

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ROMANIA AND UKRAINE: PROMOTION OF CULTURE AND PRESEVATION OF HISTORICAL HERITAGE*

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Abstract: *Cross-border cooperation is one of the important multipurpose instruments aimed at developing good neighborly relations with states on the borders of the European Union, as well as supporting economic and social development and promoting European values in partner countries in the context of EU integration. The long-term objectives of cross-border cooperation projects aim at: creating more bilateral benefits; improving the physical and economic infrastructure; human resources development of the region; deepening the cultural and educational ties; preparing for the EU membership; environmental protection etc. Cross-border cooperation is favored by the cultural, ethno-linguistic and historical heritage, or the presence of national minorities. The Romanian community in Ukraine or the Ukrainian community in Romania, the common ethno-linguistic heritage of the population of Romania and the Republic of Moldova are the favorable elements in the process of cross-border cooperation. In this context, the protection of historical heritage becomes one of the objectives of the Joint Operational Programs, which were launched in 2007. The implementation of cross-border cooperation interventions between Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine for 2007–2013 and 2014-2020 required a careful approach, a differentiation of needs, taking into account the specifics of each region and the distinct regional priorities. One of the aims of cross-border projects, which has the goal to restore and protect the historical and cultural heritage, is the development of tourism infrastructure, strengthening accommodation capacity and associated services. The fortresses of Soroca, Hotin and Suceava can be included in a unique tourist route, which would teach the tourists the glorious history of medieval Moldova. At the same time, the development of marketing and an efficient promotion of the cross-border region, together with the creation of touristic infrastructure would lead to an influx of tourists in the area, taking into account the*

considerable potential, especially based on previously untapped resources. Cultural tourism, agrotourism and thematic tourism (winter sports, vinery routes, historical and ethno-folk festivals, etc.) as well as areas such as handicrafts, production based on local traditions, the use of the same brand for certain products, such as handcrafted products from the cultural heritage could be opportunities for beautiful cross-border cooperation. Due to the potential of the cultural heritage as a resource for sustainable development, economic growth and social development, the implementation of projects for the restoration and conservation of historical and cultural heritage would strengthen the relations between the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Romania. Romania supports the "European Course" of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. In the case of the two latter countries, the agenda for the future period on the dimension of cross-border cooperation must be one derived from the provisions of the Association Agreements with the European Union.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has identified some general principles of cross-border cooperation: getting closer to citizens - residents of cross-border areas express their desire to establish cooperation in order to solve the problems they face or improve living conditions; the involvement of political representatives (local, regional, national and European) is fundamental for better cross-border cooperation; subsidiarity – although collaboration with national governments is essential, local and regional levels are important for carrying out cross-border cooperation; partnership - for the achievement of common objectives, the involvement of all actors on one side and on the other side of the border is necessary; common structures - equipped with common resources (technical, administrative, financial and decision-making tools) can carry out sustainable activities, in continuous evolution; manage programs, achieve harmonious relations across borders¹. The enlargement of the EU, through which Romania became a member of the European community, had a major impact on the role and place of the Union outside the borders of Europe, its ability to influence abroad, in general and, in particular, in its immediate vicinity. Once Central and Eastern European states became members of the organization, the border moved eastward, making it the

¹ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on "Euroregions", Brussels, 11 July 2007, Official Journal of the European Union C 256, 27.10.2007, p. 12.

Union's longest land border today. Moreover, Romania has a certain historically and politically motivated sensitivity for foreign policy and orientation of security strategies towards the eastern part of the continent.

Cross-border cooperation is favored by cultural, ethnolinguistic, historical heritage or the presence of national minorities. The Romanian community in Ukraine or the Ukrainian community in Romania, the common ethnolinguistic heritage of the population of Romania and the Republic of Moldova, constitute favorable elements in the process of cross-border cooperation. This complex situation makes the existence and maintenance of interest in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine a true foreign policy leitmotif.

In this context, the protection of historical heritage becomes one of the objectives of the Joint Operational Programs, which were launched since 2007. The implementation of cross-border cooperation interventions between Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, related to the period 2007-2013, demanded a careful approach to the differentiation of needs, taking into account the specifics of each country and the priorities distinct regions. The joint operational program 2007-2013 aimed to create a bridge between the three partner states, with the aim of supporting the communities in the border areas in finding common solutions to the similar problems they were facing. The main cooperation area of the program included the following counties in Romania: Suceava, Botoșani, Iași, Vaslui, Galați and Tulcea; from Ukraine - Odesa and Chernivtsi regions and the entire territory of the Republic of Moldova.

