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INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BODIES OF KOŠICE REGION AND PREŠOV REGION WITH PARTNERS IN UKRAINE²

Abstract

Despite the absence of a law on cross-border cooperation in the Slovak Republic, it can be concluded that the existing legal frameworks in Slovakia and Ukraine provide sufficient and diverse formal opportunities for cooperation between regional and local authorities on both sides of the border. At the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century, real self-governing structures, the business environment, and the non-governmental sector were just starting to take shape, and the relations between the then-new states of Slovakia (founded in 1993) and Ukraine (founded in 1991) were just being formed anew. The legislative environment was gradually formed. From this period, if we do not count legislative frameworks at national levels, almost the only formal evidence of cooperation between regional and local actors on both sides of the border is official documents on international partnerships of cities and municipalities. Of course, cooperation existed, especially in areas where it still works. In the field of culture, sports, tourism, education, and possibly also other, but practical matters, for example, related to transport

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connections or trade. We believe that, given the circumstances, the intensity of cooperation was at a lower level than at present. The paper deals with mapping international partnerships of local and regional public administration bodies in the Prešov and Košice regions with partners in Ukraine, from 1993 until now. The text deals with the legislative and institutional framework for the cooperation of local and regional actors across the border. Part of the article is also an overview of the contractual relations between the examined local and regional public administration bodies. The paper also offers political considerations and recommendations for the further development of the investigated relations. The paper also includes an interpretation of the results of the author's survey and the sociological survey carried out for the SIBSU project.

Key words: public administration, international partnerships, local and regional authorities, Slovakia, Ukraine

1 INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that, due to its geographical location and territorial administrative division, every region in Slovakia is also a border region. Only two regions in eastern Slovakia (Košický kraj and Prešovský kraj) border the Ukrainian Zakarpattia region. There wouldn't be anything special about that if it weren't for the so-called Schengen „green“ border and the border of the European Union. Of course, there was no Schengen border before December 2007 and no European Union border before 2004 either. Ukraine gained its independence in 1991 and the Slovak Republic was established in 1993. Therefore, we can formally consider 1993 as the year of the beginning of the establishment of joint relations between Slovakia and Ukraine at various levels and in various areas. Because local and regional actors in the Košice Region and Prešov Region and local and regional actors in the Zakarpattia Region of Ukraine and other nearby regions of Ukraine should, for logical reasons, be most interested in mutual partnership and cooperation. The paper tries to reflect this international cooperation. We focus primarily on representatives from the local/regional self-government, although it is often the private sector and the non-profit sector that develop more effective frameworks for cooperation, which may not be as formalized and institutionalized as is typical for public administration.

2 LEGAL REQUIREMENT OF SLOVAK TERRITORIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BODIES FROM EASTERN SLOVAKIA WITH UKRAINE

In the case of territorial self-government in Slovakia, we can talk about local self-government and regional self-government. Local self-government, which in Slovakia is represented by municipalities and cities³, in the field of international cooperation is governed by Act no. 369/1990 Coll. on the municipal establishment. Paragraph 21 of the Act states that the municipality may, within the scope of its competence, cooperate with territorial and administrative units or with the authorities of other states performing local functions. It has the right to become a member of an international association of territorial units or territorial bodies. Approve agreements on international cooperation and membership of the municipality in an international association - this is decided by the municipal council elected by the inhabitants of the municipality.

In Slovakia, international partnerships of towns and municipalities are a traditional form of cooperation, i.e. partnership or town-twinning, which we define as cooperation between two or more municipalities based on a partnership agreement, agreement, or memorandum⁴ and are approved by the local/city council for a long but certain period (Špačeková, Labátová, Ďurechová, 2012, s. 14).

In the case of regional self-government, which in Slovakia consists of higher territorial units (self-governing regions), the international cooperation of self-governing regions is regulated in Act No. 302/2001 Coll. on the self-government of Higher Territorial Units (self-governing regions) in § 5. The self-governing region may, within the scope of its competence, cooperate with territorial and administrative units or with offices of other states performing

3 The city of Košice - the metropolis of eastern Slovakia - has a special position, as cities in Slovakia with more than 200,000 inhabitants have a separate law. Law on the city of Košice no. 401/1990 Coll. allows the city and, with the prior consent of the city and the city district, that it may, within the scope of its competence, conclude agreements, establish associations and establish international cooperation..

