

# Cross-border Euro-regional activation and regional development in Slovakia

## *Cezhraničná – euroregionálna aktivizácia a regionálny rozvoj na Slovensku*

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**Abstract:** Social-political transition in the former socialist countries led to a new understanding of borders and created the prerequisites for renaissance and significant activation of the cross-border co-operation. This way, Slovakia along with other countries joined the Euro-regional movement in Europe, which spread since the end of 60-ies through Western-European countries. Formation and institutionalisation of Euro-regional relations, links and co-operation was initially hindered by a whole range of obstacles, including the ones with political background. It was obvious mainly in Slovakia where it influenced the existence and potential establishment of new Euro-regional associations. Rebirth of the Euro-regional activities started after 1998. Currently, there are Euro-regions practically operating along the entire Slovak border with its neighbours. The extent and form of institutionalisation and professional staffing varies. Activities of Euro-regions are merely based on projects which bring funding. Projects are broadly oriented, while the prevailing focus is currently on the economic activation of Euro-regions. There is a lack of partner co-operation and co-ordination of activities between countries and their activities, including cross-border activities and activities of Euro-regions. Euro-regional activities play a significant role in activation of border areas in the country, while they have a complementary character for the regional state policy and regional policy of self-governed regions which is being formulated.

**Key words:** social-political transition, border, border regions, social-territorial situation, cross-border co-operation, civil activation, Euro-region, institutionalisation, regional development

**Abstract:** Spoločensko-politická tranzícia v niekdajších socialistických krajinách viedla aj k zmene chápania hranice a vytvorila predpoklady na renesanciu a výraznú aktivizáciu cezhraničnej spolupráce. Tým sa tieto krajiny, včítane Slovenska pripojili k euroregionálnemu hnutiu v Európe, ktoré od konca 60-tych rokov sa šírilo vo vtedajších západoeurópskych krajinách. Formovanie a inštitucionalizácia euroregionálnych vzťahov, väzieb a spoluprác narážalo v počiatkoch na celý rad prekážok, včítane prekážok s politickým pozadím. V tomto období sa to významne prejavovalo práve na Slovensku a ovplyňovalo to možnosti pôsobenie existujúcich a možnosti vzniku nových euroregionálnych združení. Oživenie euroregionálnych aktivít nastáva po roku 1998. V súčasnosti po celej dĺžke slovenských hraníc s jeho susedmi pôsobia euroregióny. Miera a formy inštitucionalizácie a profesionalizácie ich činnosti je rôzna. Činnosť euroregiónov z veľkej miery stojí na projektových aktivitách, prostredníctvom ktorých sa tieto uchádzajú o finančné prostriedky. Projekty majú širokospektrálny záber, pričom narastá orientácia na tie projekty, ktoré ovplyvňujú hospodársku aktivizáciu euroregionálnych území. Určitým nedostatkom je, že viazne partnerská spolupráca a koordinácia aktivít medzi samosprávnymi krajinami a ich aktivitami, včítane cezhraničných a aktivitami euroregiónov. Euroregionálne aktivity sú významné pre aktivizáciu prihraničných území krajiny a majú komplementárny charakter k regionálnej politike štátu a formujúcej sa regionálnej politike samosprávnych krajov.

**Kľúčové slová:** spoločensko-politická tranzícia, hranica, prihraničné regióny, sociálno-priestorová situácia, cezhraničná spolupráca, občianska aktivizácia, euroregión, inštitucionalizácia, regionálny rozvoj

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## CROSS-BORDER EURO-REGIONAL ACTIVATION IN THE SOCIAL TRANSITION PROCESS

Forms of cross-border co-operation and cross-border relationships as such are linked with the phenomenon of border defining the space and at the same time separating territories. For most of human history, borders, especially between states, served to separate, create barriers, to filter, to protect, etc. Due to its "space defining" character serving mainly to political and economic interests, it was a space of uncertainty and conflicts inducing warfare, political, economic and cultural isolation. In other words, for many decades border used to express a negative more than positive connotation. With regard to this experience and in an effort to change this predominantly negative understanding to a more positive one, the European Charter of Border and Cross-Border Regions from 1994 declares in its Preamble that borders between states are defined as "scars of history", which should be changed to a space of positively oriented contacts and links by means of cross-border co-operation, in order to gradually moderate diving and impermeable character of the border. The European Charter of Border and Cross-Border Regions was preceded by a whole range of activities reflecting changing political and economic climate in the Western part of Europe after 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, mainly throughout 60-ies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which led to establishment of the Association of European Border Regions – AEBR in 1971 (Cross-border regional co-operation was supported by the European Framework Agreement on Cross-Border Co-operation signed in Madrid in 1980).

