

Legal Framework for Cross-border Cooperation along the EU's External Borders in the Western Balkans: A Special Focus on Serbia

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Abstract

Since the last enlargements of the European Union, the importance of European territorial cooperation along the external borders of the EU has increased. The horizontal dimension of European territorial cooperation and cohesion is receiving greater emphasis, and new governance methods are being developed to ensure a coherent framework for interregional, transnational and cross-border cooperation. However, in the last few years, the most recent crises have resulted in more stringent border management procedures, and a securitisation discourse has emerged as a dominant narrative, replacing collaboration. This study examines the legal framework for cross-border territorial cooperation along the EU's external borders in the Western Balkans, paying particular attention to the Hungarian–Serbian border. After providing an overview of the legal framework for cross-border cooperation, the paper analyses how the Council of Europe and the European Union can support the preconditions for institutionalised forms of cross-border cooperation, such as Euroregions and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), as well as the involvement of border authorities in such cooperation in Serbia. Finally, it summarises legal alternatives and possible responses to increase the efficiency of cross-border territorial cooperation in the Western Balkans, focusing especially on the Hungarian–Serbian border.

Keywords: *Western-Balkans, Euroregion, European Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), Cross-border cooperation, External borders, Hungarian-Serbian border*

Introduction

The significance of the European cross-border cooperation along the external borders of the EU has increased since its last enlargements in 2004, 2007 and 2013. Over the past few decades, institutionalised forms of cross-border cooperation have become ever more important within EU Cohesion Policy and EU Enlargement. Since the Lisbon Treaty, the overarching objective of EU Cohesion Policy has been to promote the harmonious development of the EU as a whole and to strengthen its economic, social and territorial cohesion, with a particular focus on cross-border regions.¹

The European Union promotes cross-border cooperation with the aim of promoting peace, stability, and economic development, as well as to offer the prospect of EU accession to the region. Cross-border cooperation can be a factor of integration through the development of infrastructures and networks and the establishment of free trade areas between neighbouring countries. European integration and cross-border regional cooperation are inextricably linked. The EU launched the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) targeting external border regions. The purpose of participating in EU cross-border programmes is to help enlargement countries become familiar with EU policies and instruments and to enhance cooperation before accession.

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement constitutes the framework of relations between the European Union and the Western Balkan countries for implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP).² The agreements are adapted to the specific situation of each partner country and, while establishing a free trade area between the EU and the country concerned, they also identify common political and economic objectives and encourage regional cooperation. Cross-border cooperation is an essential element of the Stabilisation and Association Process, encouraging countries in the region to collaborate on a multitude of policy domains.

The SAP was launched in June 1999 and strengthened at the Thessaloniki Summit in June 2003, taking over elements of the accession process.³ At the time, it was a significant event, as it aimed to promote democratisation and stability in these countries. The EU offered them the chance to complete their political transitions and develop into functioning democracies based on the rule of law. However, the last twenty years have shed light on the problem of enlargement policy depending solely on the shared will of the parties, and that if one or the other party does not fully engage in cooperation, accession may be delayed.⁴

In Barry Buzan's regional conception,⁵ each of the regions concerned is a Hobbesian conflict typically with instability and violent conflict. In 1991, fear and rivalry were the main drivers of security interdependence among the states of the Western Balkan region. In this paper's approach, the Western Balkans as a spatial category is more a political definition than a geographical one. It covers a group of countries with a Western orientation, involved in the unique enlargement process (SAP), with the aim to stabilise these countries politically and economically so that they will eventually be ready to join the EU. At present, the narrow delimitation has six countries, such as Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia,

¹ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union - PART THREE: UNION POLICIES AND INTERNAL ACTIONS - TITLE XVIII: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND TERRITORIAL COHESION - Article 174 (ex: Article 158 TEC), Official Journal L 115, 09/05/2008. 127.

² European Commission, "Stabilisation and Association Process", https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/glossary/stabilisation-and-association-process_en Accessed 10 August 2025.

³ European Commission, "The Thessaloniki Summit: A Milestone in the European Union's Relations with the Western Balkans". IP/03/860 Brussels, 18 June 2003. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_03_860 Accessed 10 August 2025.

⁴ Koller, Boglárka, and Ördögh, Tibor, "Rule of Law as the Hard Condition for Accession. Analysing the Current Preparedness of the Candidates in the Fields of the Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and Justice, Freedom and Security", *Európai Tükör* Vol. 16, No. 2, 2023. 7-28.

⁵ Buzan, Barry. "How regions were made, and the legacies for world politics: an English School reconnaissance" in: Paul, T. V. (ed.) *International Relations and Regional Transformation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012. 22-46.

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Some of them, however, have developed into more cooperative territorial units, and some regions have had to undergo a qualitative change to achieve this.

Currently, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia have been designated as candidate countries. Accession negotiations and chapters have been opened with Albania, Montenegro and Serbia. By October 2025, a total of 28 chapters had been opened in Albania. To date, with Montenegro all 33 negotiating chapters have been opened, and seven have been provisionally closed, however, political turmoil and instability have led to the stalling of its EU integration process in recent years. Serbia submitted its application for EU membership in December 2009 and was granted candidate country status in March 2012 following the reaching of an agreement between Belgrade and Pristina on Kosovo's regional representation. The first two chapters, including the one on the normalisation of relations with Kosovo, were opened in December 2015. To date, 22 out of 35 negotiating chapters have been opened, two of which have been provisionally closed. Serbia's future EU integration is inextricably linked to the EU-facilitated dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo. This dialogue is expected to culminate in a comprehensive, legally binding agreement on normalising their relations. Similar to Serbia, Kosovo is obliged to fulfil the commitments derived from the revised accord of early 2023, which aims to reinvigorate the stagnant dialogue.⁶ The European Union received an application for membership from Kosovo in December 2022.⁷ Negotiations were initiated with North Macedonia in July 2022, but no chapters have been opened yet. Accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina were formally opened in March 2024, but progress has been limited, slow and compounded by a deep domestic political crisis.

