

Cross-boundary cooperation as a factor of development of Bosnia and Herzegovina within the EU integration processes

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Abstract: The paper identifies and defines cross-boundary areas and top-priority cross-boundary zones in Bosnia and Herzegovina (i.e. its entities the Republic of Srpska and BiH Federation). Typicality of geosystem, limitations and problems of development, and distinguished development advantages are primary prerequisites for the overall economic development, regional integrations, territorial cohesion and sustainable development. The pertinence of the paper is both practical and theoretical in line with the spatial-functional organization of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the concepts of cross-boundary cooperation and cross-boundary regional development within the process of EU integration, and the overall sustainable development.

Key-Words: Bosnia and Herzegovina, cross-boundary cooperation, integration, development processes, regional development.

1 Introductory remarks

Modern concerns of spatial development are determined by a whole range of development factors and are caused by the unbalanced and unharmonized territorial development. The increasing development disparities, which are manifested on both local and global levels, are the primary development problems of modern humankind. Contemporary development issues determine new development policies in order to help prevail the target problems.

The European Union observes a rational spatial development in line with the economic, social and territorial cohesion. The cross-boundary cooperation and development “promoted and encouraged by the European Union are modalities of cohesion policy” [1], which is, principally, based upon regional development policies. These policies “encourage regions and cities from different EU countries to cooperate and share experience through joint programs, projects and networks” [2]. Hence, cross-boundary development is “a novel approach to the spatial-functional organization of areas along the boundary line of two or more countries” [1].

Cross-boundary cooperation enables a most favorable approach to evaluation of areas along the borderline in line with rational solutions for the functional organization. One such type of cooperation is the most concrete current type of cooperation in Europe. “It also represents a most

flexible and efficient model for the interest articulation” [3].

There are some EU member countries with a long-term tradition of cross-boundary cooperation. The first institutional cross-boundary initiative was run by Germany and the Netherlands (EUREGIO 1958). It was in late 20th century that the initiative on cross-boundary cooperation intensified its dynamics and expanded outside EU.

In general, “modern development processes and needs affected changes in approach to spatial-functional organization and the role of areas along the borderlines” [3]. Within development policies of EU, the cross-boundary cooperation, especially on regional levels, plays a primary role in spatial-functional organization of bordering areas which are usually underdeveloped. In addition, the aim is to improve coherency and sustainable development by integrating these bordering areas into the current regional development processes.

The cooperation along the borderline is affected by the unbalanced economic growth, insufficient functional connectedness, cultural relations and affinity [4,5]. The priority of one such cooperation is to protect sites, cultural heritage and tourism as well as to encourage economic cooperation and development. In this regard, there are different types of cross-boundary cooperation implemented within various European programs as follows: INTEREG

(International Institute for Ethnic-group Rights and Regionalism), IPA (Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance), ESPON (European Spatial Planning Observatory Network), GMES (Global Monitoring for Environment and Security), EGTC (European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation) etc.

The geographic space of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter BiH) is now facing the initial phase of the aforementioned integration processes. The few scientific and professional studies on cross-boundary cooperation mostly collide with the social practices. It is cross-boundary cooperation and cross-boundary regional development that are a prerequisite for the BiH regional integration and the key factor for the advancement in the EU integration processes. Thus, the primary aim of this paper is to promote cross-boundary cooperation as a most optimal model for the solution of a whole range of BiH development problems and as a most appropriate implementation of European development policies.

In line with the primary aim of the paper, different complementary and compatible methodologies are used focusing on analytical synthesis and generalization methods. The methodological approach enables designation of crucial development issues and their most optimal solutions through the application of the cross-boundary regional development concept. Within this context, we defined areas of cross-boundary cooperation and priority zones within them, which is the subject matter of our study.

2 Fundamental geographic determinants and modern development problems of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The state of Bosnia and Herzegovina resulted from geopolitical disintegration of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in late 20th century, which was a course of wider geopolitical interests defined by global processes. It was in 1992 that the country gained international recognition and the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement modelled the state organization after the civil war. Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises two political-territorial subjects (entities), i.e. the Republic of Srpska (RS) and BiH Federation (FBiH), and Brčko District which was founded later on. Bosnia and Herzegovina covers the territory of 50 129 km² inhabited by 3 791 622 people and has the population density of 76 people per km² [6]. The population consists of three constitutive peoples of

three different denominations as follows: the Serbs (Orthodox Christianity), the Bosnians (Islam) and the Coats (Catholicism). Along with the political-territorial organization, it is the national and religious heterogeneity that further complicates the development integration processes.