4 Regarding cross-border cooperation contractual relations, they can be divided according to the type of legal force into agreements, memoranda, declarations, letters of intent, etc. Examples of partnership cooperation between the two largest cities in eastern Slovakia. City of Košice: <https://www.kosice.sk/mesto/partnerske-mesta-mesta-kosice>. City of Prešov: <https://www.presov.sk/partnerske-mesta.html>. It is interesting that the city of Prešov states in the cooperation agreement with the Ukrainian Mukachevo that the cooperation is complicated despite the geographical proximity, given that, as a non-member country of the European Union, the Ukrainian partners have a number of bureaucratic obstacles to mutual cooperation.

regional functions. It has the right to become a member of an international association of territorial units or territorial bodies. Cooperation shall take place only based on a cooperation agreement⁵, which must contain the statutory requirements. The cooperation agreement must be concluded in writing and must be approved in advance by an absolute majority of all deputies of the self-governing regional council. Of course, other forms of cooperation do not have such legal force and are not defined in the law in question (declarations, memoranda, declarations, cooperation protocols, cooperation intentions, etc.). We must add that, in our experience from other projects as well, these cooperation agreements are often only of a formal nature and, in principle, except for non-functioning partnerships.

In addition to local and regional parliaments, the management and organization of international cooperation between municipalities and cities - mayors elected as executive bodies of municipalities and cities, and also at the level of self-governing regions at the level of regional self-government. These elected representatives have the possibility by law to establish permanent or temporary advisory, initiative, and control bodies (commissions), which can deal with matters of cross-border cooperation, foreign relations, and the like. They can also set up various agencies/organizations (tourism, regional development, etc.) based on association law or the basis of other legal regulations (for example based on Act no. 539/2008 Coll. on the support of regional development or the basis of Act No. 91/2010 Coll. on the support of tourism). Within the municipal and regional offices, organizational units can be set up, that deal with the issue of foreign relations and protocol. Their goal is to develop foreign relations and support cross-border (project) cooperation.

Slovakia does not have a separate law on cross-border cooperation, but membership in the EU gives Slovak self-governments additional opportunities for institutional cross-border cooperation. The above-mentioned law on the support of regional development defines a Euroregion as a territorial cooperation entity composed of representatives of socio-economic partners operating at the regional and local level of neighboring countries, established for cross-border cooperation. On this basis, the Slovak part of the Euroregion is an interest association of legal entities established under a special law for cross-border cooperation with its registered office in the Slovak Republic. Act

5 The Prešov self-governing region has an agreement on cooperation with the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine dated March 15, 2005 (more information about the agreement here: <https://www.po-kraj.sk/sk/samosprava/medzinarodna-spolupraca/bilateralna-spolupraca/zakarpatska-oblast-ukrajina/dohoda-spolupraci.html>) and the Declaration on Cooperation with the Ivano-Frankivsk Region from June 2, 2004, but this cooperation is more or less on a formal level. The Košice self-governing region has signed only the Memorandum on cooperation with the Zakarpattia region in Ukraine from October 2006 (more info here: <https://web.vucke.sk/sk/fakty-kraji/ine/partnerske-regiony/>).

no. 90/2008 Coll. on European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation makes membership of the association conditional on the consent of local or regional authorities, as municipalities and higher territorial units may be members of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation. According to the List of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation,⁶ the Ukrainian side is a member of only one European grouping of territorial cooperation (Tisza EGTC based in Kisvárd, Hungary).⁷

Municipalities, cities, and self-governing regions, especially after Slovakia joined the European Union, initiated mutually beneficial partnership cooperation with the Ukrainian side, mainly due to the support of joint cross-border projects from the European Structural Investment Funds, but also from other sources and grant schemes⁸ (for example, the EEA and Norway Grants, where the program *Dobré spravovanie a cezhraničná spolupráca* is currently active⁹), which change during program periods and politically set priorities. This cooperation takes place based on partnership contracts for projects, cooperation intentions related to projects, contracts on the provision of financial contributions, agreements on cooperation and financing of projects, and the basis of other project contracts. Municipalities, cities, and regions do not have to be involved in these projects directly, but also through organizations within their founding jurisdiction, which in the case of larger settlements or self-

6 List of European groupings of territorial cooperation (EGTC), link: https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRAactivities/Documents/Official_List_of_the_EGTCs.pdf?Web=0.

