CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION EUROREGIONS IN THE ROMANIAN DANUBE BORDER-ZONE[1]

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Abstract. Since several transversal issues have been cropping up, the need was felt for a unitary system to tackle them. So, the building of some cross-border co-operation structures both at local level (cross-border zones) and at regional level (cross-border Euroregions) appeared as highly necessary and desirable. Their typology depends on the intensity and character of cross-border fluxes, the existence of local convergence cores, and of elements of complementariness and homogeneity between the frontier spaces. The Danube-lined Romanian frontier represents an axis of discontinuity between natural regions, each with its own distinct traits. As a result, the limitrophe border zone shows particular social and economic characteristics. Although the Danube River has favoured the emergence of an urban area, yet the respective towns do not form a coherent system, the zone itself being extremely rural as a whole. The Romanian cross-border zone in the Danube sector features by a sudden variation in transversal fluxes, concentrating on certain directions imposed by the pattern of communication routes and the layout of doublet towns.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contradiction between the institutional division of the territory and the existence of cross-border issues that asked for a unitary approach and consequently cross-border co-operation led to the appearance of new types of regional co-operation structures which coincide with state-frontiers: cross-border co-operation euroregions. This kind of co-operation should take into consideration the fact that between the cross-border zones there is a strip of frontier and, there are different legislations with distinct requirements of the co-operation framework. Consequently, *breaking up the process* represents the main threat to cross-border regions; if this process is not properly co-ordinated at central level, there is the risk of loosing control, the cross-border region gravitating towards one of the co-participant states.

The issues that fuel cross-border dynamics are part of the level of harmonization of the policy for the development of cross-border zones that come into contact. The areas situated on each side of the border have, or have not, the tendency to evolve in the same way, as a result of central and local policy, but also of specific local situations.

The separation caused by hydrographical systems has led to the individualization of some transversal fluxes concentration cores, as a result of favourable local topographic conditions. Thus, the presence of crossing fords has led to the concentration of population on both banks and gradually doublet settlements would appear, with local or even regional polarization role. In time, the cores of cross-border demographic concentration have acted as Euroregion' embryos through the extension of a low border traffic at macro-territorial scale based on the existing relationships within the settlement systems of conterminous administrative-territorial units.

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This is also the case of the cross-border zone in the Romanian Danube sector; throughout the centuries, the river was both an important axis of structuring transversal fluxes and the main navigation thoroughfare, which favoured longitudinal fluxes between Central Europe and the Black Sea Basin. Its presence generated a real "urban belt" in the southern part of this country, contributing to the development of a specific economic activity, thereby increasing the polarization potential of port towns. The latter is closely related to connecting harbours to the land transport system, and to some towns acting as customs points (Fig. 1).

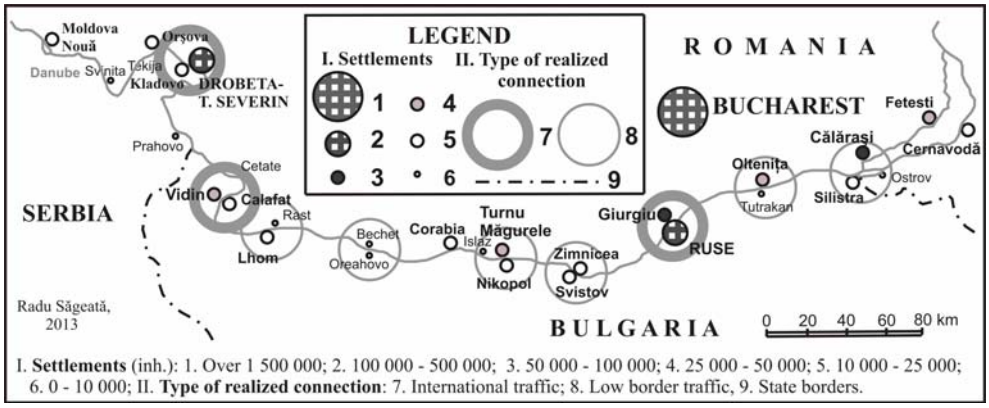

Fig. 1 – The doublet settlements within the Danube-lined sector of the Romanian border and categories of connections materialized through them.

2. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

After the Second World War, the Romanian Sector of the Danube became an axis that attracted different industries (Fig. 2):

– *chemistry* at Drobeta-Turnu Severin, Turnu Măgurele, Giurgiu, Brăila and Tulcea;
– *water-power stations* at Iron Gate I and II;
– *thermal-power stations* at Drobeta-Turnu Severin, Brăila and Galaţi;
– *integrated metallurgical complexes* at Galaţi and Călăraşi;
– *nuclear-power stations* at Cernavodă.

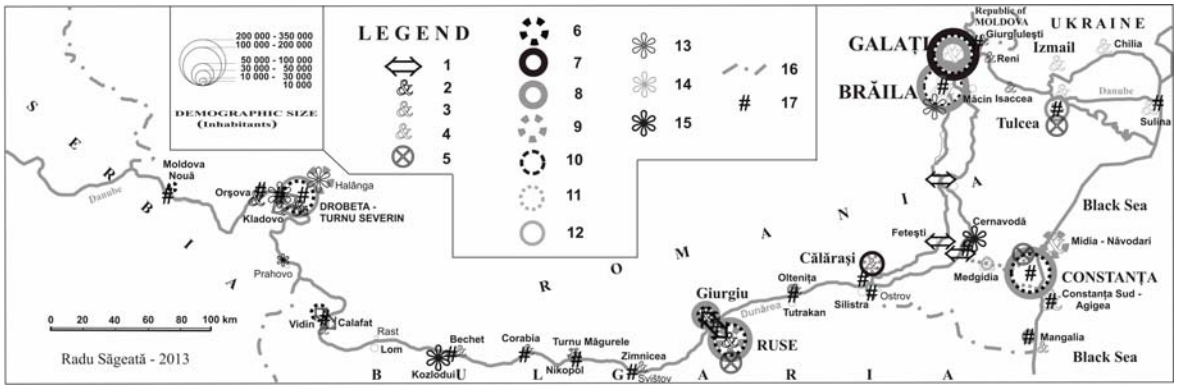

Fig. 2 – The urban system in the Lower Sector of the Danube.
1. Bridges; 2. River harbours; 3. River-maritime harbours; 4. Maritime harbours; 5. Airports; 6. Copper ore extraction centres; 7. Iron-and-steel estates; 8. Ship-yards; 9. Chemical and petro-chemical industries; 10. Building-materials industries; 11. Paper and cellulose industries; 12. Cement factories; 13. Thermal-power stations; 14. Water-power stations; 15. Nuclear-electric stations; 16. Terrestrial borders; 17. Cross-border connections.

As a result, ecological problems with cross-border implications favoured by northeast and northwest winds cropped up, tensioning cross-border relationships several times.

Following the structural changes after 1989, the economic evolution of settlements in the Romanian sector of the Danube took up a negative course.

The causes behind this process are:

– the general decline of the Romanian economy, with direct effects on the depleted volume of goods transited on the Danube and the industrial production capacity of units located in industrial ports;

– the dismemberment of COMECOM, resulting in the loss of some important markets, affected especially the export-oriented industrial branches, mainly metallurgy

– the dramatic decrease of investments in industry hindered the development and modernization of this sector, and maintained low-labour productivity levels;

– the intensification of environmental protection was a pressure element for the polluting industries (chemistry, metallurgy), forcing them to limit production in order to observe acceptable pollution standards.

3. THE PRESENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION THE EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE REGION

The analyzed space, although greatly transformed during the last 20th century decades, is extremely rural, urban areas being fewer and scattered (Table 1).

The share of the active population and its professional structure show employment to stand between 29% and 76%, but most of the time the percentage is lower than the all-country average value, lowest values being registered in the highly rural countryside.

The low percentage of industrial population in the village area supports this assertion.

Taking into account the structure of the active population, some functional types of settlements can be outlined in terms of development and location: ship-building: *Orşova, Drobeta - Turnu Severin*, *Giurgiu*, *Oltenița*, *Brăila*, *Galați*, and *Tulcea*; iron-and-steel industry: *Zimnicea*, *Călăraşi* and *Galați*; chemical industry: *Turnu Măgurele*, *Oltenița* and *Tulcea* and agriculture.

Table 1

The number of population in the Danubian towns of Romania (1977–2011).

