish side changed the structure of society on the border. After the rigid separation of the first post-war years, from the 1960s on developed a certain degree of coexistence and co-operation. However, very often these contacts were decreed, often at Party level.³⁶ The situation on the Polish-Czech border was not different until 1989, which was particularly a result of the marked centralism of the Socialist states. Only with the end of the Cold War there developed the prospect of removing the border. The then happening functional change of the border, in particular Germany’s border to its eastern neighbours, was rapid. As a result of German reunification, suddenly Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg and Saxony were at the EU’s exterior frontier, then as a result of the accession of the Czech Republic and Poland to the EU in 2004 these borders became a new interior border which, with the latter countries’ accession to the Schengen Area, became even more permeable.

³³ Wim L.G. Schelberg, “EUREGIO. Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit in der Praxis“, in: Heinz Heineberg/Klaus Temnitz (Edits.), *Münsterland - Osnabrücker Land/Emsland - Twente. Entwicklungspotentiale und grenzübergreifende Kooperation in europäischer Perspektive*, Hamm, 1998, pp. 55-61, here: p. 55

³⁴ Perkmann, “The emergence and governance of Euroregions“, p. 170.

³⁵ James Wesley Scott, “Transboundary Co-operation on Germany’s Borders: Strategic Regionalism through Multilevel Governance“, in: *Journal of Borderlands Studies* no. 15, 1, 2000, pp. 143-167.

³⁶ Elzbieta Opilowska, “Zwei Städte auf der Suche nach einer gemeinsamen Identität im erweiterten Europa“, in: Joachim Beck/Birte Wassenberg (Edits.), *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit leben und erforschen (Vol. 5): Integration und (trans-)regionale Identitäten*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 2013, pp. 287-300.

Already in 1989 the PHARE programme was started, which served for bringing Poland and Hungary towards the European Union and was later extended to all accession candidates in East and Central Europe. In many cases Euregios were founded bottom-up, as a result of immediate cross-border contacts. Just the same, they were motivated by getting access to EU funding. Consequently, this was masterminded by the national governments.³⁷ In the Bavarian-Czech border region co-operation was started by an agreement between the Prime Ministers of Bavaria and the Czech Republic respectively. On the Saxonian-Czech border, on the other hand, it was initiated by actors from the immediate border regions where, between 1991 and 1994, there developed five Euro-Regions along the German-Czech border.³⁸ Also on the Polish border a number of Euro-Regions were founded within just a few years, which was made easier by the signing of bilateral or multi-lateral agreements between the states.³⁹ On the German-Czech border, cross-border co-operation was more difficult because of legal obstacles, as there was no bilateral agreement between Germany and the Czech Republic, such as the Anholt Agreement between Germany and the Netherlands. Municipal co-operation in the form of a cross-border special purpose association was legally impossible, as there was no treaty allowing for this. Thus, due to their legal flexibility, the Euro-Regions were the suitable organisational form, as joint municipal projects did not require any special legal basis, thus allowing for rather unbinding yet efficient, practice-oriented co-operation. Similar to the long-time practice on the German-Dutch border, they were organised according to the law of associations of one member, mostly the German one.

The trilateral Euro-Region of Neisse-Nisa-Nysa, founded on the German-Czech-Polish border in 1991, was particularly strongly oriented at the model of the traditional Euregios in the German-Dutch border region, and in some respects it shows similarities. There the development of cross-border co-operation was positively influenced by the fact that until World War II had been a united

³⁷ Vladimír Goněc, "The Transborder Regions of the EU: a successful or failed tool for reconciliation and partnership. The experience in Slovakia and Czech Republic", in: Nicolae Păun/ Sylvain Schirmann (Edits.), *Borders, Identities, Communities. The Road to Reconciliation and Partnership in Central and Eastern Europe*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016, pp. 177-194.

³⁸ The Euro-Regions of Neiße-Nisa-Nysa, of Elbe/Labe, of Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří, the Euregio Egrensis and the Euro-Region of Bayerischer Wald-Böhmischer Wald-Mühlviertel

³⁹ A total of 16, 4 along the western border to Germany, 7 on the southern border to Czechoslovakia, 3 on the eastern to Ukraine and Belarussia, and 2 on the northern border to the Baltic states. Marek Olszewski, "Euroregional co-operation as a contribution to European Integration. The Example of the Euroregion Śląsk Cieszyński (Cieszyn Silesia)", in: Birte Wassenberg/Joachim Beck (Edits.), *Living and Researching Cross-Border Co-operation (volume 3): The European Dimension*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 2011, pp. 269-282.

economic sphere and habitat. A negative effect, on the other hand, were the historical burdens from the recent past, the period of National Socialism and the subsequent expulsion of the Sudeten Germans. Thus, there was no basis for the development of any cross-border identity in the region.⁴⁰ And after Germany's reunification it was most of all the different speed of socio-economic development which made the regions on both sides of the border move further apart from each other. On the German side the *Aufbau Ost* (Eastern Build Up) was successful, if not as rapidly and to the extent as expected, so that there was much emigration from the Saxonian border region to West Germany, to an extent that a clear asymmetry between the members of this Euregio had to be stated. Thus, the conditions were clearly less favourable than in the German-Dutch border region in the 1950s. E. g. there was a general lack of infrastructural preconditions on the Czech and Polish sides, such as mobility or means of communication. Furthermore, in the participating states happened an extensive social, political and administrative transformation process which was characterised by decentralisation and administrative reform and made continuous co-operation more difficult.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it was there where the first socially accepted way of cross-border co-operation in Central and East Europe were established. Organisation and structure were oriented at the model of the German-Dutch Euregios. Members are the regional corporations, cities, municipalities, or the municipal associations. Like the EUREGIO, they are organised as registered associations. They have no law-making function but pass decisions and make recommendations which must be implemented by national bodies. This co-operation is characterised by a high degree of formalisation and institutionalisation, with statutes or rules of procedure, offices, differentiated structures including decision-making bodies such as councils or chairmanships. Subject-related work is done in teams whose topics are oriented at local requirements. On the German-Czech border these are e. g. security issues, which are of great significance, environmental issues or, like after the last Elbe high water, flood prevention.⁴² The immediate transfer of the organisational form of the Euregio, however, proved to be difficult, as the region is less homogeneous than the models it is oriented at. Still today there is no joint secretariat. In this trilingual