7 However, there is talk of the possibility of establishing a new EGTC. If the regions are interested, cooperation should take place between the Košice self-governing region and the Prešov self-governing region in Slovakia and three regions in Ukraine: Zakarpattia, Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk (Otrivá, 2022).

8 After 1989 and the fall of the Iron Curtain, many support programs of the European Union for cross-border cooperation were established. After the programs Interreg I, Interreg II to Interreg III, which brought reform and unification of policies, an obvious shift was achieved only in the period 2007-2013. Territorial cooperation as a whole changed its status and moved to the level of a separate objective, which increased its visibility and gave it more prominence legislative starting point. Partnerships with countries outside the European Union were no longer supported by the Structural Funds, but belonged to the zone of two new supports: the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. Cross-border cooperation established a wider geographical coverage than the former Interreg programme. The 2014-2020 programming period also includes the Interreg V-A program within the framework of the European Union and the European Social Development Fund called Together Without Borders. In addition, there is also the ENI operational program Cross-border cooperation Hungary - Slovakia - Romania - Ukraine for the program period 2014 - 2020. The cooperation programs are a supplement to the main European programs, for example the Rural Development Program of the Slovak Republic 2014 - 2020 or programs implemented within the goal of Investing in growth and employment (Cirner, 2018, s. 10-11)..

9 List of currently active EEA and Norway Grants projects: <https://www.eeagrants.sk/programy/dobre-spravovanie-a-cezhranicna-spolupraca/projekty/>.

governing regions may be several dozen or more than 100 (if we are talking about self-governing regions). Municipalities can be associated with a local action group (milestone akčná skupina) (hereinafter referred to as „MAS“) and many municipalities are part of MAS.¹⁰ MAS is also involved in cross-border cooperation projects.

The MAS is a partnership of representatives of the public, business, and civic sectors that operate in a cohesive territory. The MAS prepares and subsequently implements the development strategy for project cooperation. The implementation of the strategy consists primarily in deciding on the support of projects of local entities, including their monitoring and the implementation of joint development projects and programs. The MAS has a legal personality and mandatory authorities. In the conditions of Slovakia, MASs can become civic associations, which will be selected by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic based on the evaluation of development strategies and will be granted MAS Statute (Miestna akčná skupina Spiš, 2018).¹¹

Of course, in this context, the national and international framework, which concerns self-government and cross-border cooperation through various normative legal acts, must not be forgotten.

Of course, in this context, the national and international framework, which concerns self-government and cross-border cooperation through various normative legal acts, must not be forgotten. These are international obligations of the Slovak Republic, to which it has committed itself in the form of multilateral and bilateral agreements, treaties, memoranda of understanding, implementation and technical protocols, and other forms (eg. agreements on cross-border cooperation with neighboring countries or trade, scientific and cultural cooperation with countries of interest). It is also the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Entities or Authorities, including the Additional Protocol and Protocol No 2, which promotes the conclusion of agreements on cross-border and interterritorial (non-neighboring territorial entities or authorities) within local and regional authorities. The Slovak Republic has signed a cross-border cooperation agreement with Ukraine by European Outline Convention on Transfrontier cooperation between Territorial Entities or Authorities. The European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the Slovak Republic and Ukraine, also mentions the right of local authorities to associate. An association agreement has been signed between the European Union, which has included the

10 List of approved local action groups for the implementation period 2014-2020. Link: <https://www.nsrv.sk/?pl=91>. ..

11 From 2020, this competence passed to the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic..

Slovak Republic since 2004, and Ukraine, which also includes the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine (DCFTA).¹²

Table 1: Examples of cooperation agreements concluded between local and regional authorities of Ukraine and Slovakia (Košice Region, Prešov Region) in the years 1993 – 2021