Urban Settlements	**Number of population (inh.) (Population census)**				**Change in population number (%) (Population census)**			
	1977	1992	2002	2011*	1977/1992	1992/2002	2002/2011	1977/2011
Moldova Nouă	15 973	16 862	13 917	11 603	+ 5.65	- 21.16	- 19.94	- 37.64
Orşova	13 701	15 985	12 965	10 080	+ 16.67	- 23.29	- 28.62	- 35.92
Drobeta - Turnu Severin	76 686	115 526	104 557	88 758	+ 50.64	- 10.49	- 17.80	+ 15.74
Calafat	15 568	20 435	18 858	17 280	+ 31.26	- 8.36	- 9.13	+ 11.00
Bechet[1]			3 864	3 542			- 9.09	
Dăbuleni[1]			13 888	12 297			- 12.94	
Corabia	19 705	22 522	20 610	14 978	+ 14.29	- 9.28	- 37.60	- 31.56
Turnu Măgurele	32 341	36 825	30 089	25 015	+ 13.86	- 22.38	- 20.28	- 29.28
Zimnicea	13 964	17 140	15 672	13 170	+ 22.74	- 9.37	- 19.00	- 6.03
Giurgiu	51 544	74 236	69 345	53 260	+ 44.02	- 7.05	- 30.20	+ 3.33
Oltenița	24 414	31 743	27 213	23 307	+ 30.02	- 16.64	- 16.76	- 4.75
Călăraşi	49 727	76 886	70 039	57 129	+ 54.62	- 9.77	- 22.60	+ 14.88
Feteşti	27 491	34 945	33 294	27 795	+ 27.11	- 4.96	- 19.78	+ 1.10
Cernavodă	13 608	22 046	18 915	16 143	+ 62.01	- 16.53	- 17.17	+ 18.63

Table 1 (continuing)

Hârşova	8 239	10 342	10 097	9 127	+ 25.52	- 2.43	- 10.63	+ 10.78
Brăila	195 659	234 706	216 292	176 004	+ 19.95	- 8.51	- 22.89	- 11.17
Măcin	10 544	12 047	10 625	8 473	+ 14.25	- 13.38	- 25.40	- 24.44
Galaţi	238 292	325 788	298 861	241 776	+ 36.72	- 9.01	- 23.61	+ 1.46
Isaccea	5 347	5 588	5 374	4 947	+ 4.51	- 3.98	- 8.63	- 8.08
Tulcea	61 729	97 500	91 875	68 608	+ 57.95	- 6.12	- 33.91	+ 11.14
Sulina	4 911	5 492	4 601	3 903	+ 11.83	- 19.36	- 17.88	- 25.82

2011 * - Preliminary results; Bechet, Dăbuleni [1] – Towns since 2004

Source: Population Census 1977, 1992, 2002, 2011. Data processing by Radu Săgeată.

The European Union Strategy for the Danube Region represents a vast regional co-operation project signed by the representatives of 14 states and adopted by the Council of Europe on the 24th of June, 2011 after lengthy public debates and political, economic, administrative and scientific meetings (Bălteanu 2012, p. 8). The document includes the official communique and action plan of 11 priority domains, grouped by four axes: environmental protection, prosperity-building in the region and improvement of governance, also stipulating concrete actions for the sustainable development of each domain.

Transports fall into the "connectivity" axis, measures referring to traffic on the Danube and its navigable tributaries, alternative energy resources and development of tourism. The strategy starts from the reality that, for all the great importance of the Danube – Black Sea fluvial-maritime axis in enlarging economic relations between the EU and the Central Asian states, transport on the Danube is insufficiently developed. The idea is to have multi-modal terminals built in the Danubian ports until 2020, in order to better connect river transport to road-and-rail facilities (European Commission, 2012–b).

4. CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION EUROREGIONS IN THE ROMANIAN BORDER ZONE OF THE DANUBE SECTOR

The topographic peculiarities, preferential directionalization and the intensity of cross-border fluxes are the factors that individualize and characterize a cross-border area.

The delimitation of the Romanian sector of the cross-border area depends on two essential elements:

– the closed character of the border, which imposes the degree of narrowness of cross-border area;

– the preferential orientation of transversal circulation axes, which determines the width in some specific sectors of maximum intensity of cross-border fluxes.

The intensity of cross-border is given by the exchange vectors caused by the doublet settlements, location and type of customs points (low frontier traffic, international traffic) and not least by the specific of connection axes (bridge or ferry-boat), which determines the intensity of cross-border fluxes.

In these conditions, cross-border co-operation in the Danubian sector imposed new exigencies: on the one hand, easing traffic flows, and on the other, securing the European Union's external frontiers by efficiently controlling the human and material fluxes arriving at its eastern borders.