Within the priority Promotion of "people to people" activities with the objective Cultural, social and educational exchanges was conceived and put into application of the cross-border project "Medieval Jewels - Hotin, Suceava, Soroca". Within it, the implementation team set out to coordinate the execution technical design works and archaeological excavation works at the Citadel Soroca, for restoration and construction inside Soroca and Hotin Fortresses and in the area that surrounds them, but also the promotion of medieval fortresses as a destination a cultural tourism. For the rehabilitation of the Soroca fortress, the EU allocated 2 mln. Of euro, for carrying out some rehabilitation works at the Hotin citadel - 660 thousand euros – being renovated the electricity system, which allowed the opening of costume exhibitions historical and military, but also of paintings.

Within the framework of the Joint Operational Program, the foundation of the Suceava Citadel was strengthened in order to ensure the stability of the structure and a unique access point was created in the monument space. Development works were carried out on an area of approximately 2,500 m² of land, parking spaces for cars and coaches being created. Pedestrian and road access ways were opened, adapted to the needs of people with reduced mobility. Also, the Bucovina Museum in Suceava ran together with the Regional Museum of Folk Architecture and Ethnography in Chernivtsi, the Museum of History and Ethnography in Balti, the cross-border project "Let's preserve our past to create our future", which had among its objectives the creation an electronic database to store the cultural heritage of museums. The project had a total value of 208,500 euros. In the Chernivtsi region and Suceava county, the project "Development of the festive tourism network in Bucovina" was implemented with the mission of preserving and promoting the cultural identity in the Suceava county and the Chernivtsi region, as well as the common cultural heritage of the two cross-border regions, having a funding of over 166,000 euros.

Also in Suceava, the Bucovina Museum benefited from the "Common Traditional Heritage - European Promotion Element" project, with funding of 150,000 euros, but also from another project "To preserve the past means to create the future", with funding of over 208,000 euro.

In the Republic of Moldova, the Manuc Bey Mansion in Hâncești, one of the gems of Moldovan architecture, was rebuilt. In addition to the reconstruction of the "Prince's Palace" Manuc Bey, the project supported the restoration works of the Elena Cuza Mortuary Complex in Solești commune (Vaslui, Romania) and the modernization of the air conditioning system of the Municipal Museum of Private Collections of A.V. Bleschiunov from Odessa, Ukraine. Thus, through the implementation of these projects, protection was pursued the historical and cultural heritage of the three countries, the establishment of bridges of cooperation and rapprochement.

One of the aims of the cross-border projects, aimed at the restoration and protection of the historical and cultural heritage, is the development of the tourism infrastructure, the strengthening of the accommodation capacity and associated services. The fortresses of Soroca, Hotin and Suceava can be included in a unique tourist route, which would familiarize tourists with the glorious history of medieval Moldova. At the same time, the

development of marketing and an effective promotion of the cross-border region, together with the creation of the tourism infrastructure would lead to an influx of tourists in the area, taking into account the considerable potential, especially based on the unexploited resources so far. Cultural tourism, agro-tourism and thematic tourism (winter sports, the wine route, historical, ethno-folkloric festivals, etc.), as well as fields such as art craft, production based on local traditions, use of the same brand for certain products, such as cultural heritage products, could be opportunities for beautiful cross-border cooperation². In this sense, the support given to the tourism sector is seen as an essential element in this program, because cross-border areas face similar problems both in terms of the present challenges and the unexploited tourist potential that can generate the development of local tourism based on intensified actions, especially in the field of cultural tourism and eco-tourism. At the same time, this would bring a significant benefit by providing an incentive for the establishment of a large number of small-scale service enterprises and at the same time providing a solid base and sources of job creation in the border area. Within the Cross-Border Cooperation Program of the European Union with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova 2014-2020, compared to 2007-2013, trilateral programs became bilateral, like those between Romania and Ukraine and Romania – Republic of Moldova. This was driven by complexity increased procedures in trilateral projects, a complicated decision-making chain and coordination difficulties.

