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## THE JOINT OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME ROMANIA-UKRAINE: A BOOST OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION

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### ABSTRACT:

*THE CROSS BORDER COOPERATION BETWEEN ROMANIA AND UKRAINE HAD A SLOW START BUT WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE JOINT OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME ROMANIA-UKRAINE-MOLDOVA 2007-2014 AND AFTER THAT THE SECOND PROGRAMME FOCUSED ONLY ON ROMANIA AND UKRAINE, THE CROSS BORDER COOPERATION BETWEEN THIS TWO COUNTRIES BEGAN TO INTENSIFY, CREATING THE COOPERATION FRAMEWORK AT ALL LEVELS. BECAUSE OF THIS, THE PRIVATE OR THE PUBLIC SECTORS EITHER FROM ROMANIA OR UKRAINE BEGUN TO CREATE THEIR OWN PROJECTS OR THEIR OWN FORM OF COOPERATION. THIS IS HOW STARTING WITH A COOPERATION BETWEEN CERTAIN LINE, DICTATED BY THE JOINT OPERATIONAL PROGRAM, THE TWO STATES BEGAN TO CONSIDER THE REAL BENEFITS OF COOPERATION.*

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**KEY WORDS:** BOOST, IMPROVEMENT, CROSS-BORDER, RECIPROCITY, ECONOMY

### INTRODUCTION

Cross-border cooperation between two states is an extremely common phenomenon nowadays. These cooperation possibilities are facilitating the mutual development of the parties involved, especially in the areas along the common border, and supporting good neighborly relations.

Cross-border cooperation started as a timid collaboration between border regions that for security reasons were kept intentionally underdeveloped (so as not to become sources of conflict between states)<sup>2</sup>. Over time, the concept started to gradually evolve. Citizens on the borders of states began to undertake small-scale economic exchanges out of the need for survival, thus overcoming the generally valid conceptual barrier at the time that individuals beyond that border were their enemies.

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<sup>2</sup> Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, Mircea Brie and Nicolae Toderaş, „Cooperarea transfrontalieră între România și Ucraina, respectiv între România și Republica Moldova. Oportunități și provocări în perioada 2014-2020”, in *Studii de Strategie și Politici SPOS 2015*, Bucharest 2016, 25, [http://ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/publicatii/St-2\\_Cooperarea-transfrontaliera\\_final.pdf](http://ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/publicatii/St-2_Cooperarea-transfrontaliera_final.pdf), accessed on 08.07.2022.

With the passage of time, this type of cooperation evolved leading to the emergence of today's European construction model. By jointly managing the coal and steel industries, the six states that signed the Treaty of Paris (1951) started the first cooperation in the true sense of the word. The ultimate goal of the cooperation was to create a community that would protect both their economies and their population. In this way, from the collaboration in the fields of coal and steel industries, a spillover effect has been gradually created that succeeded in expanding what was then called the European Coal and Steel Community and the political and social integration so that today we can talk about an independent entity like the European Union.

In the specialized literature, the concept of cross-border cooperation received several definitions, each taking into account the object and also the space of the cooperation. However, cross-border cooperation between state entities can be defined as direct collaboration between regions found along the same common border, regardless of the level at which it is carried out. This type of collaboration can exist at all levels, involving both state and non-state actors, and can be achieved in all fields<sup>3</sup>.

In the case of our study, the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, was initiated by the same criteria of cooperation between citizens along the common border. This cooperation was regulated by an official document only in 1997 through the "Treaty on the relations of good neighbourliness and cooperation between Romania and Ukraine", signed in Neptun, Constanța, by the presidents of the two states at the time, Emil Constantinescu and Leonid Kucima.

Although the above-mentioned treaty established a first legal framework for cross-border cooperation, the two states did not undertake actions to facilitate the collaboration of border regions in any way until later. The actions that facilitated the cooperation started in 2007 at the initiative of the European Union. The EU, within the Eastern Partnership, a component of the European Neighborhood Policy, launched the Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine for the period of 2007-2013. This program continued for the 2014-2020 funding period.

Therefore, in this article we propose to analyze whether the EU initiative to launch a joint operational program between the two states succeeded or not in facilitating the cross-border cooperation. In order to succeed in doing this, we will analyze the data provided by specialized institutions regarding the economic exchanges between the two states. We will have in our focus the key years of the implementation of these operational programs.