The path of the Western Balkans towards EU membership depends on several internal and external factors, including political and institutional reforms, settling disputes with neighbouring countries, and aligning legislation.⁸ On 8 November 2023, the European Commission adopted a Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. This plan aims to prepare Western Balkan partners for accession by promoting economic reforms and investment, and by providing citizens in the region with some of the benefits of EU membership.⁹ The Growth Plan for the Western Balkans is based on four pillars, aimed at enhancing the Western Balkan partners' economic integration with the EU's single market, boosting economic integration within the region through the Common Regional Market, accelerating fundamental reforms, and increasing financial assistance to support the reforms through a Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans. Implementing these reforms will require the digitalisation of public administration and the development of an innovative society, as well as improving the population's attitudes towards digital technologies in order to manage e-government tasks.¹⁰ These countries must carefully navigate these complexities, demonstrating sustained efforts, comprehensive reforms and diplomatic engagement to move closer to their goal of EU membership.

The aim of this study is to examine whether countries in the Western Balkans, Serbia in particular, will be able to integrate into the EU's territorial cohesion policy. The main focus will be on the legal tools required for participation in cross-border Euroregions and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs). After providing an overview of the legal framework for cross-border cooperation, the paper analyses how the Council of Europe and the European Union can support the preconditions for institutionalised forms of cross-border cooperation, such as Euroregions and European Groupings of

⁶De Munter, André, "The Western Balkans". European Parliament, Brussels, 04/2025. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/168/a-nyugat-balkan> Accessed 04 August 2025.

⁷De Munter, André, "The Western Balkans". European Parliament, Brussels, 04/2025, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/168/a-nyugat-balkan> Accessed 04 August 2025.

⁸ Soós, Edit, and Pap, Tibor, "Regionális és kisebbségpolitikai válaszok az EU-csatlakozás kihívásaira" [Regional and minority policy responses to the challenges of the EU accession]. *DETUROPE: THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM*, vol. 7. issue 1, 2015. 21-43.; Soós, Edit, "A Vajdaság útja az európai integrációba a Vajdaság AT Statútumának tükrében" *KÖZÉP-EURÓPAI KÖZLEMÉNYEK* 2011/3-4. 145-155.

⁹ European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, New growth plan for the Western Balkans", Brussels, 8.11.2023, COM(2023) 691 final.

¹⁰ See Kaiser, Tamás, and Gadár, László. "Survey data on the attitudes towards digital technologies and the way of managing e-governmental tasks". *Data in Brief* Vol. 46, February, 2003. doi: 10.1016/j.dib.2022.108871

Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), and the involvement of border authorities in such cooperation in Serbia. Finally, it summarises legal alternatives and possible responses to increase the efficiency of cross-border territorial cooperation in the Western Balkans, highlighting the Hungarian–Serbian border in more detail.

Data and Methods

The author conducted an analysis of the official documents of the Council of Europe and the EU, encompassing both primary and secondary sources of EU law, in addition to the EU policy papers and strategies concerning the European territorial cohesion and cross-border cooperation.

The main method employed in this study was the historical analysis of the legal and institutional process of cross-border cooperation within the context of the EU Cohesion Policy. Beyond legal analysis, the author takes a practical approach to investigating the legal tools and legal practice in Serbia, based on the case study conducted by CESCO Balkans in framework of B-Solutions project.¹¹

The study adopts the definition of a border region as set out in the EU's 9th Cohesion Report. According to this definition, a border region is defined as a NUTS 3 statistical region that shares an international land border or a region in which more than half of the population lives within 25 km of such a border. According to the report, “external border regions” are defined as those regions that share a border with countries that are not members of the European Union, which are mostly located along its eastern border and the border with the Western Balkans.¹²

Legal framework for cross-border cooperation

The strengthening of cross-border cooperation all over Europe is a result of Europeanisation and decentralisation processes. The improvement competencies of the local and regional authorities, especially in external relations, have only recently emerged in the context of European integration and the evolution of regions.¹³ However, for a long time, there were no uniform rules governing the institutionalisation of cross-border cooperation. Initially, cooperation took place in different organisational forms, a wide range of methods for collaboration have been developed both in practice and in the literature.

The most frequently cited and broadest classification is Perkmann's concept who distinguishes between cooperation according to geographical extension and whether there is “a more or less institutionalized collaboration between contiguous subnational authorities across national borders”.¹⁴ It differentiates between local, regional, and national participants in the vertical aspect of multi-level governance, and in this respect, it represents their network horizontally, depending on whether immediately adjacent territories are interconnected or whether the common interests of the regional aspect arising at regional level are brought together in a broader geographical area.

The Council of Europe

Legal framework for CBC: Madrid Convention

The Council of Europe has always recognised the crucial importance of democracy at the local and regional level. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (CLRAE) was

¹¹ Georgiadis, Christos, and Erős, Ervin. “Serbian members in an EGTC. B-Solutions. Final Report.” Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives Balkans. 24 February 2025.

¹² European Commission, “Ninth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion”, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union. 2024.
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/reports/cohesion9/9CR_Report_FINAL.pdf Accessed 10 August 2025.109.

¹³ The Committee of the Regions, „White Paper on Multilevel Governance”, Own-initiative Opinion of The Committee of the Regions, CdR 89/2009, 17-18 June 2009.
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/regi/dv/cdr89-2009_/cdr89-2009_en.pdf

¹⁴ Perkmann, Markus, “Cross-border regions in Europe: significance and drivers of regional cross-border cooperation”, *European Urban and Regional Studies* Vol.10, No.2, 2023. 156.

created within the Council in 1957 to guarantee of local and regional democracy in Europe and bring together the elected representatives of the local and regional communities.¹⁵

The Council of Europe has taken part a significant role in dismantling barriers to regional and international cooperation as well as strengthening cooperation across borders, with the aim of decentralisation, while encouraging consultation and political dialogue between the national governments and the territorial entities.¹⁶

At the European level, the only document that seeks to create comprehensive regulation on cross-border cooperation systems is the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, passed by the Council of Europe in 1980. The aim of the Convention is to promote cross-border agreements between local and regional authorities within the scope of their respective powers. Such agreements may cover fields such as regional, urban, and rural development, environmental protection, the improvement of public facilities and services and mutual assistance in emergencies, etc., and may include setting up transfrontier associations or consortia of local authorities.¹⁷

In accordance with the Convention, transfrontier cooperation means any concerted action designed to reinforce and foster neighbourly relations between territorial communities or authorities within the jurisdiction of two or more Contracting Parties and the conclusion of agreements and arrangements necessary for this purpose. Transfrontier cooperation takes place in the framework of territorial communities' or authorities' powers as defined in domestic law.¹⁸ The specific forms of cooperation are derived from the domestic law of each Member State, according to the Convention, which only provides a legal framework that must be filled with specific content by the internal legislations of the ratifying Contracting Parties. Under the Convention, Parties undertake to seek ways of eliminating obstacles to transfrontier cooperation and to grant to authorities engaging in international cooperation the facilities they would enjoy in a purely national context.