⁴⁰ Hartmut Kowalke/Milan Jerábek/Christian Preußscher, "Grenzüberschreitende Nachbarschaft und regionale Identität. Das Beispiel des sächsisch-böhmischen Grenzraums", in: Beck/Wassenberg, *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit leben und erforschen* (Vol. 5), pp. 233-254.

⁴¹ Katrin Böttger, *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit in Europa. Erfolge und Misserfolge der Kooperation am Beispiel der EUREGIO (Rhein-Ems-Ijssel), der Euregio Maas-Rhein und der Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa*, Tübingen: EZFF, 2006, p. 67.

⁴² Thomas Groh, "Die grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit an der deutsch-tschechischen Grenze", in: Beck/Wassenberg, *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit leben und erforschen* (Vol. 2), pp. 307-323.

region (including the Sorbian language there are even four languages), also language deficits prove to be a problem which does not only make the work of the bodies difficult. Interpreters are necessary even for the bodies of the Euro-Regions.⁴³ Also and most of all the people-to-people projects, which are so important for socio-cultural encounters, are more difficult to organise. In this region, the road to the distant goal of cross-border co-operation, to the growing together to one, unitary, region, is much more stony.

On the whole, like in other border regions in East and Central Europe, co-operation on the German-Czech border has become more intensive and has condensed to a network of cross-border relations, although intensity and density are not as marked as in the core states of the European Union and particularly on the German-French and German-Dutch borders. There, cross-border co-operation is more than 30 years ahead, and the new Euregios must still catch up with this.

Conclusion

Euro-Regions are often considered testing grounds for new regional ways of governance in the EU. At the same time they are considered – in particular by their actors – both “testing grounds” and “driving forces” of European integration.⁴⁴ Not without reason there is the objection that Euregios can indeed not serve as a model for the further development of the EU, as they are not supra-nationally structured but are based on ways of intergovernmental co-operation. Furthermore, their efficiency is doubted as, due to the different political-administrative structures at the national levels, different levels are in charge which will never come together to form unitary constellations of actors.⁴⁵ If in the former case the significance of the Euregios is overestimated, in the latter case their possibilities are underestimated. Cross-border regions are certainly no sure formula for solving the problems of the European Union, problems resulting from the balancing act between efficiency on the one hand and transparency, closeness to citizens and democratic legitimation on the other. However, the region makes the individual citizen see and feel the actual

⁴³ Ibid. p.319.

⁴⁴ Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung Rheinland, NW 400, Nr. 202, Empfehlungen aufgestellt von der Konferenz aus Vertretern der auftraggebenden Ministerien und Gebietskörperschaften, 25.06.1969.

⁴⁵ Tobias Chilla, “Grenzüberschreitende Verflechtung - ein Fall von postsouveräner Raumentwicklung?“, in: Ulrike Jureit/Nikola Tietze (Edits.), *Postsouveräne Territorialität. Die Europäische Union und ihr Raum*, Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2015, pp. 191-209. For example, in the Netherlands other administrative levels are in charge of regional planning than in Germany. Also the position of the mayor and the way in which he/she understands him/herself cannot be compared: in the Netherlands, mayors are appointed and not directly elected like in Germany. These are but two examples out of many.

material added value of Europe. At the same time, the cross-border regions are much more appreciated by European regional policy. And not at last, the existence of Euregios gives testimony to the regions being Europeanised. By help of the way of governance developed there they influence regional policy both at the national and the European level. They hold a crucial position within Europe's multi-level system, which allows them to influence the cross-level coordination and network structures in two directions, vertically and horizontally. They thus play a role for the articulation and implementation of EU policies both at the level of the national states and the regions, just like they communicate EU policies to the regions and distribute funding. This happens partly by immediate contact to the Commission. Thus, even if the Euregios are no foreign policy actors in the classical sense, still they do "small scale foreign policy"⁴⁶. As concerns the first foundations of Euregios, we may certainly speak of a success story. Concerning the Euregios founded after 1989/90, for the time being this may be stated only with reservations. Proven models, this has become obvious and may be demonstrated by further examples, cannot be easily transferred but must be adjusted to the respective situations and constellations of the individual border regions. Euregios are an integral part of Europe's multi-level system and part of the governance of border regions. In this function they can indeed effectively contribute to politics, and in the long run they have the potential to develop cross-border systems of government. This sounds rather utopian at a time when we must wait and see if cross-border co-operation is capable at all of keeping the idea of open interior borders in Europe alive and of practicing open borders.

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⁴⁶ Birte Wassenberg, "Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit in Europa als Mittel der „kleinen“ deutschen Außenpolitik: das Beispiel des Oberrheins", in: *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande* no. 47, 2015, pp. 77-96.

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