Local/regional authorities in Slovakia	Local/regional authorities in Ukraine	Name of the agreement	Date/Year of signature of the cooperation
Zatín Village Council	Yanoshi Village Council	Cooperation Agreement	?
City Council of Veľký Šariš	Rakoshino City Council	Cooperation Agreement	before 2014
Košice City Council	Uzhhorod City Council	Cooperation Agreement	January 16, 1993
Council of Košice Region	Ivano-Frankivsk Regional State Administration	On the principles of mutual relations and development of cooperation	December 09, 1997 (repealed in 2015, but Ivano-Frankivsk Regional State Administration is interested in renewing the agreement)
City Council of Stará Ľubovňa	City Council of Svaliava	Cooperation Agreement	October 02, 1998
Michalovce City Council	Uzhhorod City Council	Cooperation Agreement	1999
City Council of Humenne	City Council of Perechyn	Cooperation Agreement	May 09, 1999

12 More detailed information can be found in the texts: DULEBA, A. – CIRNER, M. 2021. Country profile: Slovakia. Comparative analysis on the competencies of regional and local authorities in the field of CBC of the 5 countries. Budapešť : CESCO, 2021. s. 47 – 57. Dostupné online: <https://budapest.cesci-net.eu/en/comparative-analysis-on-the-competencies-of-regional-and-local-authorities-in-the-field-of-cbc-of-the-5-countries/>; CIRNER, M. – DUDINSKÁ, I. 2019. A comparison of political and administrative competences of regional and local actors (an analysis of the national legislatures of Slovakia and Ukraine, context, aims). In: SZÉKELY, G. Cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine III: Policies and practices of regional and local actors. Prešov : Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej univerzity, 2019. s. 19-48. ISBN 978-80-555-2350-7..

Council of the Košice Region	Transcarpathian Regional Council	The Agreement on Interregional Cooperation between the Transcarpathian Regional Council (Ukraine) and the Council of the Košice Region	December 17, 1999
Council of the Prešov Region	Transcarpathian Regional Council	The Agreement on Interregional Cooperation between the Transcarpathian Regional Council (Ukraine) and the Council of the Prešov Region	November 19, 2000
Council of the Prešov Region	Ivano-Frankivsk Regional State Administration	Agreement on the principles of mutual relations	June 26, 2001
		(repealed in 2015, but the Ivano-Frankivsk Regional State Administration is interested in renewing the agreement)	
Council of the Prešov Region	Lviv Regional State Administration	Agreement between the Lviv Regional State Administration (Ukraine) and the Council of the Prešov Region on Interregional Cooperation (Slovakia)	October 26, 2001
Council of the Košice Region	Transcarpathian Regional State Administration	Memorandum of Understanding on cross-border cooperation	June 21, 2002, and May 13, 2006

City Council of Vranov nad Topľou	City Council of Vinogradov	Cooperation Agreement	2004
Council of the Prešov Region	Transcarpathian Regional State Administration	Cooperation Agreement	March 15, 2005
Bol Village Council	Batiovo Village Council	Cooperation Agreement	August 25, 2006
City Council of Sobrance	City Council of Perechyn	Cooperation Agreement	September 2006
City Council of Bardejov	City Council of Ťačiv	Cooperation Agreement	October 01, 2006
Council of the Košice Region	Transcarpathian Regional State Administration	Agreement on trade-economic, scientific-technical and cultural cooperation between the Transcarpathian Regional State Administration (Ukraine) and the Council of the Košice Region (Slovakia)	November 24, 2006
Prešov City Council	Mukachevo City Council	Cooperation Agreement	June 8, 2007
City Council of Čierna nad Tisou	Čop City Council	Cooperation Agreement	2008
City Council of Snina	City Council of Chust	Cooperation Agreement	October 10, 2008
City Council of Snina	City Council of Kremenčuk	Cooperation Agreement	June 23, 2009
Drienica Village Council	City Council of Perechyn	Cooperation Agreement	September 9, 2009
Humenné City Council	Mukachevo City Council	Cooperation Agreement	September 14, 2010
City Council of Lipany	Chust City Council	Cooperation Agreement	December 09, 2010
City Council of Humenné	City Council of Uzhhorod	Protocol of Intent	2011