Having variable legal and political systems, it must also create frameworks of bilateral and multilateral agreements. The Madrid Outline Convention served as a basis for numerous bilateral and multilateral agreements between national and provincial governments enabling the local stakeholders to set up cross-border organisations and structures. To allow for variations in the legal and constitutional systems in the Council of Europe's Member States, the Convention sets out a range of model and outline agreements, statutes and contracts appended to itself,¹⁹ to enable both local and regional authorities as well as States to facilitate them with carrying out their tasks effectively.

The Convention has been modified several times, and three Additional Protocols (1995; 1998; 2009) were drafted. The three protocols of the Convention have enlarged further the room for manoeuvre of the local and regional authorities in the field of territorial cooperation.

The first Additional Protocol aims to strengthen the Outline Convention, under certain conditions, recognise the right of territorial communities to engage in cross-border cooperation agreements. The protocol also aims to ensure the validity of acts and decisions made within the framework of such agreements under domestic law. Furthermore, it seeks to establish the legal corporate capacity, otherwise known as 'legal personality', of any cooperation body established under the agreement. The Outline

¹⁵ Based on Document Database of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLRAE) of the Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress> Accessed 04 August 2025.

¹⁶ Soós, Edit, "Az önkormányzatok döntéshozatali mechanizmusa az EU-ban", in: Csefkó F (ed.) *EU-integráció – önkormányzatok*, Budapest, Önkormányzati Szövetségek Tanácsa, Egyesült Államok Nemzetközi Fejlesztési Hivatala, 1998. 61-77.

¹⁷ Council of Europe. "European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities", 21.05.1980, ETS No. 106, Preamble, <https://rm.coe.int/1680078b0c> Accessed 04 April 2024.

¹⁸ Council of Europe. "European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities", 21.05.1980, ETS No. 106, Article 2, <https://rm.coe.int/1680078b0c> Accessed 04 April 2024.

¹⁹ Appendix numbered 1.1 to 1.5 and 2.1 to 2.6. These model and outline agreements, statutes and contracts are intended for guidance only and have no treaty value.

Convention, when considered in conjunction with the Protocol, establishes a comprehensive legal framework that facilitates the collaboration of local and regional authorities across Europe, which can prove beneficial to new Member States in the context of their governmental reform processes.²⁰

The Protocol no. 2. aims to enhance inter-territorial collaboration among European nations. This initiative aligns with the Council of Europe's declaration at the Vienna 1993 summit, which aspired to cultivate a tolerant and prosperous Europe through transfrontier cooperation. It is a supplementary document to the existing Convention and Protocol, which focus on the relations between adjacent communities that share common borders. The efficacy of these two legal texts has been such that twinning agreements have begun to emerge between areas that are further apart. It is evident that Protocol 2 will function as a legal text, the purpose of which is to provide coverage for the aforementioned new arrangements. It acknowledges the prerogative of authorities to enter into such agreements and establishes a legal framework within which they are permitted to operate.²¹

The Protocol No. 3 to the Madrid Convention provides for the legal status, establishment and operation of Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs). Composed of local authorities and other public bodies from the Contracting Parties, the aim of a grouping is for transfrontier and interterritorial co-operation to be put into practice for its members, within the scope of their competences and prerogatives. The ECG can be a legal person, governed by the law of the Party, Council of Europe Member State, in which it has its headquarters, and it has the most extensive legal capacity accorded to legal persons under that State's national law.²² Under the Protocol the Council of Europe may draw up model national laws for facilitating adoption by the Contracting Parties of appropriate national legislation for enabling the Euroregional Co-operation Groupings to operate effectively.²³

It can be concluded that in the absence of the Convention, the proliferation of cross-border cooperation would have been unfeasible. At present, there are more than 300 such collaborations in Europe, the aim of all of which is to reduce the effects of state borders, to develop mutual trust, to maintain peaceful coexistence and to promote local cross-border democracy.

Table 1. Madrid Convention entry into force in the Western Balkans²⁴

| Country | European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities | Additional Protocol to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or | Protocol No. 2 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or | Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or |
|----------------|---|--|---|---|
| | | | | |

²⁰ Council of Europe, “Additional Protocol to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities”, 1995, ETS No. 159, <https://rm.coe.int/168007cdae> Accessed 04 August 2025.

²¹ Council of Europe, “Protocol No. 2 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning interterritorial co-operation”, 1998, ETS No. 169, <https://rm.coe.int/168007f2cb> Accessed 04 August 2025.

²² Council of Europe, “Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs)”, 2009, ETS No. 206, Article 2-3. <https://rm.coe.int/1680084827> Accessed 04 August 2025.

²³ Council of Europe, “Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs)”, 2009, ETS No. 206, <https://rm.coe.int/1680084827> Accessed 04 August 2025.

