

# Sharing the Experiences of Visegrad Cooperation in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership Countries

Interregional Workshop  
on  
Cross-border Cooperation

Chisinau, Moldova, 24-26 June 2010

## *SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS*

### Contents

<b>General Findings.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Three Aspects of Analyzing Cross-border Cooperation and Regional Obstacles to CBC.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>The role of states/local governments in CBC.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Financing and co-financing.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>The impact of regional initiatives.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>Conclusions.....</b>	<b>6</b>

1



norwegian financial mechanism



**Contact: Frank Kalmar | E-mail: [f.kalmar@icdt.hu](mailto:f.kalmar@icdt.hu); Katerina Ivanova | E-mail: [k.ivanova@icdt.hu](mailto:k.ivanova@icdt.hu)**

Árvácska u. 12, 1022 Budapest | Phone: +36 (1) 438 0820 | Fax: +36 (1) 438 0821 | E-mail: [info@icdt.hu](mailto:info@icdt.hu) | [www.icdt.hu](http://www.icdt.hu)

## GENERAL FINDINGS

- Participants in general highlighted the crucial importance of cross-border cooperation in overcoming natural and political/administrative borders between the countries; to overcome historical animosities and prejudices between peoples of border regions. Among other motives for cross-border cooperation (CBC) were mentioned the intention to bridge the gaps between the “centre” and “periphery”, promotion of economic growth and development, as well as the development of operational local/regional administrative structures. The following basic points emerged from the panel presentations and discussions:
  - Cross-border cooperation (CBC) is one of the important aspects of regional cooperation;
  - CBC has bilateral, regional, as well as European dimensions;
  - Specific experiences of the V4 in CBC can be used as an example in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and Western Balkan regions;
  - Civil society organizations (CSOs) can be considered as important actors of CBC.
- The Visegrad Experience was summarized in the following points:
  - CBC at the local level occurs as a result of organic development, thus it has been a more difficult and lengthy process than the creation of the Visegrad Group itself. CBC can be more complex than interstate relations;
  - The real task of state level institutions and international organizations in terms of supporting CBC is to create a sustainable legal and institutional framework for CBC;
  - Subsidiarity – the delegation of authority in a given issue to the lowest possible level where it can be managed – is key for CBC to flourish, so decision making will not become bureaucratic;
  - Focused financial mechanisms should be developed as in the case of the ENPI CBC instrument;
  - Local capacity-building requires constant attention.

The IVF in particular serves the last two objectives and as such is a good institutional example for both regions.
- For the majority of Eastern Neighborhood countries, CBC is a valuable instrument for promoting European integration processes across borders, as well as a useful mechanism of cooperation for achieving common goals, such as:
  - Stimulating economic growth and higher standards of living on both sides of the borders involved by improving conditions for free trade, investments and free movement of services, in particular by promoting integration of the region into European communication and transportation networks;
  - Improving bilateral relations between neighbouring states and assisting political processes intended to solve territorial conflicts, including by promoting minority rights on both sides of the border;
  - Reducing challenges caused by the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarging EU and countries without a perspective of accession.

2



norwegian financial mechanism



**Contact: Frank Kalmar | E-mail: [f.kalmar@icdt.hu](mailto:f.kalmar@icdt.hu); Katerina Ivanova | E-mail: [k.ivanova@icdt.hu](mailto:k.ivanova@icdt.hu)**

Árvácska u. 12, 1022 Budapest | Phone: +36 (1) 438 0820 | Fax: +36 (1) 438 0821 | E-mail: [info@icdt.hu](mailto:info@icdt.hu) | [www.icdt.hu](http://www.icdt.hu)

### THREE MAIN ASPECTS OF ANALYZING CBC, REGIONAL OBSTACLES TO CBC

Three main aspects of CBC were identified as problem areas upon analysing CBC in the target regions:

- The role of states and local governments in CBC;
  - Financing and co-financing of CBC;
  - The impact of regional initiatives on CBC and vice versa.
- The role of states/local governments in CBC