At the same time, following the analysis of the type of projects implemented in the border regions through this program, we will try to offer suggestions for improvement and to emphasize the areas in which the two states should facilitate cooperation.

## **I. THE JOINT OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME ROMANIA-UKRAINE**

Before we start the description of economic relations between Romania and Ukraine, we need to familiarize with the joint operational programs between these two countries for a better understanding of the purpose for which it was created.

The first joint operational program that the European Commission launched within the Eastern Partnership instrument and in which Romania was included was the Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2014.

As also mentioned in the Applicant's Guide of this Operational Programme, the aim

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<sup>3</sup> Jordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu , Mircea Brie and Nicolae Toderaș, *Cooperarea transfrontalieră între România și Ucraina, respectiv între România și Republica Moldova...*, 26.

of the program is to „prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between EU and its neighbors and to offer partner countries the opportunity to participate in various EU activities, through greater political, security, economic and cultural co-operation”<sup>4</sup>. The stated purpose is in accordance with the aim of the Eastern Partnership – a component of the European Neighborhood Policy – which tries to reduce the disparities between members of the European Union and the neighborhood countries.

The Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova represented a chance for the three countries to improve their relations and to develop more economic exchanges. Nevertheless, this operational program had also another aim that was to facilitate closer relations between the two non - EU states (Ukraine and Republic of Moldova) and the European Union and to reduce their connections with the Russian Federation.

This first program had a total budget of 138,1 mil. EUR and was divided into three priorities, as follows:

- a) Towards a more competitive economy of the border area;
- b) Environment and emergency preparedness;
- c) Promoting the people to people activities<sup>5</sup>.

The eligible counties in Romania in which it was allowed to implement the projects financed by this program were Suceava, Botoșani, Iași, Vaslui, Galați and Tulcea. The eligible Ukrainian oblasts<sup>6</sup> were Odessa and Chernihiv and in Republic of Moldova the whole territory of the country. Later on, new areas were added on the eligible list. In Romanian the county of Brăila, and the Ukrainian oblast Ivano Frankivsk, Vinniytk and some districts from Khmelnytski and Ternopilsk.

Consequently, technically any governmental or non-governmental entities from the mentioned regions were able to apply for a project within those three main priorities. A number of 133 projects were contracted and 72 were finalized summing 1.586 euros<sup>7</sup>. The 72 projects that have been implemented states an early phase of CBC through the programs initiated by the EU.

This CBC program straightened the relations between Romania and Republic of Moldova and representing at the same time a milestone in romanian-ukraine relations, a point that sets up the upcoming projects.

Given the good performance of the first joint operational program and after some serious analysis, the EU decided to launch another operational program also within the framework of the European neighborhood policy, using the Eastern Partnership tool, but for this time it is a program focused just on Romania and Ukraine without the Republic of Moldova (for which a separate joint operational program has been created).

The so called Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020 had a total budget of 60 mil. EUR and four thematic objectives as follows: a) Common challenges

<sup>4</sup> Applicant Guide for the Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine-Moldova 2007-2013, which can be consulted on

[https://www.fonduri-structurale.ro/Document\\_Files/transfrontaliera/00000041/yujkx\\_POC\\_Ro-Ua-Md\\_feb\\_romana.pdf](https://www.fonduri-structurale.ro/Document_Files/transfrontaliera/00000041/yujkx_POC_Ro-Ua-Md_feb_romana.pdf), last accessed on 07.07.2022.

<sup>5</sup> Programul Operațional Comun România-Ucraina-Moldova 2007-2013, Ministerul Dezvoltării, Lucrărilor Publice și Administrației, [https://www.mdlpa.ro/userfiles/fisa\\_ro\\_ua\\_mo.pdf](https://www.mdlpa.ro/userfiles/fisa_ro_ua_mo.pdf), last accessed on 07.07.2022.

<sup>6</sup> Ukrainian county

<sup>7</sup> Ramona Tiganasu, Tudor Dumitru Jijie, Karima Kourtit, „Effectiveness and impact of cross-border cooperation programmes in the perception of beneficiaries. Investigation of 2007-2013 Romania-Ukraine-Moldova programmes” in *Regional Science Policy&Practice*, Vol. 12, Issue 5, 873, <https://rsaiconnect.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rsp3.12342>, last accessed on 07.07.2022

in the field of safety and security; b) Improvement of accessibility to the regions, development of sustainable and climate-proof transport and communication networks and systems; c) Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage; d) Support to education, research, technological development and innovation. As well as in the first joint operational programme, all the governmental or non-governmental entities from the Romanian counties Satu Mare, Maramures, Botosani, Suceava, Tulcea and the Ukrainian oblasts Ivano-Frankivsk, Zakarpatska, Cernăuți and Odessa were able to apply for funding their projects from this program<sup>8</sup>.