²⁴ Source: own edition, based on the Council of Europe, European Treaty Series, <http://www.conventions.coe.int> Accessed 04 August 2025.

| | (Madrid Convention) ETS No. 106. | Authorities ETS. No. 159. | Authorities concerning interterritorial co-operation ETS No. 169. | concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs) ETS. No. 206. |
|-------------------------------|---|---------------------------|---|---|
| Albania | 08/02/2002 | 12/03/2002 | 12/03/2002 | - |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 29/06/2008 | 08/01/2009 | 08/01/2009 | - |
| Kosovo | - | - | - | - |
| Montenegro | 09/03/2011 | 09/03/2011 | 09/03/2011 | signed only 16/11/2009 |
| North Macedonia | - | - | - | - |
| Serbia | 16/06/2016 | - | - | - |

Euroregion

However, no official definition for the term “Euroregion”, an Euroregion can be recognised as one of the European cross-border structures that plays an essential role at the borders between European countries. The objective of the initiative is to establish a unified space that is developed collectively, thereby transforming the border from an impediment into a resource and an opportunity for development. In order to achieve this objective, a framework for cooperation is established, thereby facilitating the convergence of disparate actors and the implementation of shared policies and initiatives. The concept of the Euroregion encompasses various forms of partnerships between regions and border territories, which are often structured and, in some instances, equipped with a permanent secretariat. The legal structures utilised exhibit variation across different border regions, contingent on the duration of the prevailing cooperative arrangements and the existing legal infrastructure. It is mainly a political agreement among territorial entities whose level of enforcement depends on political momentum and on interpersonal relations.

Euroregions in Western Balkans

Euroregions may differ in terms of governance structure through the degree of institutionalisation, the legal character of the organisation (with or without legal personality), the scope of the agreement and the goals pursued by the promoters of the initiative.²⁵

Euroregions in the countries of the Western Balkans are:²⁶

1. Adriatic Ionian Euroregion (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro)
2. Belasica Euroregion (North Macedonia) [+ Bulgaria]
3. Drina-Sava-Majevisa Euroregion (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia)
4. Danube–Drava–Sava Euroregion (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia) [+ Hungary]
5. Danube 21 Euroregion (Serbia) [+ Bulgaria]
6. Epirus Region (Albania) [+ Greece]
7. Eurobalkans (North Macedonia, Serbia) [+ Bulgaria]
8. Euroregion DKMT (Serbia) [+ Romania, Hungary]
9. Euroregion Nishava (Serbia) [+ Bulgaria]

²⁵ Durá Guimera, Antoni et. al. “Euroregions, Excellence and Innovation across EU borders. A Catalogue of Good Practices”, Barcelona Department of Geography, UAB 2018. 25-26.

https://ddd.uab.cat/pub/l1ibres/2018/189399/RECOT_CRII_Catalogue.pdf

²⁶ Source: Durá Guimera, Antoni et. al. “Euroregions, Excellence and Innovation across EU borders. A Catalogue of Good Practices”, Barcelona Department of Geography, UAB 2018.

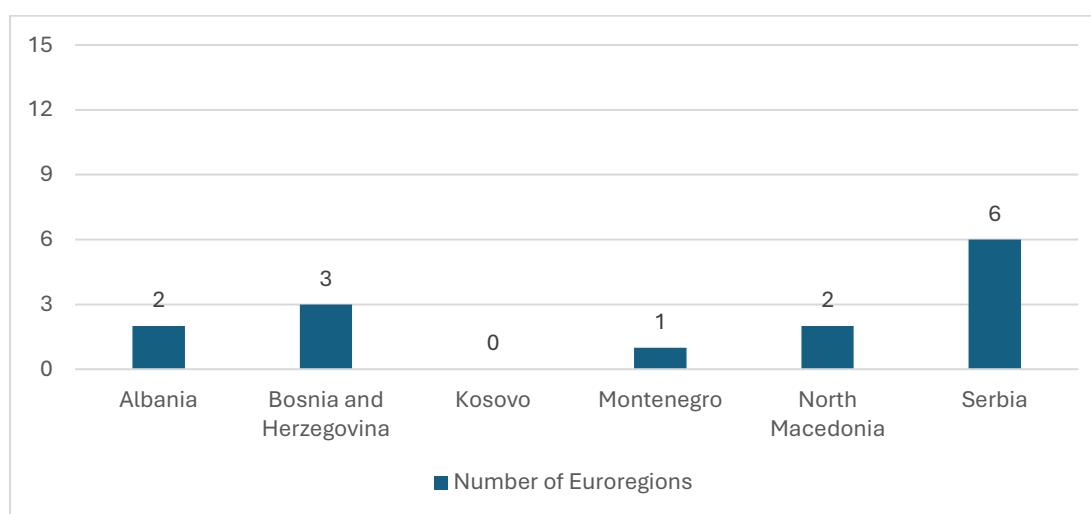
https://ddd.uab.cat/pub/l1ibres/2018/189399/RECOT_CRII_Catalogue.pdf and <https://www.aebr.eu/members/> Accessed 16 October 2025.

10. Stara Planina Euroregion (Serbia) [+ Bulgaria]

Serbia has the highest number of Euroregion memberships among the Western Balkan countries (six Euroregions, mostly on the Serbian-Bulgarian border). This can be explained by long-standing economic relations and minority issues, since Euroregions can provide a framework to bring together previously cohesive but border-divided territories in a less formal and strict framework.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a participant in three Euroregions, which also bring together previously contiguous territorial entities through the instruments of paradiplomacy, mainly in partnership with Serbia and Croatia. The Adriatic Ionian Euroregion serves as a pertinent exemplar of cross-border cooperation among the territorial entities of the former Yugoslavia, encompassing Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro.

Figure 1. Euroregions in Western Balkans²⁷



The European Union

Legal framework for CBC: EGTC Regulation

Over 25 years after the adoption of the Madrid Convention, the Regulation (EC) 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) provides a response to the lack of legal and institutional instruments and ensures cooperation facilities for the local and regional authorities and Member States under EU law. The EGTC is a European legal instrument that aims to facilitate and promote territorial cooperation, including one or more types of cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation between its Parties with the aim of strengthening the Union's economic, social, and territorial cohesion.²⁸ There are three forms of EGTC: 1) cross-border cooperation between adjacent border regions in neighbouring countries; 2) trans-national cooperation between groups of countries and regions, mainly in the field of spatial planning; and 3) inter-regional cooperation between regions or cities in various countries.

The EGTC has legal personality, and it has in each Member States the most extensive legal capacity accorded to legal persons under that Member State's national law.²⁹ The registered office of the EGTC is

²⁷ Source: own edition, based on Durá Guimera, Antoni et. al. (2018) and AEBR databases, <https://www.aebr.eu/members/> Accessed 16 October 2025.