City Council of Svidnik	City Council of Rakhiv	Agreement on cultural cooperation	June 2014 (beginning of cooperation in 2002, was renewed in 2014)
City Council of Vranov nad Topľou	City Council of Sambir	Memorandum of understanding between Sambir (Ukraine) and Vranov nad Topľou (Slovakia)	2014
City Council of Vranov nad Topľou	City Council of Sambir	Memorandum of understanding and held annual exchanges of official delegations, culinary art fairs, and folk art festivals	2015
City of Spišská Nová Ves	City Council of Lviv	Cooperation and implementation of projects in the field of preservation of historical heritage and cultural exchanges	2015
Council of the Prešov Region	Transcarpathian Regional Council; Transcarpathian Regional State Administration	Joint Action Program for 2015-2016 of the Transcarpathian Regional Council (Ukraine), Transcarpathian Regional State Administration (Ukraine), and the Council of the Prešov Region (Slovakia)	May 15, 2015

Council of the Košice Region	Transcarpathian Regional State Administration	Executive Protocol No. 7 to the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Transcarpathian Regional State Administration (Ukraine) and the Council of the Košice Region (Slovakia) for 2015-2016	May 15, 2015
Council of the Košice Region	Transcarpathian Regional Council	Agreement on cross-border cooperation of local governments in the Tisza River basin	May 12, 2016
Council of the Košice Region	Transcarpathian Regional State Administration; Transcarpathian Regional Council	Memorandum of Cooperation	May 21, 2016
City Council of Spišské Podhradie	City Council of Perechin	Cooperation Agreement	2017
City Council of Gelnica	City Council of Novodnistrovsk	Cooperation Agreement	April 27, 2017
Council of the Prešov Region; Council of the Košice Region	Transcarpathian Regional State Administration; Transcarpathian Regional Council	Implementing Protocols to the Memoranda of Cooperation between the Council of the Presov Region, Transcarpathian Regional State Administration, Transcarpathian Regional Council, and the Council of the Košice Region	May 13, 2017 (for the period from May 2017 to May 2018)

City Council of Kráľovský Chlmec	Berehovo City Council	Cooperation Agreement	September 16, 2017
Council of the Prešov Region; Council of the Košice Region	Transcarpathian Regional State Administration; Transcarpathian Regional Council	Memorandum of Cooperation for the period from May 2018 to May 2019	May 26, 2018
City Council of Spišská Nová Ves	City Council of Ťačiv	Cooperation Agreement	November 04, 2019
City Council of Stropkov	City Council of Novovolynsk	Cooperation Agreement	2020

Source: Authors based on data from public administration bodies, 2022.

Cooperation agreements usually declare the need for the development of several areas of cooperation, including economic development of regions, transport infrastructure, safe and efficient use of natural resources, implementation of anti-flood measures, development of tourism, and preservation of cultural and historical heritage.

3 SOCIO-POLITICAL CONNOTATIONS OF THE (NON) DEVELOPMENT OF SLOVAK-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES FROM EASTERN SLOVAKIA

As our findings show, the formal institutional cooperation of local and regional actors began to start gradually only after 1998, until then it was rather a unique phenomenon. The Slovak Republic was established as an independent state in 1993 and Ukraine in 1991. The first years of independence of the newly formed states emphasize other issues than the development of cross-border cooperation at the regional and local levels. In addition, in both countries, there has been a profound transformation towards democracy, a transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, a transformation of law, economy, and major social change, which has brought many problems. The political situation in both countries also favored centralism and state dirigisme, state administration was strengthened at the expense of local communities, self-government was rather not trusted, and management from the center was enforced. In Slovakia, the change occurred after the defeat of Vladimír Mečiar in the 1998 elections, when the governments of Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998-2002; 2002-2006) began many reforms in the area of public administration and its decentralization. At the same time, the governments of Mikuláš Dzurinda had a pro-European and pro-Atlantic direction and wanted

to bring Slovakia into the EU and NATO.

This political direction has significantly assisted local and regional actors in developing cross-border cooperation. At the same time, part of the governing coalition was the political party SĽS (Democratic Left Party), whose chairman Jozef Migaš also served in Ukraine as the Slovak ambassador. Another government political party was SOP (Party of Civic Understanding), whose leader was the Mayor of Košice city Rudolf Schuster and later the President of the Slovak Republic (1999-2004), who had good friendly relations with at the time Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma. These circumstances also weighed on the development of mutual relations at the national level, which supported other levels as well. In addition, at this time the foreign policy direction in Ukraine changed to a more pro-European and less pro-Russian when the Prime Minister of Ukraine was Viktor Yushchenko.