In the Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2014-2020, the rehabilitation and protection of the historical heritage was included in the priority "Promotion and preservation of the cultural and historical heritage". The Joint Operational Program Romania - Ukraine 2014-2020 included the Romanian counties of Botoșani, Suceava, Tulcea, Maramureș, Satu Mare and the regions of Odesa, Ivano-Frankivsk, Transcarpathia and Chernivtsi in Ukraine. The area of the Joint Operational Program Romania - Republic of Moldova 2014-2020 included the entire territory of the Republic of Moldova and the Romanian counties located on the border, namely Botoșani, Iași, Vaslui and Galați. We currently do not have official ratings, but based on the available information we can make some preliminary conclusions. In the Joint Operational Program with the Republic of

² European Instrument for Neighborhood and Partnership. Operational Program 35 Joint Romania – Ukraine – Moldova 2007-2013, 2008, p.37.

Moldova, 89.1 were allocated millions of euros - an amount which, as in the case of Ukraine, was exceeded by demand. The Botoșani County Administration submitted 13 projects, and the Iași County Council registered 12 projects totaling 24 million euros, more than a quarter of the allocated funds. The Vaslui County Council also initiated ten projects. The following projects aimed at preserving the cultural and historical heritage were selected for implementation:

- Restoration of the "Ion Creangă" Museum ("Bojdeuca" - heritage building, the inner courtyard and the museum building), within the "Călător per cultural meridians" project (1.7 million euros). In the Republic of Moldova, the partners are the Fălești District Council, with the rehabilitation of the Museum of History and Ethnography "Lazăr Dubinovski" and the City Hall, with the revalorization of the architectural monument on the central Ștefan cel Mare street;

- The "Mihai Eminescu" museum is to be restored and consolidated through the "Education and culture without borders" partnership, for which the sum of 1.6 million euros was requested. The partner is the Fălești district, where another architectural monument would be renovated - the Fălești Mixed Primary School.

- The ensemble of the "Constantin Negruzzi" Memorial House from Hermeziu (a village in the Trifesti commune, located on the banks of the Prut), will be rehabilitated "as a package" with the repair of the wooden church from Vorniceni, in the Strășeni district. In addition to the two-century-old church, the 1.5 million euro project includes the conservation and restoration of the 600-year-old pottery kilns in the same village.

- With 1.7 million euros, the Abbey of Golia Monastery (a building dating from the end of the 18th century) will be restored, and the Ungheni District Council will rehabilitate and equip the Museum of the Sculeni commune, founded in 1985 in the building of the former school primary.

- The municipality of Iași joined forces with the Telenești District Council and the Soroca City Hall in an attempt to obtain funding of 7.76 million lei for the development of cooperation and the consolidation of cross-border relations through the creation of a multi-ethnic cultural center, the renovation of the Telenești Museum and the Park. Mihai Eminescu" from Soroca.

- Several joint cultural and artistic projects were organized over a period of 24 months.

Due to the potential of cultural heritage as a resource for sustainable development, for economic growth and for social development, by implementing the restoration and conservation projects of the historical and cultural heritage, the relations between the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Romania are strengthened. By promoting tourism and social development in the regions on both sides of common borders, addressing common challenges and local cross-border promotion for the preservation and promotion of cultural and historical heritage actions, the framework is created for the implementation of cross-border activities in the context of the European Neighborhood Policy with the aim of to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the EU and its neighbors and to give partner countries the opportunity to participate in various EU activities through greater political, security, economic and cultural cooperation.

Without disputing the importance of the implementation of the renovation and conservation projects of the historical and cultural heritage, the experience of the last years has shown that, although there were the necessary premises to strengthen the culture of the implementation of cross-border cooperation projects, its level is currently only moderate. Among the factors that led to this, we mention the delay in starting the program and implicitly the projects, the undifferentiated implementation in territorial-administrative units different in type and size, the existence of different procedures in terms of regulation and/or authorization, poor communication with certain public authorities in Romania or from partner countries. Added to these are certain gaps regarding the administrative capacity of the management structures of the Joint Operational Program Romania – Ukraine – Republic of Moldova, such as the insufficiency of human resources, as well as the poor endowment from a logistical point of view. Political stability is one of the important factors in strengthening cross-border cooperation between the three countries. The current conflict situation in Ukraine, the frequent political changes and, above all, the excessive government alternation often generate changes to the objectives established in bilateral and multilateral cooperation that are not always specific to the Joint Operational Program.