The integration of Romania into the Schengen space, as well as the country's position at the eastern periphery of Europe's area of free circulation implies stressing co-operation exigencies, moreover so, as the Romanian ethnical element on both sides of the eastern border is very homogeneous. Therefore, facilitating cross-border traffic on either side of the Prut River is extremely necessary.

Between 2001 and 2005, a number of seven cross-border co-operation euroregions were formed: five with bilateral participation (Romanian-Serbian and Romanian-Bulgarian) and two, situated at the

EU eastern border, with trilateral participation (Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia; Romania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova).

The Middle Danube-Iron Gate Euroregion (Fig. 3) associates the Romanian counties of Caraş-Severin and Mehedinţi, lying on the lefthandside of the Danube, with the Serbian districts of Branicesvski and Borski (Bor) on the righthandside of the River. Since the Romanian administrative units are larger, the Romanian sector covers 64.5% of all of the Euroregion's surface-area. The main cross-border polarizing nuclei are found in the Romanian sector: the towns of Drobeta-Turnu Severin (92,617 inh.) and Reşiţa (73,282 inh.) rank first in the urban hierarchy of Caraş-Severin and Mehedinţi counties; municipia: Caransebeş (24,689 inh.) and Orşova (10,441 inh.); the Serbian sector: Požarevac (44,183 inh.) and Bor (34,160 inh.).

Fig. 3 – Middle Danube – Iron Gate Euroregion.
1. Romanian sector; 2. Serbian sector; 3. Main polarizing cores;
4. Secondary polarizing cores; 5. State border.

What makes this Euroregion functional is in the first place is the homogeneous natural potential of the Danube Defile and of the adjacent mountain zones. Thus, the co-operation framework is based on the protection of fragile natural ecosystems, a *sine qua non* for sustainable regional development. The two hydro-power and navigation systems in this Danubian sector (Iron Gate I and II) have engendered a very anthropogenic landscape, so that rare or endemic ecosystems are highly vulnerable.

The "Danube 21" Association of cross-border co-operation (Fig. 4) belongs to the category of euroregions is formed of three sectors: Romanian, Serbian and Bulgarian. Just like the former Euroregion it is situated on the external EU frontier. As Serbia is expected to join the European Union, the two Euroregions will fall inside the EU space, at the junction between Central Europe and the West Balkans. Euroregion "Danube 21" is an associative structure grouping 8 Serbian, and 8 Bulgarian municipalities and 5 Romanian administrative territorial units: 4 communes and one town. Cross-border converging nuclei make it functional Vidin (48,071 inh.), Zaječar (43,860 inh.), Calafat (17,336 inh.) and the Calafat-Vidin bridge across the River (Danube Bridge 2), inaugurated on June 14, 2013. The geostrategic importance of the bridge lies in revitalising the Athens – Sofia – Timişoara – Budapest traffic axis, as an alternative to the old Ruse – Giurgiu – Bucharest one with connections to the former Soviet space.

Fig. 4 – "Danube 21" Cross-border Co-operation Association.
1. Romanian Sector; 2. Serbian Sector; 3. Bulgarian Sector;
4 Polarizing cores; 5. State border.

A peculiar feature of the *"South Danube" Euroregion* (Fig. 5) is discontinuity of the Romanian sector, it consisting of four distinct areas corresponding to the administrative territory of four towns in Teleorman County: Alexandria, Roşiori de Vede and Zimnicea, fact that reduces considerably territorial functionality in the Romanian sector and implicity its viability. In opposition, the Bulgarian sector is contiguous, and has three municipalities: two (Nikopol and Belene) in Pleven Province and one (Svishtov) in Veliko-Tarnovo Province, so that this Euroregion has entirely an urban population (ca 564,000 inh.). Cross-border polarization axes are represented by doublet towns situated on either side of the River (Turnu Măgurele – Nikopol, and Zimnicea – Svishtov, respectively) connected by ferry-boat traffic.

"Danubius" and *"Giurgiu-Ruse"* are two overlapping Euroregions formed around the polarizing nucleus of Ruse (149,642 inh.) and Giurgiu (61,353 inh.), linked by the first bridge, built across the Danube (Danube Bridge 1, Friendship Bridge) in the Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border sector and commissioned on June 20, 1954. This is the main convergence axis of cross-border fluxes.