From geographical and historical-geographical points of view, Bosnia and Herzegovina is located in west part of the Balkans, i.e. it belongs to the regional community of South-East European countries. Still, due to its development degree, it is a peripheral part of Europe. The country has been a cultural-civilizational crossroad among different geopolitical, economic and cultural interests. Therefore, this geographical space is a sphere of various interests of both neighboring countries and global powers. Although the major Pan-European corridors do not pass here, the country's geographical position between the Pannonian basin in north and the Adriatic basin in south provides it with a significant transit role as it connects Central and, partly, West Europe with the Adriatic basin (the Mediterranean) (Appendix 1).

Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises three different morphological units as follows: Pannonia in north, highlands and basins in west, central and east parts, and the Adriatic basin in south. All these units determine the Eco climate and other natural-geographical specificities, which, along with divergent cultural-civilizational impacts (Central European, Oriental, Mediterranean), create different development conditions. Thus, these are spatial units (regions) of different geographical features, spatial-functional organization, and social-geographical content, i.e. different development opportunities and limitations.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is among economically poorly developed countries in the region (South-East Europe) and Europe in general. Besides, its spatial (regional) development is imbalanced and disproportionate so that areas along the borderline are mostly backward areas. It is a direct consequence of the country's historical-geographical development and destructive development processes in war (1992-1995) and post-war periods, as well as the ineffective recent transformation of the political-economic system. A more prosperous development of BiH will largely be determined by its designation and involvement in both regional and global development processes. In this regard, cross-boundary cooperation and cross-boundary regional development are vital. BiH commerce is compatible with and mutually dependent on the commerce of newly-formed states in former Yugoslavia geospace. The connections

that the Serbs and Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina maintain with their national states, i.e. Serbia and Croatia, are highly related to the intensity of cross-boundary cooperation. All this implies the interest of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its two entities to restore all types of cooperation with the neighboring countries.

Cross-boundary cooperation is an authentic indicator of the stability of relations between neighboring countries. The intensity of BiH cross-boundary cooperation with bordering states is a sign of normalization of post-war connections and interrupted development processes as well as openness to EU integration processes. The overall development processes in South-East Europe, conducted under the umbrella of EU, are heading towards creation of a regional association of SE European countries. The state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is pursuing EU integrations by meeting the defined pre-accession terms, i.e. by conducting reforms (reforms of the political-economic system and meeting EU standards). Integrations with the direct regional surroundings are executed by the entities (The Republic of Srpska and BiH Federation), the cooperation of which has been determined by both historical-geographical development and experience. The Republic of Srpska has the specific cooperation with Serbia (special and parallel connections) within the fields of commerce and social life. Parts of BiH Federation dominated by the Croatian population have similar connection and cooperation with Croatia.

The most common form of cross-boundary cooperation and connection with EU is the association of spatial units that share the borderline (Euro regions). Formation of cross-boundary regions is crucial for BiH in order for it to revitalize connections with the neighboring areas and encourage the overall development processes, i.e. to encourage the development of poorly developed backward areas along the borderline. This form of cross-boundary cooperation and development is precisely what is missing despite strong needs and opportunities. The only instance of one such cooperation in BiH is the Drina-Sava-Majevisa Euro region that has existed since 2003. It comprises 10 municipalities from north-east BiH (7 RS municipalities, 2 BiH Federation municipalities and Brčko District), 4 municipalities from the Republic of Serbia and 2 from the Republic of Croatia [7]. Bosnia and Herzegovina has been participating in six more IPA programs for cross-boundary cooperation.

3 Cross-boundary areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina as prerequisites for development

BiH borderline is largely determined by water streams as follows: the Una River in north-west and the Sava River in north (borderline with the Republic of Croatia), and the Drina River in east (borderline with the Republic of Serbia). In south and south-east, bordering areas with Croatia and Montenegro are actually the Dinarides mountain chain. Ever since July 2013, the borderline with Croatia (932 km) has also been the EU borderline. These bordering areas have been burdened by long-term problems of protection, management, arrangement, and planning, as well as inadequate evaluation that might support the concept of sustainable development. The most rational solution would be “joint and coordinated development programs run by all interested parties, i.e. cross-boundary regional development” [3]. The specific state of affairs in BiH geospace is determined by several cross-boundary areas (the Una River area, the Sava River area, the Drina River area and the Adriatic area) and zones within them (Appendix 2). Among other criteria, the differentiation of priority action zones was performed by using criteria from VASION PLANET project [8]. The differentiated cross-boundary areas and zones within RS geospace are mostly compatible with areas addressed in the RS Spatial Plan [9].

The aforementioned cross-boundary areas have a heterogeneous spatial-functional structure (natural-geographical, colonial, demographic, social-economic, infrastructural, etc.) determined by different internal and external development factors of different nature and intensity.