*States play an important role in the development of CBC. The State is an important actor in domestic politics, but also plays a crucial role on the international scene. Since states frame the whole development of CBC, specific attention should be paid to the following aspects:*

#### ➤ Legislation

*Legislation passed by national parliaments should be supportive of the development of CBC and should reflect comments and suggestions of the representatives of local governments and civil society organisations. States which are serious about developing CBC should harmonize their relevant legislation with neighbours.*

#### ➤ Decentralisation

*The process of decentralisation plays an important role in the development of CBC. The stronger competencies regional and local governments acquire, the broader opportunities for the enhancement of CBC they have.*

#### ➤ Transparency in decision making

*This category concerns state governments as well as regional and local governments. Fight against corruption is an important task for both the Western Balkan and EaP countries, though the V4 countries should also pay a close attention to this issue. Only a transparent decision making process enables the stakeholders involved in CBC to trust one another.*

#### ➤ Good relations with neighbours

*Another prerequisite for improving CBC is good neighbourly relations. Countries that have unsettled borders with their neighbours can hardly develop fruitful CBC. The borders, however, are not the only problem that might complicate good neighbourly relations. Other problems concern political tensions between political leaders or more profoundly the lack of political will.*

#### ➤ Relations between the state and local governments



norwegian financial mechanism



*Relations between state and local governments are crucial from the point of view of efficient CBC. One of the problems in this area might be a different political orientation of the leaders of local and state governments.*

➤ *Relations between state/local governments and CSOs*

*Good relations between state/local governments and CSOs are another prerequisite for an efficient CBC. States should consider CSOs as partners and not as a distraction. The same applies to the relationship between local governments and CSOs. Local governments and the grassroots level need to coordinate their efforts to lobby at the central level.*

- *Financing and co-financing*

- *Financing and co-financing is an extremely important issue for CBC. States as such should be interested and involved in the financing of CBC since good relations with neighbours (regional cooperation) in the context of is one of their basic foreign policy priorities (and a condition to advance in the process of European integration).*

- *Other sources of financing include international financial institutions and other donors (foundations, funds etc.). An example of the International Visegrad Fund seems to attract partners both in the Western Balkans and the EaP countries, since it is a unique institution dedicated to the financing of educational, cultural and – to a large extent – cross-border cooperation projects. During ten years of its existence, the IVF has become an important actor in supporting the development of civic the dimension of Visegrad cooperation.*

- *Regional initiatives and their impact on CBC*

- *The role of the Visegrad group on the development of CBC cannot be questioned. The importance of CBC in building good neighbourly relations is not only recognized politically and embedded in all crucial V4 documents, including the most important declarations and guidelines, but is also supported financially, mostly through the Visegrad Fund.*

- *The Western Balkans still faces a problem concerning the lack of an indigenous and efficient regional initiative in this field. Though there are initiatives that deserve attention, e.g. the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) or the Southeast European Cooperation Process (SEEC) – they lack complex mechanisms that would be supportive for the development of CBC.*

- *The involvement of the Eastern Neighbourhood countries in the Eastern Partnership concept offers certain possibilities for the enhancement of CBC cooperation in the region. Expectations, however, cannot be high at the moment, since the EaP is still in the process of being fleshed out in practice. The EaP Civil Society Forum can be an additional measure to be used for the development of CBC.*

- *Experience in the Eastern Partnership countries highlighted that often the implementation of CBC projects are affected by:*
  - *Lack of meaningful political commitment from the part of central governments;*
  - *Lack of necessary financial resources that would enable local authorities and civil society organizations to co-finance CBC projects supported by international donors ;*
  - *Weak institutions and poor governance;*
  - *Insufficient respect for the rule of law;*
  - *Unresolved territorial disputes and unfinished demarcation of borders; under-developed border and customs check points;*
  - *Unsettled property rights on the territory of partner countries;*
  - *Underdeveloped communication and transportation infrastructure;*
  - *Unsettled interethnic tensions at the border areas;*
  - *Lack of dialogue between CBC stakeholders (policy makers, local community and local self-government of border regions, donors);*
  - *Lack of practice in sharing experience obtained in implementing CBC projects;*
  - *Cumbersome procedures for small cross-border trade (especially for agricultural products).*
  