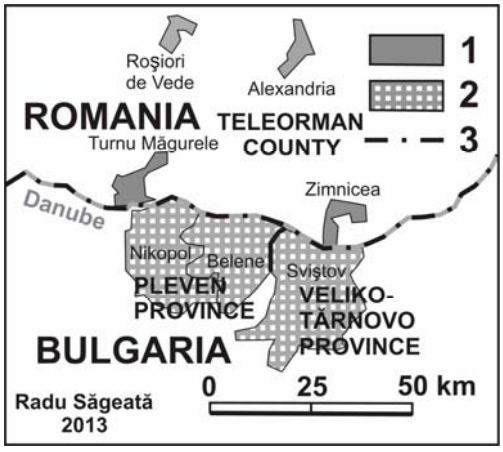

Fig. 5 – "South Danube" Euroregion.
1. Romanian Sector; 2. Bulgarian Sector; 3. State border.

The "Danubius" Euroregion (Fig. 6) is formed of the two administrative structures co-ordinated by the towns of Ruse in the Bulgarian sector (Ruse Province with 8 municipalities) and Giurgiu in the Romanian sector (with three towns, one of them a municipium, and 51 communes). The Euroregion covers 6,310 km^2 and has around 564,000 inhabitants.

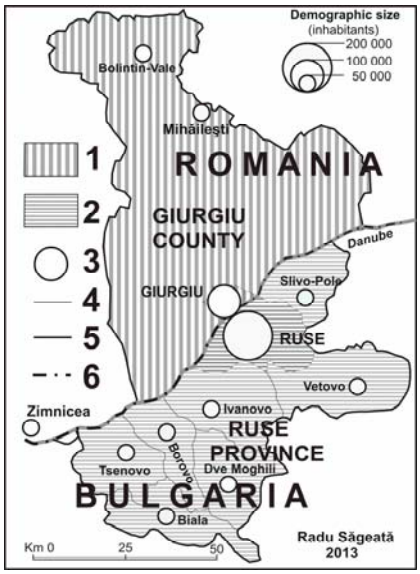

Fig. 6 – "Danubius" Euroregion.
1. Romanian Sector; 2. Bulgarian Sector; 3. Polarizing cores; 4. Limits of municipalities;
5. Limits of the Euroregion; 6. State border.

"Giurgiu-Ruse" Euroregion (Fig. 7) is part of *"Danubius" Euroregion*, being co-ordinated by the same cross-border axis of polarization. It has but one town (Giurgiu Municipium), 14 communes in Giurgiu County, and 7 municipalities in Ruse Province. Total surface-area 2,784 km^2, and a population around 353,000 inhabitants.

Fig. 7 – "Giurgiu – Ruse" Euroregion.
1. Giurgiu; 2. Ruse; 3. Rural territories in Romania; 4. Rural territories in Bulgaria;
5. Limits of communes/municipalities; 6. State border; 7. The Danube.

The Danube-Dobrogea Euroregion (Fig. 8) is the only one in the Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border sector circumscribed to both a river cross-border sector (west of Călăraşi-Silistra doublet towns) and a terrestrial sector (between Călăraşi-Silistra and Vama Veche). It is the largest (24,177 km^2) among the bilateral Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border co-operation euroregions, including three Romanian counties (Ialomița, Călăraşi and Constanța) and two Bulgarian provinces (Dobrich and Silistra). The system's functionality is ensured by Călăraşi-Silistra and Oltenița-Tutrakan doublet towns in the Danubean cross-border sector (ferry-boat connection) and Negru Vodă – Kardam and Vama Veche – Durankan in the terrestrial sector. The main macro-territorial polarizing nucleus is Constanța Municipium (283,872 inh.), lower hierarchical-rank towns being Călăraşi, Slobozia, Medgidia, Mangalia, Năvodari, Feteşti and Oltenița in the Romanian sector and Dobrich and Silistra in the Bulgarian sector (65,000 and 35,000 inh., respectively).