The cooperation began to intensify after Slovakia acceded to the EU, but did not reach such significant dimensions. The Slovak-Ukrainian border and the orientation of Slovak local and regional actors towards the member states of the EU remained a problem, where cooperation paid off based on possible joint projects and without many bureaucratic and other obstacles associated with Ukrainian partners (border, corruption, incompatible and problematic legal and economic environment, etc.). However, despite the political instability in Ukraine (revolutions) and the war since 2014, respectively since 2022, Ukraine has embarked, it seems to be definitively after 2014, on a pro-European and pro-reform course and is intensively converging with the EU. Nevertheless, we can state that the institutional cooperation of regional and local actors in Slovakia and Ukraine is not very intensive, and we believe that this institutional cooperation is often only formal. As further mentioned in the text, our research found that despite formally signed cooperation, many municipalities do not have joint projects or activities across the border. Thus, we can state in 2022 that the potential for cooperation is not fulfilled, even though today there are almost no legislative or other obstacles as to why such cooperation could not work.

This can be demonstrated by a survey, or an attempt at a survey, on the intensity of joint projects and partnerships between the Slovak and Ukrainian self-government. Even though we obtained information about Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation from publicly available sources and databases as part of the research (in addition, we have at our disposal several internal documents, lists, and our project databases from previous projects), we decided to address selected municipalities with two simple questions, which could bring us new or additional information.

As part of the survey, we contacted all regional cities (Košice, Prešov), district cities, and other selected „bigger“ cities with more than 5,000

inhabitants (Poprad, Michalovce, Spišská Nová Ves, Humenné, Bardejov, Trebišov, Vranov nad Topľou, Snina, Rožňava, Kežmarok, Stará Ľubovňa, Levoča, Sabinov, Moldava nad Bodvou, Svidník, Stropkov, Veľké Kapušany, Krompachy, Sečovce, Svit, Kráľovský Chlmec, Spišská Belá, Medzilaborce, Lipany, Sobrance, Veľký Šariš, Gelnica, Dobšiná), although several cities cannot be considered as border cities.

72 individuals were contacted by the description of their job position (provided that they could have been dealing with cross-border (project) cooperation or foreign relations). We sent a bulk e-mail for the first time on November 27, 2021, and at regular intervals (1 week) we sent our request for cooperation on the survey for one month with two questions:

-Which Ukrainian regions/cities/municipalities (or other entities) with which your municipality has/did have (formal) cross-border cooperation?

-What are the most important forms of cooperation and joint projects with Ukrainian partners that your municipality has/had?

The responsibility was expectedly very low at the level of 12.5%. We received 9 responses, of which the city of Košice contacted us by phone. In addition to Košice, answers were also sent by respondents from the cities of Kežmarok, Humenné, Trebišov, Krompachy, Spišská Nová Ves, Veľké Kapušany, Prešov, Svit. Although we cannot talk about relevant results, some of the respondents' statements well illustrated the situation in the field of Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation.

For example: „Forms of cooperation are mainly through joint projects“; „We wanted to apply for a financial grant with the city of Ťačiv under the cross-border cooperation program <https://huskroua-cbc.eu/> in the area of TC 3 Support of local culture and preservation of historical heritage and TC6 Environmental protection, mitigating the effects of climate change and adaptation climate change. In the end, however, it did not succeed due to technical and organizational complications on the part of Ťačiv“; „Cooperation with Ukrainian partners is mainly in the field of sports, culture, etc.“; „support of schools and facilities, exchange of experience within the functioning of local governments in individual areas, representational purposes“.

Some respondents mentioned current or past projects, and 3 respondents admitted that their cities have no cooperation with Ukraine. The non-answer of other municipalities to two simple questions indicates not only ignorance or unprofessionalism, but can also be an assumption that the municipalities in question are not aware of past and current cooperation with Ukrainian partners, or that such cooperation does not exist.

We were intrigued by the vague answer from the city of Prešov and

found out that apart from the formal cooperation with the partner city of Mukachevo and the fact that the city was approached by representatives of the city of Ivano-Frankivsk in the interest of cooperation, this city has not implemented a single project with a Ukrainian partner in at least the past 7 years, which is evidenced by the online map of projects of the city of Prešov¹³.