- *In Eastern Partnership there are three established Euro-regions that involve Romania (8 border regions), Moldova (24 districts) and Ukraine (2 regions). These 2 Romanian-Moldovan-Ukrainian Euro-regions - Lower Danube (1998) and Upper Prut (2000), as well 1 Moldovan-Romanian Euro-region, Siret-Prut-Nistru (2000). These Euro-regions have failed to meet the expectations of the communities that live in the area. They revitalization will occur only if the existing legal framework for developing cross-border cooperation between Moldova, Ukraine and Romania will be substantiated with specific projects and actions.*
  
- *The participants from Western Balkans pointed out that the success of the CBC's initiatives in the region is challenged in addition by such factors as:*
  - *Kosovo's declaration of independence and Serbia's non-recognition of it;*
  - *Border municipalities are often left out of national-level programs targeting development, democratization and capacity-building;*
  - *Border municipalities and civil society usually have much weaker capacity than those more centrally located;*
  - *The poor economic and social conditions in border regions in comparison with the central towns and regions;*
  - *Tensions between ethnic groups are often higher in the border regions.*



## CONCLUSIONS

- *The central authorities are not the implementers of CBC but they need to create the right legal, institutional and often financial prerequisites for it. Constant coordination and information and experience sharing between the state and local levels is essential. One tool that could be useful in both regions is to organize “NGO Fairs” where all interested stakeholders could present their goals and ideas, and so create a venue for dialogue and seek for partners and funding. Such events could also attract the attention of foreign donors. In a similar vein, dialogue should be institutionalized among euroregions to exchange experiences and encourage the spread of this particularly effective form of CBC.*
- *In order to promote CBC in a wider Europe and represent the special interest and needs of bordering regions in the Western Balkans and the European Neighborhood area at a European level, a regular forum should be created for border dialogues.*
- *The International Visegrad Fund is ready to participate in providing technical assistance on the IVF model for interested government representatives.*
- *Euroregions represent a valuable CBC instrument, therefore, countries should undertake the necessary efforts to revitalize them by exploiting the best practices provided by well established Euroregions, for instance the Carpathian Euroregion. The participants showed a special interests in learning more about the Carpathian Foundation, which is a unique, cross-border regional foundation operating on the territory of the Carpathian Euroregion that provides grants and technical assistance to NGOs and local governments, focusing primarily on inter-regional, economic development and cross-border activities.*
- *The successful example of the Carpathian Euroregion shows that the development of CBC is not possible unless all participating countries/regions meet certain criteria, such as: existence of shared values and common interests; partnership; subsidiarity; the existence of a common development concept or program; joint structures on regional/local level and independent sources of financing.*
- *It was recommended to replicate the best practices of the Carpathian Euroregion in the case of Euroregions set up in Eastern Partnership area as well. Euroregions from Eastern Partnership would benefit greatly if they would set up International Secretariats following the model of the Carpathian Euroregion. This secretariat fulfils the operative and administrative tasks, co-ordinates daily activity, organizes the meetings of the council and provides other administrative services. It also keeps contact with the National Offices, national representatives, co-ordinates the activity of the working commissions, establishes and keeps contact with international organizations, takes part in fundraising.*
- *Visegrad experience also shows that the partnership between local/regional and central authorities is essential for developing and implementing cross-border cooperation projects. Thus in the case of Slovakia, the inter-ministerial committees on CBC has engaged the local/regional and central authorities in a permanent communication on issues concerning CBC. Those committees help them to identify the concrete needs, develop projects, find resources, monitor the implementation of the projects, etc.*



norwegian financial mechanism



**Contact: Frank Kalmar | E-mail: [f.kalmar@icdt.hu](mailto:f.kalmar@icdt.hu); Katerina Ivanova | E-mail: [k.ivanova@icdt.hu](mailto:k.ivanova@icdt.hu)**