²⁸ "Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC)", OJ L 210 31.7.2006, amended by Regulation (EU) No. 1302/2013 European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013. Consolidated version. (hereinafter: Regulation (EC) 1082/2006), Article 1 (2).

²⁹ Regulation (EC) 1082/2006, Article 1 (3)–(4).

located in a Member State under whose law at least one of the EGTC's members is established.³⁰ EGTCs act on behalf of their members, who adopt their statutes by means of special conventions outlining the organisation and activities of the EGTC. As a minimum requirement, an EGTC must have two organs: an assembly, which is made up of representatives of its members, and a director, who represents the grouping and acts on its behalf.³¹ EGTCs are unique in the sense that they enable public authorities of various Member States to team up and deliver joint services without requiring a prior international agreement to be signed and ratified by national parliaments.

However, the adoption of the EGTC institution is not obligatory; it is an instrument in addition to the existing ones, and its choice is optional. It represents a new alternative to increase the efficiency, legitimacy, and transparency of the activities of territorial cooperation, and at the same time it secures legal certainty and the institutional guarantees for maintaining the results of cross-border projects.³² It is applicable in every Member State, even in those that have not signed the Madrid Convention and its Additional Protocols or the special bi- and multilateral agreements. The EGTC, as a novel legal instrument, is a complement to the existing initiatives and forms of cooperation.

The EGTC signifies decentralised cooperation and is built on decades of experience with euroregional cooperation. Its vertical projection connects actors on different levels - European, national, sub-national - and involves them in the common European decision-making.³³ On the other hand, its horizontal dimension leads to the interaction of actors on the same level, thus creating a European network whose operating principle is autonomy, based on vertical and horizontal partnerships in accordance with multi-level governance.³⁴

In 2013, the EGTC regulation was revised as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings and involvement of third countries clearer.³⁵ With some exceptions,³⁶ the members of an EGTC can be states, local and regional authorities as well as other bodies and public undertakings – if they are located on the territory of at least two Member States.³⁷ After the revision of the EGTC Regulation, an EGTC can be made up of members located on the territory of

- at least two Member States and of one or more third countries neighbouring at least one of those Member States, including its outermost regions, where those Member States and third countries jointly carry out territorial cooperation actions or implement programmes supported by the Union.³⁸
- only one Member State and of one or more third countries neighbouring that Member State, including its outermost regions, where the Member State concerned considers that EGTC to be consistent with the scope of its territorial cooperation in the context of cross-border or transnational cooperation or bilateral relations with the third countries concerned.³⁹

The revised EGTC Regulation has applied since 22 June 2014. In its report of April 2018 on the application of the EGTC Regulation, the Commission confirmed the European added value of the instrument: cooperation among EGTC members from different Member States and third countries

³⁰ Regulation (EC) 1082/2006, Article 1 (5).

³¹ Regulation (EC) 1082/2006, Article 10.

³² Ocskay, Gyula, "Changing interpretation of the EGTC tool", in: Ocskay, Gyula (ed.) *15 years of the EGTCs. Lessons learnt and future perspectives*, Budapest, CESCO, 2020. 48–54.

³³ Scott, James W, "New approaches to understand and assessing crossborder cooperation", in: Gyelnik, Teodor (ed.) *Lectures on cross-border governance: Situatedness at the border*, Budapest, CESCO, 2019. 45–68.

³⁴ Medeiros, Eduardo, "The EGTC as a tool for cross-border multi-level governance", in: Ocskay, Gyula (ed.) *15 years of the EGTCs. Lessons learnt and future perspectives*. Budapest, CESCO, 2020. 145–168.; Peyrony, Jean, "Underlying visions of cross-border integration", in: Ocskay, Gyula (ed.) *15 years of the EGTCs. Lessons learnt and future perspectives*. Budapest, CESCO, 2020. 220–223.

³⁵ "Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings", OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, 303–319.

³⁶ Regulation (EC) 1082/2006, Article 3a (1)-(2) and (5).

³⁷ Regulation (EC) 1082/2006, Article 3. (2).

³⁸ Regulation (EC) 1082/2006, Article 3a (1).

³⁹ Regulation (EC) 1082/2006, Article 3a (2) and (5).

facilitates decision-making and contributes to the joint development of objectives and strategies across national borders.⁴⁰

EGTC in Western Balkans

According to the register maintained by the Committee of the Regions,⁴¹ the number of European Groupings of Territorial Communities (EGTCs) currently stands at 92. Notably, only one of these EGTCs, namely the EGTC Amphictyony, has members from a Western Balkan country, namely Albania (see Table 2). This is despite the fact that the EGTC Regulation ensures the accession of members from third countries in the EGTC in case of the Member States and third countries jointly carrying out territorial cooperation actions or implementing programmes supported by the European Union.⁴² The revised EGTC Regulation has expanded the scope of EGTC participation to include third countries, provided these criteria are met: in the case of an EGTC with prospective members from one or more third countries, the Member State where the registered office of the EGTC is located has to satisfy itself that the conditions laid down in the EGTC Regulation are fulfilled and that each third country has approved the prospective members' participation in accordance with either:

- (a) equivalent conditions and procedures to those laid down in the EGTC Regulation; or
- (b) an agreement concluded between at least one Member State under whose law a prospective member is established and that third country.⁴³

However, it is evident that the most Western Balkan countries have not yet harmonised their legislation in accordance with the EGTC Regulation. The approval of prospective members' participation is not possible due to the lack of equivalent conditions and procedures to those laid down in the EGTC Regulation, or the absence of the bilateral agreement with at least one Member State whose entity is also a member of the EGTC. Consequently, cross-border entities within the Western Balkan region continue to be unable to become full members of EGTCs due to the absence of a national legal framework that would permit such participation at present.

Table 2. EGTC in Western Balkans⁴⁴

| Name | Members | Seat | Registration |
|--|--|-----------------|--------------|
| EGTC Amphictyony of Twinned Cities and Areas of the Mediterranean (Amphictyony / AMΦΙΚΤΥΟΝΙΑ/ Anfizionia) | Albania Greece, Italy, France, Cyprus, Palestine | Athens (Greece) | 01/12/2008 |

Legal framework for cross-border cooperation along the Hungarian-Serbian border

⁴⁰ European Commission, “Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the Regions on the application of Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as amended by Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings”, Brussels, 17.8.2018, COM/2018/597 final.

⁴¹ Based on the European Committee of the Regions. “Official List of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperations, EGTC Register”, 15/10/2025. https://cor.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/Official_List_of_the_EGTCs.pdf. Accessed 16 October 2025.

⁴² Regulation (EC) 1082/2006, Article 3a (1).

⁴³ Regulation (EC) 1082/2006, Article 4 (3a).

⁴⁴ Source: own edition, based on the European Committee of the Regions. “Official List of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperations, EGTC Register”, 15/10/2025. https://cor.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/Official_List_of_the_EGTCs.pdf. Accessed 16 October 2025.

Following the change of regime in Central and Eastern Europe and the civil war in Serbia, the EU's regional policy, which recognised the importance of border regions, resulted in Serbia becoming closer to the new candidates (later EU Member States) of the EU and increasing the opportunities for cross-border cooperation. The Hungarian-Serbian border has been recognised as the EU's external border since 2004, when Hungary's accession to the EU was formally recognised. The northernmost region of Serbia is the Autonomous Province (AP) of Vojvodina, a province which, due to its unique geographical location, is adjacent to three EU member states, thus becoming known as the 'gate' of Serbia.⁴⁵

The present part of the study is based on the CECSI Balkans Report, which was commissioned under the B-Solutions initiative for the Banat-Triplex Confinium EGTC.⁴⁶ The report provides an in-depth analysis of the institutional and legal challenges impeding Serbian participation in cross-border cooperation, especially in EGTCs. The report identifies the key legislative and administrative barriers to this process and proposes concrete policy solutions to align Serbia's regulatory framework with EU cross-border cooperation mechanisms.

Serbia has been participating in cross-border cooperation since the early 2000s, operating in four distinct ways:⁴⁷

1. EU pre-accession funds for cross-border cooperation: Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA)
2. Participation in Euroregions and other cooperation based on the Madrid Outline Convention,
3. Observer status in EGTC

Interreg IPA CBC programmes with Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Bulgaria, and other neighbouring countries

Serbia initiated its pre-accession process in the early 2000s, thereby establishing cross-border relationships with neighbouring EU candidate countries (which would subsequently become EU Member States). This also resulted in EU support for cooperation along the EU's external borders. Serbia submitted its application for EU membership in December 2009 and was granted candidate country status in March 2012.

Cross-border cooperation under the Instrument for Preaccession Assistance (IPA) facilitates collaboration between the candidate countries and EU Member States. The Programme's primary objective is to promote and facilitate the harmonious cross-border development of the region. This is achieved through the co-financing of innovative initiatives by non-profit organisations operating within the Programme's geographical boundaries. In the pre-accession period, financial resources are assigned to the enhancement of democratic institutions, public administrations and organisations at central, regional and local levels, that are responsible for the implementation of EU legislation. Serbian entities have the capacity to function as lead partners in Interreg IPA CBC programmes, with no restrictions imposed due to the absence of EGTC regulation. Currently, the Interreg IPA programmes are ongoing, with Serbian entities actively participating, but without access to EGTC-specific advantages, since “without having an EGTC full-membership participation, Serbian municipalities and regional entities:

- Cannot apply the sole-beneficiary principle for integrated territorial projects.
- Miss out on long-term institutionalized cooperation opportunities provided by the EGTC framework.
- Have limited strategic decision-making roles in cross-border governance structures”.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Nagy, Imre, “Cross-border cooperation on the external borders of the EU and the impact of the received EU CBC funds on AP Vojvodina/Serbia”. *Belgeo* 2020/2. doi:10.4000/belgeo.38732

⁴⁶ Georgiadis, Christos, and Erős, Ervin. “Serbian members in an EGTC. B-Solutions. Final Report.” Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives Balkans. 24 February 2025.

⁴⁷ Georgiadis, Christos, and Erős, Ervin. “Serbian members in an EGTC. B-Solutions. Final Report.” Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives Balkans. 24 February 2025. 8.

⁴⁸ Georgiadis, Christos, and Erős, Ervin. “Serbian members in an EGTC. B-Solutions. Final Report.” Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives Balkans. 24 February 2025. 8.

Participation in Euroregions: Drina-Sava-Majeвица Euroregion, Danube–Drava–Sava Euroregion, Danube 21 Euroregion, Eurobalkans, Nišava Euroregion, Danube-Kriş-Mureş-Tisa Euroregion, Stara Planina Euroregion

The establishment of Euroregions in collaboration with Serbian partners was primarily initiated by interstate agreement, in accordance with the frameworks of the Madrid Outline Convention, which Serbia ratified in 2016. Serbia is a participant in six Euroregion (Figure 1.), however, it is important to note that the Danube-Kriş-Mureş-Tisa Euroregion is currently the sole entity operating at European standards, implementing large-scale regional projects and playing a pivotal integrating role in the Hungarian-Romanian-Serbian tri-border area.⁴⁹

The Danube-Kriş-Mureş-Tisa (DKMT) Euroregion was formally established on 21st November 1997 with the stated objective of supporting and encouraging cooperation between self-governments, local associations, economic participants and citizens in various fields. The primary objective of this cooperation was to contribute to the democratisation, stabilisation, European integration, social and economic development of the area. At present, the DKMT Euroregion constitutes the area of cross-border regional cooperation integrating the Hungarian Bács-Kiskun and Csongrád counties, the Romanian Arad, Caraş-Severin and Timiş counties, and the Serbian Voivodina Autonomous Province. The Euroregion extends over an area exceeding 60,000 km² and has a population of approximately 4.5 million. Due to its pivotal function in the process of stabilising the Balkans, the significance of the DKMT Euroregion is increased further. The institutions of the DKMT (General Assembly, Secretariat, Development Agency and Working Groups) play a primary role in the coordination of activities. They also participate in the elaboration and implementation of development projects through their political and professional connections. This can result in the strengthening of the way of thinking on euroregional level, both inside and outside.⁵⁰ The DKMT Euroregion is also a model from the point of view of participatory governance, including in its structure the representatives of universities, chambers and civil associations.