And one more piece of information. According to the Interactive map of SlovakAid projects¹⁴, which refers to the set of all activities of Slovakia that belong to the development cooperation of the Slovak Republic and are financed or co-financed from the state budget of the Slovak Republic, Slovakia has so far supported 114 projects, of which 25 in the Transcarpathian region (21 partners were based in Uzhhorod) and 3 in the Lviv region. None of the projects came from eastern Slovakia, regional and local actors in eastern Slovakia do not use this opportunity for joint Slovak-Ukrainian projects.

Secondly, we examined the results of a sociological survey carried out for the aforementioned SIBSU project with the same questions on both the Slovak and Ukrainian sides. In the case of cross-border cooperation, according to a survey conducted in Ukraine in December 2021 - January 2022 (809 respondents), 17.6% of respondents cited „bureaucracy required by regulations“ as the cause of obstacles when crossing the Slovak-Ukrainian border. In addition, 36.1% of respondents believe that „stability and a favorable legal environment“ are important for the development of cross-border cooperation, and 5.6% of respondents said that it is necessary to improve national legislation.¹⁵

According to a poll conducted in Slovakia in December 2021 (807 people interviewed), 15.1% of respondents cited „bureaucracy required by regulations“ as the cause of obstacles in crossing the Slovak-Ukrainian border. A stable and favorable legal environment for cross-border cooperation is considered useful by 50.4% of respondents and to some extent by another 26.3% of respondents. When asked whether local and regional authorities help support the development of cross-border cooperation, up to 40% of respondents said that they provided only partial support and 25.1% of respondents stated that they provided no support or little support. As far as local and regional government is concerned, the assessment of respondents is almost identical and to the detriment of these bodies.

59.5% of respondents believe that joint planning of regional development of border areas by local and regional authorities on both sides

13 Online map of projects of the city of Prešov available here: <https://www.presov.sk/oznamy/mesto-presov-uspesne-zrealizovalo-projekty-z-externych-zdrojov-v-objeme-47-milionov-eur.html>

14 Interactive map of SlovakAid projects available here: [https://slovakaid.sk/projekty/..](https://slovakaid.sk/projekty/)

15 Main results of the sociological survey for the SIBSU project, December 2021 - January 2022...

of the border would have a positive impact on the local economy and society. As many as 49.3% of respondents consider local and regional authorities (municipality/city, local authorities, and their affiliated organizations) to be on average successful in the field of cross-border cooperation. In the case of local and regional state authorities, it is very similar, with 48.6% of respondents considering them to be an average success in cross-border cooperation.¹⁶

According to a poll, the Slovak state administration and self-government are not considered very active in the field of cross-border cooperation, nor their support for the development of cross-border cooperation is not perceived very positively. This may also be due to incomplete decentralization and a large number of municipalities with a very small population, low budgets, and a lack of capacity. However, in the case of larger cities or self-governing regions, there may be also a lack of strategic planning and perceiving this kind of cooperation as beneficial, thus investing more energy into searching for opportunities and project implementation. Based on the results of the survey, we can say that the public even supports joint planning of regional development and cross-border cooperation, so it would be appropriate to amend the law on regional development support to allow joint planning of regional development in border regions on both sides of the border in its economic and social development plans. There could also be an obligation in law to plan cross-border cooperation. Strategic planning should become part of every major piece of legislation on the functioning of self-government and state administration.

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that there was no territorial regional self-government in Slovakia until 2001, so the main partners for regional Ukrainian state/self-government authorities (where there was a strong centralization in that period, the state administration also had the main say in the territory and there was only very weak self-government) were, for example, Regional offices (Krajské úrady) (since 1996 in Prešov and Košice, abolished in 2007), which could also establish cooperation with authorities on the other side of the border. The political situation in Slovakia did not allow Slovakia to become a member of the Carpathian Euroregion in 1993, of which Ukraine was one of the founding members. Slovakia joined only in 1999 after political changes. It was the period of reforms and Slovakia's efforts to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic structures that contributed to many fundamental changes (adoption of many legislative changes, ratification of many conventions, charters, etc.) in the field of international/cross-border cooperation. The emergence of

¹⁶ Main results of the sociological survey for the SIBSU project, December 2021..

regional self-government and the decentralization of public administration in this period contributed to the fact that territorial local and regional self-government became even stronger actors in this field as well. The newly established regional self-government began to look for (contractual) partners in Ukraine as well.