Formation of cross-border co-operation and its Euro-regional character may be linked with the gradual enforcement of civil society principles (Wallace 1993) as basis for modern state functioning. The basis is the fact that a citizen is being activated in satisfaction of his/her needs and expectations, whether individual or group ones. For this purpose, a citizen forms various civil institutions taking over a whole range of competencies formerly facilitated by the state agencies, or facilitating the space which did not used to be filled with any activities. Sociological dimension of the issue (which social groups are being activated in fulfilment of which types of needs; what networks of relationships are being created, who is marginalised in society, etc.) overlaps with a significantly political dimension. It leads to redefinition of the role of state and actors in formulating policies and it is also a question of the distribution of competencies, functioning of the political system, etc.

Social-political change occurring after 1989 in Central and Eastern-Europe creates space for enforcement of the civil society principles even in this part of Europe. Activation in cross-border co-operation forms a part of social-political change. Such activation is initially a spontaneous and local process with actors being just individual municipalities situated in border areas contacting their neighbours from the other side of the border. However, this initially individual process soon becomes a spontaneous movement forming bonds of municipalities aiming at territorial co-operation with similar clusters of municipalities on the other side of the border. Nonetheless, the gradual institutionalisation process of such cross-border co-operation must have respected or deal with:

- Legislative conditions administering range of competencies to international co-operation and association of residential entities,
- Political will to support such activities
- Conditions of territorial and administrative division of the given country and the related competencies in the area of cross-border and international co-operation of the administrative entities

## CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION AND EURO-REGIONS IN SLOVAKIA

Slovakia, due to its size and position, but mainly to the administrative division, is "a border country". This metaphoric characteristic is based on the fact that all present self-governed regional entities (higher territorial units) are situated on the state border. Slovakia has no "inner-state" self-governed territorial unit, which stresses the character of border, conditions for cross-border relations and co-operation – to what extent the border is a barrier and to which it is a space of contact. Social-political change from the end of 1989 had significantly influenced the process of changes linked with border, its function, importance and impacts on forms of social existence within the border space. That related mainly to the border with former socialist partners, but most of all to breakthrough the physical, ideological and social border – "iron curtain" with so called Western Europe. The form of spontaneity in applying cross-border contacts may be characterised by the description of direct participants from the Slovak-Austrian border:

*"Záhorská Ves – People from Angern came, the first semi-official visit ... their Mayor came, various representatives from our country visited us, it was discussed what could be done in the future, what contacts may be made with their municipality."*

*“Gajary – ... I participated in the first meetings as nearby Morava. We have organised it in few days and very many people came, from the surrounding villages ... really and it was a very pleasant feeling ... if only you saw it ... singing, people were singing and walking towards Morava, murals ... it is truly an unforgettable experience.”*

*“Moravský Svätý Ján – It was so beautiful. It was something ... to see something we have not seen for so many years and now, that we came there, they were on one bank, we were on the other one. ... When we were allowed to go through Mikulov, we went the way to Hohenau ... visited their Mayor and entered into contacts and then we organised a historical parade on Silvester ... a day, a day prior to Silvester. And they started from there and we started from here. There was brass music there and here. There were 12 000 people here approximately... They were on one bank, we were on the other one and with a boat, then there was their Mayor and a local MP, the priest ... They rode to our side, we welcomed them with a slivovica, bread and salt and so we welcomed them. TV shot it then. It was magnificent then ...” (Faltan 2003).*