3.1 The Sava River cross-boundary area

This area covers north Bosnia and Herzegovina and most of it belongs to the Republic of Srpska entity. It is determined by the Sava river-stream and affiliation to the Pannonian basin. In addition, this distinctive geosystem of typical Pannonian features is the state borderline with Croatia. Due to its qualitative specificities, it is favorable for the development of a whole range of functions. It is an agro-industrial area that plays a pertinent transport role and disposes of international border-crossings to the Republic of Croatia, i.e. European Union (Fig. 2). Unlike other neighboring cross-boundary areas, it has a large demographic potential. Furthermore, the urban and rural systems are relatively developed. The Sava River cross-boundary area is characterized

by correspondent settlements which share a long-term tradition of functionality. Its transportation relevance and geographical position, along with the total infrastructure built upon the Pan European corridor X (the Republic of Croatia) offer possibilities to quickly integrate into European development processes. Joint interests of BiH greatly match the interests of the Republic of Croatia. Joint actions of these two countries are mostly defined by the IPA cross-boundary cooperation project (improvement of social and health services, environmental protection focusing on risk management, tourism development, preservation of natural and cultural heritage, improvement of competitiveness and business environment through institutional infrastructure and services) [10]. There is also a joint interest in maintenance of functional hydraulic systems (canals and dykes) and protection of the existing ecosystems by alleviating the threats. The Sava River cross-boundary area can be conditionally divided into Gradiška-Pakrac and Posavina-Slavonia zones (Fig. 2). All of the geographical features of Gradiška-Pakrac cross-boundary zone make it a priority interest for the Republic of Srpska. Its relevance is based upon centuries of cultural-historical development of the Serbs from both sides of the borderline and the protection of joint cultural heritage under the recent geopolitical circumstances.

3.2. The Drina River cross-boundary area

This area is determined by the Drina River water stream, which makes a borderline with the Republic of Serbia. It covers east Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e. the Republic of Srpska entity. Its geographical position is pertinent as it connects BiH with Serbia and brings together the Serbian ethnic population living on opposite sides of the border. In addition, the area mostly comprises highlands and basins. There are different natural elements (morphological, hydrographical, climate, vegetation), which makes it rich in both development potentials and limitations. It is conditionally divided into three cross-boundary zones (Fig 2). The overall development potentials and presence of development processes make upper and lower Podrinje the top priority cross-boundary zones. The area is dominated by high mountains and deep river valleys. Still, demographically, the largest threat is the continuous population emigration. Urban and rural settlement systems are growing weak from both functional and demographical perspectives. Speaking of development, it is a typical backward area. Sustainable development focuses on evaluation of

natural-geographical features (Eco climate and forest potential, hydro potential) as well as on development of forestry and tourism as key development functions. Thus, joint cross-boundary cooperation and cross-boundary regional development with Serbia and Montenegro, which share similar natural-geographical and social-economic characteristics and development processes, are basic prerequisites for sustainable development of bordering areas of these three countries. Lower Podrinje zone has larger population and is commercially more developed. Here, there are already different forms of cross-boundary cooperation that have reached higher level of integration. It is this cross-boundary zone through which the Republic of Srpska culturally and commercially cooperates with the Serbs region-wide.

3.3 The Adriatic cross-boundary area

The Adriatic cross-boundary area of BiH mostly covers the proximate Adriatic inner land of Croatian Dalmatia coast and partly Boka Kotorska coast in Montenegro. This cross-boundary area is characterized by specific natural, economic, and cultural-civilizational features which are under the Mediterranean impact. It is a typical karst area with multiple natural-geographical subsystems that determine the development characteristics of the area. The development dynamics of most parts of this cross-boundary area is also determined by development impulses of mid and south Croatian coast. From a commercial point of view, it is mostly touristic area, which is dependent and connected due to trade of energy-generated products, water and agricultural products. Furthermore, it is prevalently ethnically homogeneous area populated by Croats and Serbs divided by state boundaries of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. From the economic, ethnic and geopolitical points of view, the whole area is rather “sensitive”, which imposes a need to set harmonized cooperation and development strategies. The development processes and problems conditionally divided the Adriatic cross-boundary area into the following zones: Triangle zone (Trebinje-Herceg Novi-Dubrovnik), Neretva-Adriatic zone and Dinara-Adriatic zone (Appendix 2). The Neretva-Adriatic zone is characterized by a larger degree of boundary integration and more progressive development. Still, the Triangle zone and Dinara-Adriatic zone are singled out as top priority zones (Appendix 2). The Triangle zone is priority as we speak of south-east Republic of Srpska integration with south Croatian

coast and parts of Montenegro coast, targeting at major cities of Trebinje, Herceg Novi and Dubrovnik. Spatial and infrastructural capacities of Croatian and Montenegrin parts of this cross-boundary zone are insufficient to meet the growing touristic need, which causes new connections with Trebinje and its vicinity that improve the development of this city. The Dinara-Adriatic zone has dual development processes. The BiH side of the borderline is a backward emigration area with poorly sustainable urban and rural settlement systems. The Croatian side of the borderline in this zone absorbs the demographic energy of the Dinara area, encourages commercial cooperation and largely coordinates development processes in the entire zone.