In the 2014-2020 period a number of 69 projects were financed within this program with a value of 69.930.884 EUR<sup>9</sup>, but even if there are fewer projects accessed compared to the first joint programme, we need to take into consideration the Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020 includes only two states, not three like the previous one. So we can say that is a big progress regarding the cross border cooperation from 2007 to 2020.

## **II. A BACKGROUND OF THE ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN ROMANIA AND UKRAINE**

The economic cooperation between Romania and Ukraine is closely related to the political cooperation of the two states. The bilateral political relations between the two states should always be considered when analyzing the economic relations. The cooperation agreements concluded at the political level created the necessary framework for economic collaboration which intended to help the two states in their development. In the case of Romania and Ukraine, we have several priorities regarding cooperation in the economic field: the formation of competitive regions; concluding and developing agreements to create the necessary legal basis for cooperation; developing border points and ensuring the necessary infrastructure; tourism development. These priorities have been put into practice since the beginning of the 2000s, with the signing of the treaty that laid the foundations for the relationship between the two states. However, the intensification of commercial relations and the fulfillment of the real objectives of the two states were largely done with the help of the European Neighborhood Instrument.

With the establishment of bilateral contacts between Romania and Ukraine, the issue of creating Euroregions was raised in order to intensify the cross-border economic cooperation and to fulfill one of the priorities mentioned above - the creation of competitive regions. Euroregions represent a specific instrument for the implementation of European integration objectives, being rather a desire of local communities in the development of mutually beneficial economic relations<sup>10</sup>. This desideratum also appears in the "Treaty on the relations of good neighbourliness and cooperation between Romania and Ukraine", in art. 8, which stipulated that the parties "will contribute to the collaboration between administrative-territorial units from the two states within the existing Euroregions, as well as the newly created "Upper Prut" and "Lower Danube" Euroregions, in which administrative-territorial

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<sup>8</sup> 2014-2020 Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC, available on <https://keep.eu/programmes/93/2014-2020-Romania-Ukraine/>, last accessed on 20.07.2022.

<sup>9</sup> Proiecte contractate, available on <https://ro-ua.net/ro/about-the-programme-ro/proiecte-contractate.html>, last accessed on 20.07.2022.

<sup>10</sup> Jakab Albert Zsolt și Peti Lehel, *Procese și contexte social-identitare la minoritățile din România*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2009), 372.

units may also be invited to participate from other interested states"<sup>11</sup>.

These Euroregions, which are mentioned in the treaty, were initiated by the central bodies of the two countries as bilateral Romanian-Ukrainian Euroregions, which later became trilateral after the participation of the Republic of Moldova. Within the "Lower

Danube" Euroregion (established in 1998) several actions related to infrastructure, trade and tourism are undertaken. Meanwhile, within the "Upper Prut" Euroregion (established in 2000) several groups of experts are organized who are trying to identify the main opportunities of cross-border cooperation. In addition, Romania and Ukraine also collaborates within the "Carpathian Euroregion" created on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1993 together with Hungary and Poland. Within this Euroregion, Romania only received an observer status because the national legislation did not allow a full integration at the time. Only after the regional reform of 1997 five Romanian counties became full members of the "Carpathian Euroregion" Association<sup>12</sup>.

The ultimate goal of these Euroregions is to create a legal framework for cross-border cooperation at local level, without necessarily involving the central apparatus. Moreover, in these Euroregions we can find designated field-oriented commissions that contribute with specific expertise in order to improve the collaboration. Within these regions, both local authorities and interested stakeholders can collaborate for mutual economic development. This collaboration is much easier, already having the necessary mechanisms to implement cross-border projects. It should be mentioned that at the level of administrative-territorial units located on the borders of Ukraine and Romania, there are also functional bilateral contacts. The oldest example of cooperation at this level is between the Chernivtsi region and Suceava County, which has been operating since the time of the U.S.S.R, constantly exchanging experiences in order to establish the necessary framework for economic cooperation. The downgrade of this cooperation at the local level is constituted by the dialogue. More precisely, the fact that the composition of the Ukrainian participants to the dialogue is constantly changing, the quality it is affected<sup>13</sup>.