At the beginning of 90-ies, first legislative prerequisites were created for cross-border co-operation, which was linked with adoption of the Act of SNR 369/1990 Coll. on Municipal Establishment from September 6, 1990, which provided municipalities with the opportunity to enter into international co-operation and contacts. Above all, border municipalities started to make use of it, while the individual contacts grew into the co-operation between associations formed on both sides of the border. Such attempts started to appear in the first half of 90-ies. It meant establishment of co-operation within more or less compact territories. Local administration has not existed at that time; the existing districts represented territorial-administrative units ruled by the state (state administration) and later in 1996 joined by regional territorial-administrative units equally governed by the state. At that time, the state had no interest in entering into certain entities (associations), which on the basis of civil principle united municipalities with the aim of performing cross-border co-operation. Therefore, the first initiatives in this direction undertaken even by some district authorities in Eastern Slovakia within a framework of Carpathian Euro-region formation (1993) were hindered by the state power. Along with that, the pressure from the state also stopped activities undertaken by the representatives of the Association of Municipalities in Eastern Slovakia, who were the main initiators of the Euro-region establishment and

left them in position of observers for several years onwards. Such an experience translated itself even into the extent and forms of cross-border activities of the second-in-row Euro-region, which was founded in Slovakia in early 90-ies, i.e. the Euro-region Tatry in the Slovak-Polish border area (1994). The activities of the Slovak side of the Euro-region relied on the bilateral international treaty on co-operation between Slovakia and Poland, which, especially in the case of Hungary, Slovak representatives of the Euro-region Carpathian Mountains could not refer to. Despite that, the activities of the Slovak side were limited by capacity (incl. financial) of the members – municipalities, since the state tolerated it, did not really supported it, as it was in the case of Polish partner. It points out to the fact that at the beginning of 90-ies, spontaneous attempts for formation of Euro-regions in Slovakia collided with some objective barriers, when a newly-created state (established on January 1, 1993) only started to form its foreign policy, including relationships with its immediate neighbours. At the same time, political animosity with the ethnical background grew, mainly in relations between Slovaks and Hungarians (domestic and inter-state ones), which affected the political climate and political will (or resentment) towards cross-border civil (i.e. not state-controlled) initiatives. Equally, with regard to the fact that decentralisation process had been gradually enforced, it reflected the fact that “state” was yet a little hesitant in releasing some of its competency to other, non-state, i.e. self-administering entities of public administration, or other components of civil character. It mainly tried to de-concentrate international relationships which should exist between the territory-representing entities within a limited extent – that is why certain competencies were granted to the state administration on district level and level of the newly-established regions (1996). Establishment of regional administration with certain competencies in this matter was postponed in time. Equally, the formation of new Euro-regions stopped when they did not accept the above-mentioned factors of their establishment.

Political climate and attitudes of state to Euro-regional initiatives started to change after 1998 despite the fact that the transfer of state competencies to self-governed institutions and preparation for foundation of regional administration should yet take some more time and efforts in their enforcement. However, the political space was created in order to re-start civil initiatives for activation of the cross-border co-operation leading to the establishment of further Euro-regions and Euro-regional associations. Currently, we register Euro-regions and Euro-regional associations

mentioned below, with introduced year of establishment and residence of the Slovak part, while we also mention those which are in the state of preparation for establishment:

#### **Euro-regions and Euro-regional associations at the Slovak-Hungarian border**

- Association Carpathian Euro-Region, (centre in Slovakia – Prešov) – 1993, full membership of the Slovak part since 1999
- Euro-region Košice – Miškolc (Košice) – being formed in 2003
- Euro-region Kras (Jablonov nad Turňou) – being formed in 2003
- Union of Slaná and Rimava – Euro-region Slaná – Rimava (Rimavská Sobota) – since 2000
- Region Neogradiensis – Euro-region Neogradiensis (Lučenec) – since 1999
- Ípeľ Euro-region (Šahy) – since 1999
- Regional Association Váh – Dunaj – Ípeľ, Euro-region Váh – Dunaj – Ípeľ (Nitra), since 1999
- Dunaj – Dolný Váh Regional Association (Dunajská Streda) – since 2001
- Euro-region Bratislava – Vien – Györ (Sopron, Brno?) – is being formed

#### **Euro-regions at the Slovak-Ukrainian border**

- Association Carpathian Region – Carpathian Euro-region, (centre in Slovakia – Prešov)
- Poloniny Euro-region – in the stage of preparations

#### **Euro-regions at the Slovak-Polish border**

- Beskydy Region – Euro-region Beskydy (Žilina) – since 1999
- Association Region “Tatry” – Euro-region Tatry (Kežmarok) – since 1994
- Euro-region Poloniny – in the stage of preparation

#### **Euro-regions at the Slovak-Czech border**

- Beskydy Region (Žilina)
- Biele Karpaty Region – Euro-region Biele/Bílé Karpaty (Trenčín) – since 2000
- Euro-region Weinviertel – Pomoravie-Záhorie – Južná Morava (Holíč) – since 1999
- Euro-region Bratislava – Vien – Györ (Sopron, Brno?) – is being formed

#### **Euro-regions at the Slovak-Austrian border**

- Euro-region Weinviertel – Pomoravie-Záhorie – Južná Morava (Holíč) – since 1999
- Euro-region Bratislava – Vien – Györ (Sopron, Brno?) – is being formed

## **SOCIAL-TERRITORIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SLOVAKIAN BORDER REGIONS**

It was mentioned somewhere else that with regard to the fact that border was a dividing line, a barrier and a space isolating the country from neighbour and at the same time by space in which first conflicts appeared between the states, it was an area in which not much was invested. These were often territories of civilisation retardation, space of marginalisation. Attempts to activate these territories led to establishment of the Association of European Border Regions and further activities including the establishment of Euro-regions. According to A. Gasparini, the basis of Euro-regions is to support regional development through institutionalised forms of cross-border cooperation in order to develop a region which would otherwise be marginalised with the respective impact on quality of people's life in these territories (Gasparini 2004). Social-territorial situation in the Slovak border area largely corresponds with these prerequisites of marginalisation. The analysis of social-territorial situation in Slovakia points out to this fact, since the most problematic areas concentrate in the regions of Southern border line extending from West to East, eastern strip in North-South, but also in the parts of Northern strip in West-East direction (Faltán, Pašiák 2004). In many indicators, the above-mentioned scope of issues is identical: high rate of unemployment, limited number of jobs, problems with economic restructuring, infrastructural retardation in transport infrastructure as well as in other technical and social infrastructures. Those characteristics need to be complemented by problems with the social-demographic structure of communities in the given regions. It is mainly in the Southern strip that the unfavourable age structure of population affected by ageing process occurs, while in the Northern and North-Eastern strip, demographical situation is more favourable, yet more influenced by job migration with the significant share of long-term foreign job migration. On top of that, these problematic areas are cross-border neighbours with regions which belong to more difficult ones in their countries (especially North-Eastern part of Hungary, Sub-Carpathian Ukraine and South-Eastern Poland). In Southern part of the border area, social-territorial situation is affected by the dominant position of Bratislava. On one hand, it is bound to a significant part of population from the region (in past, a strong permanent migration and intensive work mobility, while the later still persists), on the other hand, it has recently become an attractive residential area for the original Bratislava inhabitants, or those migrants who

are bound with Bratislava. Social-territorial situation of this territory is also influenced by the fact that it lies in the contact territory of attractive part of the Czech Republic, Austria or Hungary. The Western border area in Northern-Southern strip is built upon "hereditary relations and bonds" with Czech territory in the former Czechoslovakia and at the same time upon the fact that the Slovak border regions used to be and still are economically weaker, mainly in the Northern-Western corner, but also in the Myjava-Skalica part. Social-territorial situation in this region has recently been characterised by economic activation of the territory starting from Trnava Northward, including Middle Považie. South-Western, as well as the Western border strip is characterised by better infrastructural quality due to the international corridors (railway, road and water – Danube), with some problems in connection with Austria in the Záhorie part of Slovak-Austrian border. A significant factor in border regions of Slovakia, especially in its Southern and Eastern strip, or Northern-Eastern strip, is its multi-ethnic character (strong concentration of Hungarian nationality in Southern and South-Eastern strip, with large Roma population and islands of German minority, some Ukrainians and Ruthenians in the North-Eastern and Eastern parts of the border area, including Roma population).