3.4 The Una River cross-boundary area

The Una River cross-boundary area is determined by the Una River water stream and is a heterogeneous geographical area. The natural physiognomy is outlined by the Peri-Pannonian margin in north and highlands and basins in south. The BiH side of the borderline is inhabited by Serbian and Bosnian population that relies on the Serbian ethnic space in Croatia (Fig. 2). This target area in Bosnia and Herzegovina has various features and different dynamics of development processes, which partly makes it a backward area. The Croatian side of the border is poorly populated and is a backward area in line with demographical sustainability and social-economic development. The integrating factors of this area are the evaluation of the natural basis, i.e. forests, water and ores, the joint interests within the domain of environment protection and protected area and risk management, as well as the need for cultural connections of the Serbian ethnos.

4 Concluding remarks

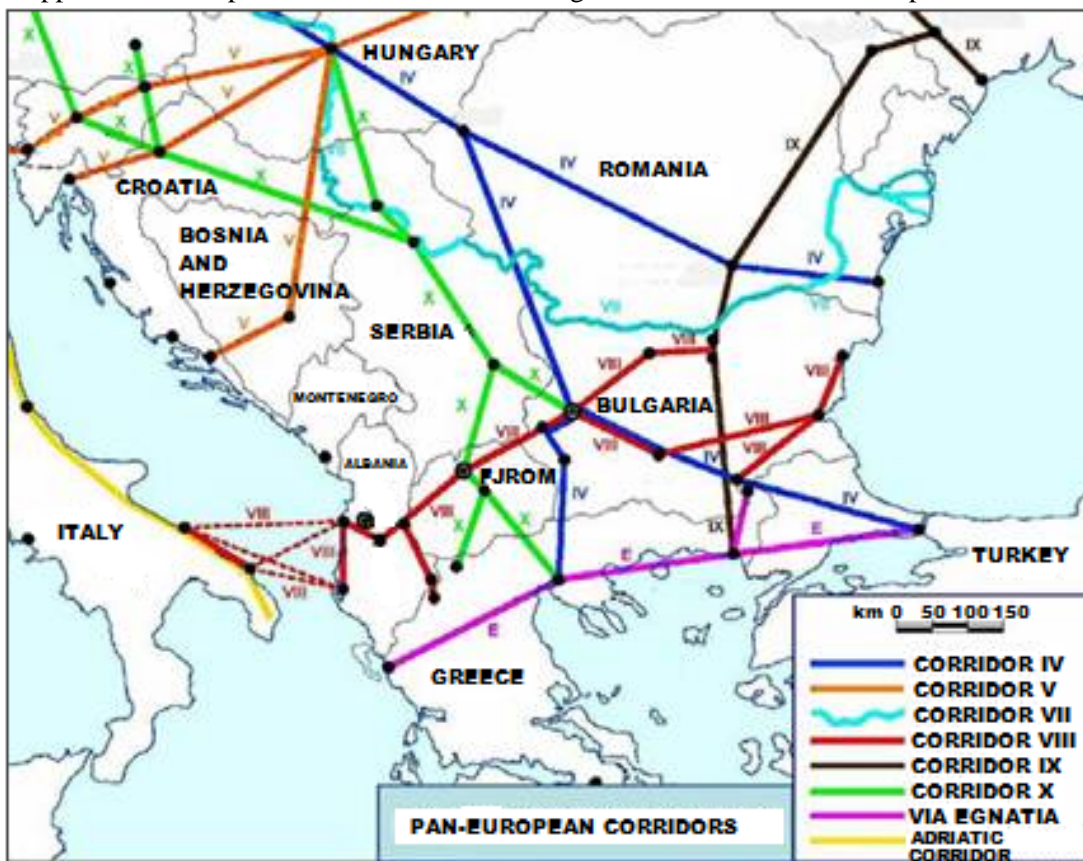
Different levels of inclusion into development processes and regional integration are what determine the development opportunities of Bosnia and Herzegovina cross-boundary areas. Standardization of legal regulations, improvement of economic activities, institutional arrangement, infrastructure and connectivity, high level of awareness, responsibility for geospace, resources and development, risk management, intra and interregional connections are all parts of positive initiatives that are a starting point for cross-boundary connections. At the same time, these are

all key problems of development and mutual connections. Thus, past conflicts, unaddressed political and territorial issues, different perception of modern global state of affairs all negatively affect cross-boundary associations. Development and cross-boundary linkage are an imperative to quickly join regional and European development processes.

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Appendix 1- The position of Bosnia and Herzegovina in line with Pan-European corridors



Appendix 2 – Cross-boundary areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina