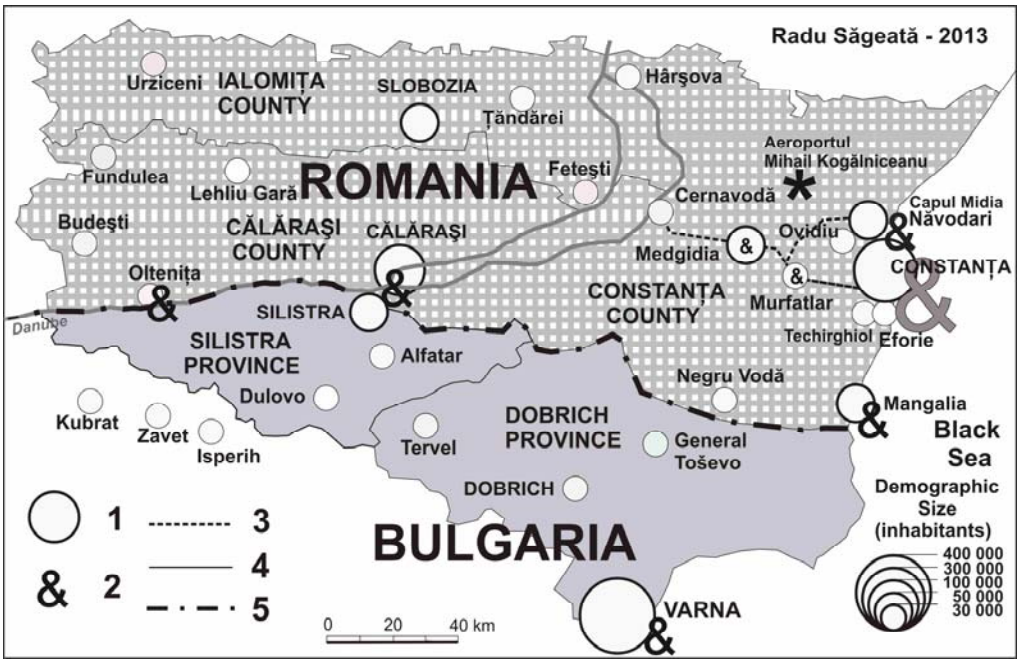

Fig. 8 – "Danube-Dobrogea" Euroregion
1. Polarizing cores; 2. Ports; 3. Navigable canals;
4. Administrative borders; 5. State border.

The Euroregion's economy is quite complex, featuring complementary sectors co-ordinated by sea ports (Constanța-Sud – Agigea, Midia – Năvodari and Mangalia) and river ports (Oltenița, Călăraşi, Cernavodă, Medgidia and Murfatlar); it has a diversified industry and remarkable littoral tourism assets both in the Romanian and Bulgarian sectors; agriculture, though on the decline, has a great prospective potential.

The Lower Danube Euroregion (Fig. 9) is the only one enjoying trilateral participation in the Romanian Danube cross-border sector that overlaps the EU eastern border. It is by far larger (53,468 km^2; 3,909,000 inh.) than the other euroregions in the studied cross-border sector, due mostly to Odessa Region (33,310 km^2, 2,687,000 inh.), in the Ukraine, which hosts the main polarization nucleus with macro-regional functions (Odessa City, 1,003,800 inh.), next in line, but at great distance, coming the Romania administrative centres (the towns of Galați – 249,432 inh; Brăila – 180,302 inh., and Tulcea – 73,707 inh.) and the Republic of Moldova towns (Cahul – 41,100 inh. and Cantemir – ca. 6,000 inh.).

Fig. 9 – "Lower Danube" Euroregion.
1. Polarizing cores; 2. River ports; 3. Fluvio-maritime ports;
4. Sea ports; 5. Airport; 6. Borderlines; 7. Administrative bounds.

The cross-border co-operation framework of this Euroregion is governed by the necessity to secure the eastern EU frontier as best as possible, a prerequisite for Romania's accession to the Schengen space, and by the presence of the homogeneous Romanian ethnical bloc, especially in the Prut cross-border sector, which implies permeability of frontier flows. This situation accounts for several cross-border connections prevailing in the Moldova-Ukrainian sector, whereas in the sector in which Romania is a participant, connections between Romania and the Republic of Moldova are ensured by Oancea – Cahul and Galați – Giurgiuleşti and between Romania and Ukraine by Galați – Reni axes.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Cross-border co-operation Euroregions represent territorial structures created to intensify inter-regional and cross-border co-operation, so as to obtain a coherent space for economic, scientific, social and cultural development.

The formation of these Euroregions is closely related to the intense cross-border co-operation within the western European space; urban cores of cross-border polarization and state border configuration are the main factors that generate them. The rapid industrial development in the post war period and liberalization of the customs regime have contributed to the development of urban agglomerations beyond national borders.

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