### **SOME PROBLEMS CONCERNING INSTITUTIONALISATION OF EURO-REGIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Enforcement of the idea or a model of Euro-regions as one of the forms of cross-border regional co-operation in transforming post-socialist countries was just a beginning of the seeking process, or formation of their actual institutional forms. Despite the fact that the bottom-up initiated activities formed joined Euro-regional entities, such territorial entities, in terms of legislation, must be based on respect for legislation of the maternal country of participants involved in the Euro-region. That was also reflected in the process of institutionalisation, formation of the common bodies, links and partner relations with state administration or administration in the maternal country, in ways of financing activities, etc. Such background differences may influence the possibilities for fulfilment of the Euro-regional programmes and objectives. For instance, even though after 1998 the official political climate in Slovakia started to be more positive

towards the Euro-regional activation, membership is based mainly upon municipalities (rural and urban ones), less upon member participation of the state administration agencies – the Euro-region Karpaty being an exception, with regional authorities being members (Prešov and Košice) – or regional governments – once again only the Euro-region Karpaty has the higher territorial unit Košice as a member. On the Hungarian side – e.g. from the Euro-region Slaná-Rimavica – three border counties are members and initiators of the Euro-region, though they have no counterpart on the Slovak side within the given Euro-region<sup>1</sup>. It signalizes a certain imbalance which may affect even the Euro-regional potential.

At the beginning, Slovak membership base in Euro-regions was mainly represented by municipalities, actually their administrations, only later, after 1998, this membership expanded and self-governed higher territorial units as well as the territorial state administration (regional authorities), civil associations and business entities had been given a chance to become members. However, municipalities still dominate. In the institutionalisation process, Euro-regions started to create their own elected and executive institutions based on nationality, which later formed a joint coordinating body via delegation. This body meets according to the agreed schedule and the presidency rotates on the basis of the approved key. Joint working committees (commissions, groups, etc.), which form part of the Euro-regional structures, focus on the agreed issues (such as economy, environment, culture, information, etc.) which they would like to tackle on their territory.

Euro-regions, with their programmes oriented on the resolution of issues in their territory, are less and less involved in project preparation, which is directly linked with the ability to receive the adequate funding, facilitation of respective documentation, etc. It leads to a situation, where Euro-regions' activities, which used to be an expanded agenda of the local administration managing the Euro-regional association, had to be gradually excluded in terms of territory, organisation and staffing and build its own professional personnel. Establishment of offices (secretariats) of Euro-regions and their professional staffing has various forms and pace. Surveys in several selected Euro-regions in Slovakia pointed out to the fact there is in general a close link to the municipal government in the national centre of the Euro-region which usually provides premises in its buildings and delegates staff to carry out the Euro-regional agenda.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the interview with the Tisovec town Mayor (district of Rimavská Sobota), the Chairman of the Slovak part of the Euro-region Slaná-Rimavica.

There are also cases where the Euro-regional associations rent their premises and conclude contracts on the performance of work with the selected persons in order to handle their agenda. Euro-region Tatry with its residence in Nowy Targ shows that institutionalisation and professional staffing may go even further when as of January 2004, the Polish Euro-regional partner has been fully independent with its own building, and apart from its own fully professional 5-member apparatus, it also runs a Slovak-Polish Centre in its building.

Certain problems in common Euro-regional activities – implementation of joint projects – may arise if the extent of institutionalisation and professional staffing varies between partners of the common Euro-region.