### III. THE JOINT PROGRAM BENEFITS

With the integration of Romania into the European Union and the pro-Western orientation of Ukraine finalized by the signing of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, the economic collaboration intensified. Through the European Neighbourhood Instrument, Romania and Ukraine collaborates within two operational programs. We are talking about the Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020 with a total funding of 66 million euros and about the Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2014-2020 with a financial allocation of 81 million euros.

Furthermore, we will analyze the impact of the funds accessed through the mentioned operational programs had on economic cooperation, while also looking at the degree of economic cooperation. More precisely, we will analyze the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics in the framework of the "Statistical Yearbook of Romania" from 2013 and by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania in the studies "State of the Economic Environment-2014" and "State of the Economic Environment- 2019". While analyzing these sources we are paying attention to three factors in the economic cooperation

<sup>11</sup> See *Tratatul cu Privire la Relațiile de Bună Vecinătate și Cooperare dintre România și Ucraina*, art. 8, <http://www.dri.gov.ro/lege-nr-1291997-pentru-ratificarea-tratatului-cu-privire-la-relatiile-de-buna-vecinatate-si-cooperare-dintre-romania-si-ucraina-semnat-la-constantina-la-2-iunie-1997/>, last accessed on 28.07.2022.

<sup>12</sup> Jakab Albert Zsolt și Peti Lehel, *Procese și contexte social-identitare la minoritățile din România...*, 374.

<sup>13</sup> Jakab Albert Zsolt și Peti Lehel, *Procese și contexte social-identitare la minoritățile din România...*, 374.



between Ukraine and Romania: imports, exports and the number of Ukrainian tourists coming to Romania. Through the number of imports and exports, we will be able to create an opinion on the commercial relations between the two states. Moreover, through the number of Ukrainian tourists coming to the territory of Romania we will understand the interest shown by Ukrainian citizens towards Romania, but also the openness of Romanians towards them. As time periods we will analyze the year 2007 (the year of the initiation of the first joint operational program between the two states), the year

2012, the year 2014 (the beginning of the Joint Operational Program Romania Ukraine 2014-2020) and the year 2019. Thus, we will be able to realize whether the collaboration in the economic field has intensified, stagnated or decreased or if the joint operational programmes founded by European Union facilitated economic collaboration.

### 1.1. The evolution of imports, exports and tourism between Romania and Ukraine

Nr. Crt	Year	Import	Export	Tourism
1	2007	577.000.000 euro	543.000.000 euro	720.000 people
2	2012	501.000.000 euro	842.000.000 euro	740.000 people
3	2014	457.280.000 euro	613.470.000 euro	716.260 people
4	2019	931.100.000 euro	616.400.000 euro	1.754.542 people

Sources: National Institute of Statistics<sup>14</sup>, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania<sup>15</sup>

Following the analyzed data, we can observe in the first year of the implementation of the Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine 2007-2013 a total of Romania's imports from Ukraine of 577 million euros, exports of 543 million euros and a number of 720,000 Ukrainian tourists coming to Romania. In 2012, a year before the end of the previously mentioned program, Romania's imports from Ukraine decreased by 15.16% compared to 2007, having a total of only 501 million euros, but exports increased considerably by 55.06%, making a total of 842 million euros. The decrease in imports of goods from Ukraine is largely due to foreign investments in Romania, which produced enough to satisfy domestic consumption. Another would be the re-profiling of the Romanian business environment towards other, more profitable or better quality import sources. Thus, imports of electrical appliances and equipment or imports of wood and wood products have been considerably reduced. Instead, the exponential growth of Romania's exports to Ukraine proves both a maturation of the Romanian economy and an increase in the standard of living of Ukrainians given the fact that the demand for products was higher. In addition to the economic indicators, in 2012 we observe an increase of 20,000 Ukrainian tourists who visited Romania.

<sup>14</sup> National Institute of Statistics, *Anuarul Statistic al României*, Bucharest, 2013, [https://insse.ro/cms/files/Anuar%20arhive/serii%20de%20date/2013/ASR\\_2013\\_romana.pdf](https://insse.ro/cms/files/Anuar%20arhive/serii%20de%20date/2013/ASR_2013_romana.pdf), last accessed on 10.08.2022.