While the DKMT Euroregion has consolidated its working processes in euroregional institutional form, other euroregions have been dissolved or developed further to an EGTC. Moreover, following their EU accession in 2004 and 2007, both Hungary and Romania were able to establish an EGTC institution. This has given rise to the dilemma of whether the DKMT Euroregion should be transformed into an EGTC. The DKMT Euroregion engaged in informal discussions concerning the potential transformation into an EGTC; however, key actors did not perceive a clear added value, and they expressed reservations regarding the restrictive possibilities for incorporating non-EU members.

Observer status in EGTC (Banat-Triplex Confinium EGTC)

At the same time, the small town of Mórahalom, located in proximity to Szeged in Hungary, initiated the establishment of the Banat-Triplex Confinium EGTC in 2009, commencing its operations at a meeting of 50 mayors who formally expressed their intention to collaborate. The inaugural meeting was held on 10 December 2009 in Mórahalom. Following a period of over a year characterised by ongoing preparation, Banat-Triplex Confinium EGTC was formally registered on 28 January 2011 as an international association with independent legal personality.⁵¹

Eventually, 74 municipalities from both Hungary and Romania became members of the EGTC, while the local governments in Serbia did not manage to officially join.⁵²

⁴⁹ Benczi, Melinda, and Ocskay, Gyula. "The evolution of cross-border cooperation in Hungary". *Észak-magyarországi Stratégiai Füzetek* XVIII. évf. 2, 2021. 60. doi:10.32976/stratfuz.2021.35

⁵⁰ DKMT Euroregion. "The Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa Regional Cooperation", <http://www.dkmt.net/en/index.php?bov=61361200392410> Accessed 04 August 2025.

⁵¹ BTC EGTC. "Banat-Triplex Confinium EGTC", <https://www.btc-egtc.eu/> Accessed 04 August 2025.

⁵² Sara Svensson, "Challenges to further up-take of the EGTC tool – a policy science approach to the critical moment of creation", in: Ocskay, Gyula (ed.) *15 years of the EGTCs. Lessons learnt and future perspectives*. Budapest, CESCI, 2020. 90-91.

In the context of Serbian legislation, it is evident that national laws are not yet in alignment with the provisions of the EGTC Regulation. Consequently, Serbian entities are currently constrained in their capacity to hold observer status within the EGTC. This limitation has the effect of restricting their participation in structured cross-border cooperation and decision-making processes. Despite of the Serbian partners has granted observer status, yet the aspiration has persistently been for them to achieve full partnership. Nevertheless, the status of Serbian members remains unresolved.

Serbia, as a candidate country for EU accession, has been aligning its legislation with the EU *acquis communautaire*, including policies related to territorial cooperation. However, Serbia remains unable to participate in EGTCs as a full member, creating a major obstacle for Serbian municipalities, regional authorities, and public bodies that seek structured, long-term cooperation with their EU counterparts. The inability to fully participate in an EGTC has a number of consequences for Serbian stakeholders. Firstly, it limits their decision-making power in joint cross-border projects. Secondly, it reduces their access to funding opportunities. Thirdly, it prevents the creation of shared governance structures that could enhance regional development.⁵³

The primary legal obstacles hindering Serbian entities from becoming full members of EGTCs are as follows:

“1. Lack of Ratification of the Third Protocol to the Madrid Outline Convention

- The Third Protocol to the Madrid Outline Convention (CETS No. 206), establishes the Euroregional Cooperation Grouping (ECG), a legal instrument similar to the EGTC, allowing for structured cross-border cooperation among local authorities.
- Serbia ratified the Madrid Outline Convention in 2016, but has not ratified its Third Protocol.
- Without this ratification, Serbian local and regional authorities cannot form or fully participate in any ECG.

2. Absence of a Serbian EGTC Law

- According to the article 3a(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1082/2006, third countries (non-EU states) are allowed to participate in EGTCs, but only if their national legislation explicitly permits it. Serbia has not adopted such legislation.
- The current Serbian legislation does not regulate the participation of domestic entities in EGTCs established in EU member states. The relevant Hungarian regulation can be a good model to elaborate its Serbian counterpart.

3. Restrictive Provisions in the Serbian Law on Local Self-Government

- According to the article 88(2) of the Law on Local Self-Government (Official Gazette of RS, No. 129/2007, amended 83/2014, 101/2016, 47/2018), Serbian local governments may cooperate with foreign entities, subject to a preexisting governmental approval.
- This requirement creates an administrative barrier, as each agreement must be individually approved.

4. No Bilateral Agreements on EGTCs with Neighbouring EU Member States

- According to Article 3a(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013, third countries (e.g., Serbia) can enable EGTC participation through bilateral or multilateral agreements with EU member-states.
- Serbia has not concluded such agreements with any of its neighbouring EU member-states (Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, or Croatia).⁵⁴

⁵³ Georgiadis, Christos, and Erős, Ervin. “Serbian members in an EGTC. B-Solutions. Final Report.” Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives Balkans. 24 February 2025. 9.

⁵⁴ Georgiadis, Christos, and Erős, Ervin. “Serbian members in an EGTC. B-Solutions. Final Report.” Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives Balkans. 24 February 2025. 6-7.