The non-governmental sector, which was ostracized and persecuted by the government of Vladimír Mečiar in previous years, found itself in a completely different situation. This sector could reorient itself to new initiatives (supporting Slovakia's entry into the Euro-Atlantic structures) and the so-called „breathing freely“, which also contributed to the fact that this sector began to actively cooperate with its counterparts on the Ukrainian side of the border in the new millennium.

The admission of Slovakia to the European Union in 2004 (and the obtaining of pre-accession aid earlier) contributed mainly through European and structural investment funds to regional and local actors from Slovakia looking for cross-border partners for joint projects. It must be admitted that due to the Schengen border (since December 2007), the visa regime, legislative obstacles, and the like, the search for partners took place mainly from neighboring countries that were also part of the European Union. Despite this, for example, there was a cross-border program within the INTERREG III A program - Neighborhood Program Hungary - Slovak Republic - Ukraine.

After the Orange Revolution, changes also occurred in Ukraine, which was reflected in the approach of the European Union, for example, the European Union project within the European Neighborhood Policy - Eastern Partnership and similar, which resulted in the already changed Operational Program for Cross-Border Cooperation in 2007-2013: ENPI Hungary - Slovakia - Romania - Ukraine. All this contributed to the development of mutual relations. From the academic experience, we can conclude that even the interrupted relations with academic institutions in Ukraine began to be renewed, which was helped again by various grant schemes that did not come only from the European Union. The projects significantly helped to revive formal cooperation and start new cooperation. However, the sustainability of such cooperation, which is based only on joint projects, is an obstacle. Many collaborations were intensive but limited by the duration of the project. Cooperation often does not continue after financial and other benefits have been exhausted.

It is partnerships based on cooperation agreements that should be a motive, a vision, and a commitment to finding other possibilities for cooperation, not only for the preparation of new projects (which is also desirable) but also for institutional cooperation, in which it is necessary to invest one's funds, time and capacity, because it is necessary to take care of every partnership so

that it does not „wither“, even in less successful or even unfavorable times. The partnership is also a symbol and the aforementioned commitment and should not only be the responsibility of individuals - activists, politicians, and businessmen but should become part of the corporate/organizational culture and even after the departure of leading politicians, directors of non-governmental organizations and after changes at the head of companies, it should „old“ friendship to continue with a „second breath“ or after the old one if it works well. It's about the need to create connections, and we have those connections, and we should try to make them even closer and more connected. Stability in all its connotations is also important. One of the most important is political stability. In this sense, Ukraine got into problems several times not only through its fault. After Euromaidan, it began to open its doors to Europe, which the European Union appreciated by introducing a visa-free regime or accepting the Association Agreement of the European Union with Ukraine. Thousands of Ukrainians legally work or study in Eastern Slovakia, which will continue to contribute to the expansion of mutual partnerships. Even in 2022, the war and the situation in the east of Ukraine provide an opportunity to debate the stability of Ukraine. However, this should be another reason for local and regional actors from Slovakia to actively help their counterparts and look for ways to help Ukraine, because the stability of Ukraine also contributes to the stability of Slovakia. The historical, cultural, linguistic, religious, geographical, economic, and other ties across the border cannot be denied. We should remember that.

Unfortunately, as we can see, often only financial attraction can bring us together. It must be admitted that the Ukrainians are more proactive in looking for partners, but the response from Slovakia is not adequate. We see the inattention and passivity of a large number of local/regional self-governments, but also often the failure of large actors in the non-functioning of the Carpathian Euroregion, in the absence of formal cooperation agreements, in the absence of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, which must be based on the territory of the European Union, but Ukrainian partners can be its members. It is a whole series of shortcomings, but they are not related to the legislation. Legislation has not been a serious obstacle to the development of cooperation for a long time. It is important to fill partnerships and agreements with meaningful content so that they do not remain on paper and to focus on the strategic and long-term planning of bilateral relations. It seems that the private and non-profit sectors have once again overtaken the public administration, and their often informal cooperation has deeper foundations than the formalized cooperation of municipalities. It is an unnecessarily unused potential, which we cannot afford on either side of the border. It is this text that takes the wind out of the idler's sails. It demonstrates

a favorable legislative environment and shows not the full use of institutional forms of cooperation, or only pro forma cooperation. In principle, it is not necessary to form new legislation, only to use responsibly the available one.

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