<sup>15</sup> Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania, *Starea Mediului Economic – 2014*, Bucharest, 2014, [https://ccir.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Starea\\_Mediului\\_Economic\\_in\\_Romania\\_2014.pdf](https://ccir.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Starea_Mediului_Economic_in_Romania_2014.pdf), last accessed on 10.08.2022; Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania, *Starea Mediului Economic –2019*, Bucharest, 2019, <https://ccir.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Starea-mediului-economic-%C3%AEn-Rom%C3%A2nia-AN-2019.pdf>, last accessed on 12.08.2022.

This also reflects the efficiency of the Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine 2007-2013. The main projects implemented through it were indeed related to cross-border infrastructure, thus facilitating the access of Ukrainians to the territory of Romania.

When it comes to the year of 2014, the first year of the new financing period of the Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020, we discovered a decrease in all the analyzed indicators compared to 2012. Romania's imports from Ukraine decreased by 9.56% (imports in 2014 totaling only 457.28 million euros), exports suffered a decrease by 37.25% (totaling 613.47 million euros) and the number of Ukrainian tourists coming from Romania, similar to the first two indicators, was down by 23,740 people. This decrease in the three analyzed indicators was largely due to Russia's military aggression in Ukraine, which also had significant effects on the economy of the neighbouring state (the economy being reoriented towards the military sector) but which also reduced trade routes between Romania and Ukraine.

Once the international community intervened and condemned Russia's aggression in Ukraine and the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula, the intensity of the conflict decreased and Ukraine's economy recovered. This aspect, correlated with Romania's economic development, led to increases in the three analyzed indicators in 2019. More precisely, Romania's imports from Ukraine were worth 931.1 million euros (an increase of 103.61% compared to 2014), Ukraine ranking 19th on the list of import partner states. This aspect takes us to the "economic recovery" of Ukraine after 2014, a recovery that was also made with the support of Romanian experts. Romania's exports to Ukraine remained almost at the same level as in 2014, representing 616.4 million euros (0.4% increase). This was largely due to the lack of involvement of the Romanian – Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce in recent years but also of political dissensions between the two states. However, the number of Ukrainian tourists who visited our country in 2019 increased considerably by approximately one million people. In 2019 the number of Ukrainian citizens who came to Romania was 1,754,542 people. This increase in number of Ukrainian tourists in Romania is correlated with an important event. Until 2014, when the annexation of Crimea took place, Russia represented the main tourist attraction for the citizens of Ukraine. After that historical moment the Ukrainian tourists reoriented themselves towards European states.

Once again, this last indicator shows us the effectiveness of the joint operational program, largely focused on bringing the citizens of the two states closer together and facilitating cooperation.

## CONCLUSION

The Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine 2014-2022 created by the European Union through the European Neighborhood Policy, boosted the cooperation of the two states by bringing three factors namely funds, legal framework and expertise. Aided by these three factors, the two states managed to jointly undertake several projects with a major impact on the citizens, creating also a template of cooperation.

Regarding this subject we can also state that there is a remarkable development of the number of the implemented projects in the 2014-2020 period compared to the previous period of funding, which shows that a lot of governmental and non-governmental entities already mastered a good part of the techniques for accessing funds through this joint programme.

Also the areas in which the project from 2014-2020 were implemented brought a new perspective on cooperation both at the level of state institutions or private companies because this time a good amount of money from the projects were invested in big infrastructure. This thing caused economic exchanges to be boosted.



Considering this, we can conclude that between Romania and Ukraine there is a stable and continuously developing economic collaboration. We can encounter small fluctuations that depend on the regional context and the political relations between the two states. In the years 2007, 2013 and 2014 Romania's imports from Ukraine did not undergo considerable changes. However, in 2019 with the intensification of cross border relations but also due to the increased standard of living of Romanian and Ukrainian citizens, the number increased significantly.

Romania's exports to Ukraine are constant, with the exception of 2012, a year in which we observe a slight increase. When it comes to tourism, we can say that Romania became an attraction for Ukrainians only after the reorientation of the Ukrainian policies towards the Western society. Another factor that produced this change in the touristic destination of Ukrainians was the adversity towards the actions of Russia.

So the two joint programmes founded by European Union achieved their goal namely to strengthen the relations of cooperation between Romania and Ukraine and further to prepare the next funding period 2021-2027.

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