Table 3. Possible Legal Pathways for Serbia⁵⁵

| Legal Level | Current Status | Required Action |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| EU Law | Serbia is eligible to join an EGTC under Regulation 1302/2013 only if it adopts national legislation or signs bilateral agreements. | Adopt EGTC Law or negotiate bilateral agreements. |
| International Law | Serbia has ratified the Madrid Outline Convention but has not ratified the Third Protocol (ECG framework). | Ratify the Third Protocol to enable ECG participation. |
| Serbian Law | No legal framework exists for EGTC membership. Restrictions on public property ownership and local government cooperation create additional obstacles. | Adopt an EGTC Law and amend restrictive provisions. |

In light of the findings outlined in the CESCO Balkans Report, and taking into account the prevailing political environment and circumstances, it is evident that the most efficient and legally sound approach to facilitating Serbia's comprehensive engagement in structured, institutionalised initiatives such as EGTCs is through the ratification of the Third Protocol of the Madrid Outline Convention (Table 1.):

- “Immediately provide a legal framework for Serbian municipalities to participate in EGTCs.
- Supersede conflicting domestic laws, requiring Serbian legislation to align with the country’s international commitments.
- Avoid lengthy delays associated with drafting and passing a new national EGTC law”.⁵⁶

Discussion

In the process of establishing the EU's external border areas as 'building blocks' of cross-border European cooperation, two conditions must be met. Firstly, the internal condition of democratic development in border regions participating in the cooperation must be taken into consideration. Secondly, there is the external condition of compliance with the standards and frameworks established under the auspices of the Council of Europe and the European Union.

In order to consolidate the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the Western Balkans, and to establish a regulated legal framework for cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation with EU members and non-EU countries, it is recommended that each of the countries in question fulfil at least one of the following requirements:

- In relation to the criteria of the Council of Europe, it is recommended that the Madrid Convention and its Additional Protocols be ratified, with particular emphasis on the third additional Protocol, in order to facilitate the formation of European Communities of Governments (ECGs) as an alternative legal structure for municipalities. The Third Protocol to the Madrid Outline Convention (CETS No. 206, 2009) establishes a legal framework for Euroregional Cooperation Groupings (ECGs), which operate in a similar way to EGTCs but are open to non-EU countries. If the countries of the Western Balkans were to ratify the Madrid Outline Convention and its Third Protocol, their respective entities would be at liberty to establish an ECG, thus providing an alternative legal framework to that of an EGTC.
- In the context of the EU legal harmonisation process, the adoption of a national EGTC law is to be encouraged, with such a law explicitly permitting national entities to participate in EGTCs. A further temporary option would be to conclude bilateral or multilateral agreements with

⁵⁵ Source: Georgiadis, Christos, and Erős, Ervin. “Serbian members in an EGTC. B-Solutions. Final Report.” Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives Balkans. 24 February 2025. 17.

⁵⁶ Georgiadis, Christos, and Erős, Ervin. “Serbian members in an EGTC. B-Solutions. Final Report.” Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives Balkans. 24 February 2025. 17.

neighbouring EU Member States (namely, Hungary, Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria) to enable participation in existing EGTCs, based on the provisions of the EGTC Regulation.⁵⁷

In consideration of the research findings, the EGTC Regulation can be regarded as a pioneering example of EU legislation in which a legal instrument grants special rights to local, regional and national public law institutions in the different Member States and candidate countries. The aim of this initiative is to facilitate the establishment of unified structures that can achieve more efficient cooperation.⁵⁸

The EGTC constitutes a novel alternative for third countries, with the objective of enhancing the efficiency, legitimacy and transparency of territorial cooperation activities. This decentralised cooperation can be predicated on the extensive history of euroregional cooperation. The EGTC instrument is regarded as a component of multi-level governance, with the potential to enhance the quality of local and regional cross-border cooperation.

In conclusion, it is evident that EGTCs have emerged as a symbol of novel strategies that are designed to foster the development of cross-border territories.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that external policies play a pivotal role in fostering European cross-border territorial cohesion. This is achieved through the expansion of neighbourhood policy and the integration of the Western Balkans. It is in the common interest of the European Union that the democratisation process be carried out in the countries located along their southern borders, and a politically stable, democratic, and safe region be developed which does not threaten peace and economic development in the European Union. The provision of a European perspective for the Western Balkan countries, with a particular focus on Serbia, is of particular interest to Europe as a whole. Moreover, the ongoing dialogue with candidate countries has contributed to the introduction of cross-border cooperation as a novel and innovative element.

Nevertheless, since 2015, we have been observing a process that is quite the opposite of the above expectations. The 2015 migration crisis, the 2020-2021 COVID-19 crisis, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent socio-economic impact of these crises have all contributed to the re-bordering tendencies observed. These have fundamentally changed European discourse: instead of collaboration along the borders, the issue of security has come to the fore, resulting in application of more stringent border management procedures, thus making it more difficult to cross the borders.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the varying levels of development, integration aspirations, and geopolitical situations in each Western Balkan country make it challenging to handle the region as a whole in a uniform manner. In the context of external EU borders, cross-border cooperation can be regarded as a distinctive and comprehensive approach to conflict resolution and reconciliation. It can also be used as a solution to overcome territorial division and enhance inclusion. The objective is to initiate a process in which the state administration acknowledges cross-border realities as a matter requiring attention and addresses it with the appropriate degree of openness. In the pursuit of EU-level or bilateral solutions, it is imperative to foster a positive attitude among state-level authorities.

The border regions situated along the external borders of the EU have the potential to be moved from their isolated positions by intensifying their relations. The establishment of local and regional partnerships, resulting from decentralised dialogue, has the potential to facilitate peaceful coexistence, economic and social development, and democratic transition, as well as the consolidation of security in border regions. The sub-national diplomacy evolving in border regions is responsible for broadening the dialogue and

⁵⁷ Regulation (EC) 1082/2006, Article 4 (3a).

⁵⁸ Zapletal, Jirka, "The European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC): A new tool facilitating cross-border cooperation and governance". *Quaestiones Geographicae*, Vol.29, No.4, 2010. 16-19.

⁵⁹ Newman, David, "Managing Borders in a Contrasting Era of Globalization and Conflict", in: Gyelník, Teodor (ed.) *Lectures on cross-border governance: Situatedness at the border*, CESCO, Budapest, 2019. 91-112.

strengthening the role of cultural cooperations besides the traditional, development-oriented Euroregional cooperation.

Cross-border cooperation along the external borders, due to their grassroots nature, can be considered the cornerstones of the EU accession process. Such cooperation has the potential to contribute to the establishment of lasting peace and a stable region, free from ethnic and other conflicts. Furthermore, it can facilitate the maintenance of diversity in terms of political, ethnic and cultural relations. Additionally, cross-border cooperation can enable joint action by the countries in the region against common issues such as organised crime and illegal immigration, which can threaten the security of the European Union.

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