## PROGRAMME AND PROJECT ACTIVITIES

In general, programs of Euro-regions are relatively ambitious in declaring their multidimensional support for the development of the region within Euro-regional borders. They declare to focus of the following areas:

- economic
- infrastructural
- environmental
- social-cultural and sport
- information and promotion

Fulfilment of these programmes depended on the abilities to transform them into concrete projects with the necessary personal and organisational backing and financial support. In other words, the ability to win a “competition” of projects for financing determined which priorities and to what extent would be gradually implemented. Here, Euro-regions, or Euro-regional associations operate as civil associations applying for the financial support for projects, which contradicts more or less the concealed worry of politicians from the beginning of 90-ies, when Euro-regional initiatives in Slovakia started to be formed, that they could gradually lead to a certain form of the territorial-administrative legal exclusion of border Euro-regional territories from administration of the given state.

At the beginning, activities related to the common social-cultural or sports events were easier to undertake. Even nowadays, these activities form an important part of the Euro-regional activities and broader projects such as:

*In the Ipel Euro-region, projects like “We live on one riverbank” (2002), or “Summer in Euro-region” (2004, were involved in the 21<sup>st</sup> Days of Culture in Hont, at the Folk Festival “Singing Ipel Valley” in Ipel Sokolec, at the Municipal celebrations in Plášťovce, at the Wine Festival – Wine-Picking celebrations in Vinica).<sup>2</sup>*

Important activities involve the information-promotional activities of the Euro-region space. They usually form part of broader projects. Typically, such activities should promote the Euro-region outside, since they do not only provide information on the Euro-region, but also promote its certain qualities and specifics:

*In the Tatry Euro-region, as part of the project “Rainbow of Euro-region Tatry” (2002), the publication “Region Tatry – what do you know about us?” was published. In 2003, the promotional and information brochure “Euro-region Tatry – treasury of folk architecture” was issued.*

*Within the framework of activities undertaken by the Euro-region Karpaty and projects implemented by them in order to develop tourism, promotional documents focusing on wooden churches, belfries, castles, chateaus and spa were published in border area of the Slovak part of the Euro-region.*

Analysis in the selected Euro-regions indicate that despite the fact that they even publish their information bulletins, broader and more systemic media promotion of the Euro-regional activities which would form the common Euro-regional awareness is missing.

In order to activate the cross-border co-operation in border areas, it is very important to consider the quality of transport infrastructure, especially the one running over the border. In this respect, border areas were and still are relatively under-dimensioned. That is why the problem of border crossings draws attention of the Euro-regional policies. Euro-regions were important initiators and supporters of investments into the newly opened border crossings (transport and special tourist ones) in Orava, Spiš, the Slovak-Hungarian border and the Slovak-Austrian border area. Such initiatives now take form of pre-investment analysis, such as transport strategies, etc.

*The Euro-region Karpaty has drafted a project “Development of Transport Infrastructure in the Carpathian Euro-region”.*

*In the Ipel Euro-region, a project titled “Ipel bridges” was drafted in 2003 with the aim of initiating construction of bridges across the Ipel river, which were demolished in the World War 2.*

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<sup>2</sup> Based on written document “Ipel Euro-region” elaborated by office of Ipel Euro-region.

Recently, the focus of Euro-regional activities is shifting to economic sphere. Euro-regions initiate or co-initiate creation of a space for economic activation. It encourages meetings of entrepreneurs, fairs and exhibitions, it forms information background for the business sphere, and it organizes specialised events, seminars and conferences. The following selected activities could be typologically broken down to:

- Specialised – analytical
  - Within the Euro-region Tatry – “Slovak-Polish economic forum*
  - “Strategy of economic and social development of the Region Tatry*
  - Within the Euro-region Slaná-Rimava – seminar titled “Investment incentives for development of regions after accession into the EU”*
- Contract-offer
  - Within the Euro-region Beskydy – “Economic forum of towns and municipalities in the Euro-region Beskydy”*
  - Within Euro-region Slaná-Rimava – “Gemera – Expo” – contracting-sales exhibition*
- Information-consulting
  - Euro-region Karpaty:*
    - *“Central-European internet business information services”*
    - *“Integrated database of organizations in the the Slovak and*
    - *Polish part of the Carpathian Euro-region – EURO-SMER“*
- Pre-investment and investment
  - Within the Euro-region Beskydy – pre-project preparation of construction concerning the “Goral Cultural Centre under Babia hora”*
  - Within the Euro-region Tatry – pre-project preparation of construction concerning the “House of Euro-region Tatry” in Kežmarok*
  - Within the Euro-region Slaná-Rimava – Preparation of background documents for investment intent the “Business incubators in Gemera-Malohont”*
  - Within the Ipeľ Euro-region Centre :*
    - *A feasibility study for renovation of railway section Šahy (SR) – Drégypalánk (MR)”*
    - *“Feasibility study for shifting of the road II/527 nearby Balog na Iplom municipality”*
    - *“Project – Regional community centre in Poiplie” – project for construction*

An important role among the Euro-regions and their activities is played by projects focusing on environmental protection, since many Euro-regions contain national parks, protected areas or smaller protected locations on their territories.

*Euro-region Tatry:*

*“Tatry – a part of Green Carpathian Mountains” – the conference mapping environment within Euro-region Tatry*

*– Project– “A year of water in the Euro-region Tatry”*

*Euro-region Slaná-Rimava – preparation of the project “Let us have clean Slaná and Rimava rivers”*

## **Funding**

Funding of activities carried out by Euro-regions comes from several sources. Given the multiple character of funding, it depended to a great extent on the way the state or respective state institutions handled these activities; on support from different support foundations and also on the range of assistance coming from the pre-accession funds of the European Union. At the beginning, the Slovak Euro-regional activities were mainly funded from their own resources formed by membership dues. Membership dues for municipalities vary (their amount depends on the number of citizens), for legal entities, for state administration bodies (districts – when they existed together with regions) and for higher territorial units.

External funding may come from foundations which may be acquired by Euro-regions via projects and they may come as resources gained through successful projects submitted (until 2004) by municipalities, civil associations within the PHARE – CBC (Cross-Border Cooperation) Programme.

Since 1999, Slovak participants of Euro-regions may have applied for support within the System of Support for Euro-regional Activities from grants of the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development SR. The respective support concentrates on the following areas:

- Human resources
  - Preparations of planning and development studies
  - Preparation of background documentation for large investment projects
  - Development of tourism
  - Public relations
  - Environment
- Multi-source funding enabled Euro-regions to create better prerequisites for implementation of intents carried out by the individual Euro-regions.

## **Euro-regions and character of administrative territorial units**

Until 2001, Euro-regions were an important entity in cross-border regional co-operation, even

though it was limited by possibilities created by Euro-regions for these activities of the Slovak side. The situation has changed when the Act 302/2001 Coll. on Administration of Higher Territorial Units was adopted, since it gave self-governed regions the right to enter into international co-operation and international associations. Since then, self-governed regions started to build international relations and co-operation with neighbouring, cross-border regional self-governed partners. It means that the cross-border regional co-operation may take a "civil" line, if we consider Euro-regions to be this civil line, as well as partner line with self-governed regional entities. A room is open here for mutual co-operation, co-ordination and complementation of procedures. The Slovak experience, however, indicates that it is not frequently so. It is often signalled by the representatives of Euro-regions who feel as if regional administrations underestimated the importance and significance of Euro-regions for the cross-border co-operation. It is obvious where the regional administration or its representatives do not operate within the Slovak part of the Euro-region. The overall situation is even more complicated due to the fact that Euro-regions overlap on the Slovak territory (municipalities and territories may be members of several Euro-regions) and at the same time, a territory of an Euro-region may cross or run through another self-governed region (e.g. the Euro-region Tatry passes through the Žilina, Prešov and Košice regions, the Euro-region Slaná-Rimava on the territory of Banská Bystrica and the Košice region). In certain situations, this factor may complicate activities of Euro-regions.

## CONCLUSION

After a period of complicated start of Euro-regional activities in Slovakia, Euro-regions influence the processes taking place in border regions in the same way they affect intensity of the cross-border relations. Such activation records territorial differences in terms of selected priorities and the way they are being fulfilled. Even though the centre of development in the given administrative region, which is the self-governed region; lies on the self-governed region itself and the way in which the state formulates its state policy towards regions, Euro-regions play an important activation and complementary role in the development of border territories.

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