Árvácska u. 12, 1022 Budapest | Phone: +36 (1) 438 0820 | Fax: +36 (1) 438 0821 | E-mail: [info@icdt.hu](mailto:info@icdt.hu) | [www.icdt.hu](http://www.icdt.hu)

- *The EU plays an increasingly important role: in particular, the EU was praised for putting forward a medium term strategy and financial resources for promoting CBC. The ENP CBC Strategy Paper 2007-2013 and Indicative Program 2007-2010 provide the strategic framework for EC support for cross-border cooperation on the external borders of the European Union, and the indicative allocations and programming framework under the European and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). In the Eastern Neighborhood, ENP is financing three Land-Border Programs Poland-Belarus-Ukraine (€186.201 million); Hungary-Slovakia-Ukraine-Romania (€68.638 million); Romania-Moldova-Ukraine (€126.718 million) and 1 Sea-Basin Programs that covers 10 states (€17.306 million).*
- *Participants identified the following common CBC opportunities:*
  - *Enhancing the institutional and human capacities of the local authorities;*
  - *Increasing transparency and institutional accountability of the local authorities;*
  - *Strengthening respect for the rule of law;*
  - *Stepping up the efforts to combat corruption among local authorities;*
  - *Developing clear cut procedures of direct joint actions taken by the countries' authorities;*
  - *Setting up institutional mechanisms that would engage governments and local authorities in cross-border cooperation efforts at the central and regional levels;*
  - *Developing a common set of norms for administration, financing and monitoring of implementation of cross-border cooperation projects;*
  - *Harmonizing border control, taxation and customs standards and practices;*
  - *Modernizing and properly equipping border and customs check points;*
  - *Rehabilitating the road infrastructure in the border areas;*
  - *Environmental protection, prevention of natural disasters through capacity development of bordering communities;*
  - *Promoting regional tourism (defining ways for "branding" regional rural tourism);*
  - *Supporting establishment of youth clubs in rural areas aiming to build human capital and leadership potential in bordering regions.*
- *In particular, facilitating the cross-border movement of people and commerce (transportation) was identified as one of most important priorities. Consequently, participants highlighted several CBC opportunities in this area, such as:*
  - *Enhancing effectiveness and transparency of Border Guards and Customs control;*
  - *Building capacity and knowledge of EU border and customs control by implementing the same European standards and best practices;*
  - *Implementing the Integrated Border Management concept;*
  - *Enhancing public awareness on border management and security.*
- *All participants underlined the vital role played by non-governmental organizations in initiating cross-border communication ties/bridges and promoting confidence building measures, thus creating appropriate conditions for starting full-fledged CBC projects in different fields. Therefore, it was recommended to further facilitate, encourage and assist the networking of non-governmental organizations in the cross-border areas.*

- *Mass-media should be more actively involved in reflecting the CBC success stories, projects' impact, CBC's relevance for ordinary people and even in inter-state relations. In this context, it was argued that the need for special trainings on CBC for mass-media representatives should be launched in order to acquaint them with the cross-border cooperation principles, objectives mechanisms and potential benefits for ordinary people, regions and states.*



norwegian financial mechanism



**Contact: Frank Kalmar | E-mail: [f.kalmar@icdt.hu](mailto:f.kalmar@icdt.hu); Katerina Ivanova | E-mail: [k.ivanova@icdt.hu](mailto:k.ivanova@icdt.hu)**

Árvácska u. 12, 1022 Budapest | Phone: +36 (1) 438 0820 | Fax: +36 (1) 438 0821 | E-mail: [info@icdt.hu](mailto:info@icdt.hu) | [www.icdt.hu](http://www.icdt.hu)