Thus, the technical and financial assistance provided by Romania to the Republic of Moldova, the frequent internal political misunderstandings in the Republic of Moldova have determined the delay or blocking of some project proposals submitted by the eligible ministries or public authorities.

Internal political battles between parties, in the case of coalition governments, have generated multiple disputes regarding priority interventions. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, the disputes over the budget allocations of the projects included in the agreement with Romania were more about topics in the category of who and how manages the resources and what political advantages result from the implementation of the interventions than those related to their efficiency or relevance.

In the case of Ukraine, the armed conflict in the eastern part, as well as the annexation of the Crimea region by the Russian Federation, have generated a series of political fears regarding the stability of the border regions in the south and west of Ukraine (Odessa and Chernivtsi regions). In this context, the centralized behavior of the central authorities increased and, as a result, the specific powers of the regions were diminished. Thus, any intervention specific to cross-border cooperation, whether it is financed through EU technical assistance or whether it is supported through government programs, must be approved at the central level. This state of affairs generates delays in the programming, decision-making and intervention implementation processes³.

At the same time, an important aspect refers to the fact that, in the case of the trilateral program for the period 2007-2013, all decisions were taken, as was normal, in a trilateral format and due to this aspect more time was needed to achieve consensus among all parties involved. In the case of the new approach regarding the POC Romania - Republic of Moldova, respectively Romania - Ukraine for the period 2014-2020, the decision-making process was, from this point of view, faster. Another problematic aspect identified refers to the fact that both in the case of the Republic of Moldova and in the case of Ukraine, the phenomenon of the lack of co-financing budgets for cross-border cooperation programs is manifested. In this case, the beneficiaries, be they authorities, private organizations for profit or non-profit, are forced to identify and contract additional financial assistance.

Much more effective collaboration takes place at the level of experts, compared to that at the level of the political class. The usual

³ Bărbulescu I.G., Brie M., Toderaş N. Cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, respectively between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Opportunities and challenges in the period 2014-2020, in "Strategy and Policy Studies", SPOS 2015, Study no. 2, Bucharest, 2016, p. 89–90.

correspondence with the national authorities of the two countries takes place directly, being technical matters. However, there were also cases in which, as the expected results were not obtained, the intervention of the MAE was requested through diplomatic channels. The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs made efforts to streamline communication with the central authorities of the partner countries, but there were sometimes delays in obtaining answers or points of view. The big problems related to delays come from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and are caused by the internal tensions between their various authorities. For example, in the case of the Republic of Moldova, the existing tensions between the State Chancellery and certain ministries, respectively, of synthesis regarding the way of managing external funds are often revealed. However, these tensions influence the quality of communication between the public authorities targeted by the respective interventions⁴.

At the same time, as a result of the political instability in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, there are frequent personnel changes in the government agencies and authorities responsible for the implementation of cross-border projects. These practices also had a negative impact on the implementation of the Joint Operational Program Romania - Ukraine - Republic of Moldova 2007-2013, but also for the financial year 2014-2020. The low visibility of cross-border cooperation specific interventions is another factor of the low level of project implementation culture. In some situations, the results of the projects were disseminated and perceived by the population as elements of electoral promotion of political competitors from Romania or the Republic of Moldova. This way of erroneous transmission of messages regarding the successes of the governing act significantly diminishes the visibility of the results obtained in within cross-border cooperation projects. Beyond the problems noted in the implementation of cross-border projects aimed at the restoration of historical and cultural heritage, they are of indisputable importance for spreading and raising the level of awareness and education of future generations in the spirit of the values of cultural heritage and its protection.

Border regions have a common culture: folklore, festivals, traditions, language and family ties. It is important that borders do not prevent the maintenance and development of this culture. Through cross-border cooperation in the field of restoration and protection of historical heritage,

⁴ Idem, pag.91.

zonal stabilization is achieved, structural reform processes are strengthened and the process of deepening relations with the EU is supported. Romania supports the European path of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. In the case of the two countries, the agenda of the future period in terms of cross-border cooperation must be one derived from the provisions of the Association Agreements with the European Union.

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