



## Transnational Co-operations in Europe from Local to Regional Level

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*“Most often the course of history is determined by the encounter  
between a situation and one or more persons capable of catching  
the meaning of the situation in order to control it.”<sup>1</sup>*

### Abstract.

The strengthening political, ideological and cultural diversity in Europe overshadowed and in many cases broke the existent connections, and not in one case the earlier organically related and strongly co-operating ethnic and social groups became opponents, even enemies.

Although the conceptions of a peaceful and co-operative Europe, which can guarantee solidarity and well-being to its citizens look back on a long history, the beginning of the process which started to turn the idea of the co-operation of European citizens into practice dates back only to one and a half century.

There is consensus about the necessity of a European Union built top-down and bottom-up at the same time, and one can meet ever newer examples of its practical effectuation. Transnational, local, micro- and interregional partnerships are getting increasing attention, these helping the reconstruction of the torn connections all over Europe.

**Keywords:** transnational co-operation, twin towns, microregion, euroregion

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<sup>1</sup>Speech of French President François Mitterrand at the National Assembly on June 25, 1986 while commemorating Robert Schuman's 100th birthday. In Schuman, R., *Európáért [Pour l'Europe]*. Pécs: Pannónia könyvek, 1991, 15.

The film based on Tibor Cseres's novel "*Cold Days*", which revealed the massacre of Novi Sad, presents a most thought-raising event. The Hungarian officers in search for partisans forced the cashier of a small provincial railway station to "classify" the passengers descending the train. "I know them, I don't know them, I know them, I know them, I don't know them ..." – depending on whether the passengers were locals or foreigners. Suddenly she felt that those she did not know were awaiting a horrible future. So she kept repeating it in a monotonous voice: "I know them, I know them, I know them as well ..." – irrespective of the reality. The 'strangers' were shot into the Danube. And the woman, tormented by remorse, mumbled to herself: "*I should have known everybody.*"

## 1 The local level – twin town relations

*"These initiatives fulfil a bridging role. The united Europe can be reached only through co-operation and personal relations."*<sup>2</sup>

The cultural, historical and economic versatility of Europe has always provided the best terrain for co-operation between nations, peoples and institutions. The oldest twin-city movement appeared in the domain of education and culture, while the motivation in establishing cross-border co-operation lay in recognizing the mutual interest and advantages in economy and administration. There is a visible difference between the twin-city partnerships, which are usually first bottom-up initiatives and acquire an organizational form later, and the cross-border co-operation, which is regularly a top-down initiative launched by the institutions. The most successful and lasting co-operations have proved those that could merge the two approaches, some of which will be highlighted below.

Learning to have a decent life and behaviour presupposes a proper social environment. Largely speaking, socialization is a life-long process developing in a specific milieu, within formal and informal communities. Among the formal ones we can mention family, school, workplace, the civil society, organizations, whereas the informal ones include friends, the micro-communities of the school or the living environment (the street, the district, etc.).

In this respect *twin town relations encompass underlying major features of both formal* (local governments, signed agreements), that is, 'official' and *informal* (relatives, friends, acquaintances), that is, 'random' relations. These

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<sup>2</sup>Speech of the German Cultural Attaché Claudia Spahl on May 9, 2008, in Zalaegerszeg.

co-operations are the expression of a most successful transnational and local complex integration based on volunteering.

Some examples of bi- or multilateral co-operations between smaller or larger settlements are the co-operations in one or several domains between self-governments, educational institutions, cultural and scientific associations, economic and professional organizations (from chambers of commerce to fire brigades) or members of NGOs safeguarding the local traditions. As most often these relations operate in a 'network' form, we believe that in addition to fostering the common values and volunteering, the future of the twinning process can be enhanced by extended networking.

### 1.1 "East and West – undivided"

Co-operation between settlements, nowadays commonly called town twinning/twin-towns, friendship, Partnerstädte, sister cities, has been present in Europe for a long time, fewer in number than at the turn of the 21st century and mainly between towns (Hansa towns, medieval town associations, friendship between towns along the Rhine and the Danube). In addition to these formal co-operations, there have been informal relations (family, friends, etc.) between the members of these settlements, which obviously are more difficult to 'document'.

The number of formal and as such recordable twin town relations showed visible increase in the second half of the 20th century, primarily between settlements in Western Europe. At the time the densest network had been the French-German twinning.<sup>3</sup> The towns of Northern Europe had also woven strong ties.

The *initiators of the partnerships* usually ranged from the self-government of a particular settlement to NGOs, a process which ended with the official signing ceremony of the agreement. In most cases the signature of the agreement was preceded by a tested and viable several-year-long co-operation at local government level. When relations do not reach a final official agreement as mentioned above, the relationship is called partnership or simply international co-operation.

*The town twinning relations of the 1950s and 1960s were born primarily from "the endeavour to learn about the life and culture of people living in small and scattered settlements." Nevertheless, highly motivating factors have also been sharing similar historical roots and traditions, common identity, the need for*

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<sup>3</sup>The first partnership was established on May 31, 1950 between the German Ludwigsburg and the French Montbéliard.

*mutual empathy, sharing experience, recognizing common economic interests.*

The twin town relations in the eastern part of the politically divided Europe started somewhat later, in the 1970s. Compared to their Western counterparts, these “nets had a looser fabric”, and only in few instances can we talk about equal-status co-operations. Most of them were built on ideological grounds, based on political “community of fate” or “brotherhood”. At the level of the town leadership the one county-seat – one ‘assigned’ and not chosen Soviet (eventually Central-European) larger city partnership was the rule. Most of these relations did not outlive the change of regime. If they did, it was when the partnership safeguarded top-down by the ‘leading political power’ became substantially enriched by formal (company) or informal (family) ties.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1970s there were some exceptional East-West partnerships, but these mostly remained at the level of the so called ‘mayor’s tourism’ or travelling of the local elite, and were very far from the genuine objectives of the original twinning activities. This ‘top-down’ practice was abandoned only in the second half of the 1980s, when a new course was set up and the settlements and citizens of Central and Western Europe started developing extended networks based on common values and interests. In building the Eastern-Western partnership, the Germans were leading the way; from the 1990s onwards a yearly average of 200 new partnerships were established.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 Europe for Citizens programme

The town twinning movement has been continuously supported by a considerable number of international (transnational) organizations by initiating governmental relations at local level, recognizing the importance of already operating partnerships, creating forums of international publicity, organizing conferences. The first such event worth mentioning is the International Congress of Mayors in 1948, which was created to facilitate the German-French co-operation and led to the foundation of the intergovernmental organization called the ‘*International Union of Mayors for German-French communication and European co-operation*’ (IUM) as well as to the establishment of the French-German town twinning. Its activity was mainly anchored in interpersonal relations between citizens and supported primarily youth exchange programmes, as a guarantee

<sup>4</sup>In the town of Veszprém, we can find examples for both: only street names are commemorating the partnership with the former East-German Halle or the Bulgarian Haszkovó, whereas the relations with the German Bottrop are still successful and fruitful at several levels.

<sup>5</sup>The relations between former Soviet states and Western Europe set off almost a decade later, and have remained relatively few to the present.

for future peace and security. From the 1970s onwards its activity slowly declined, its organizations mostly integrated into the *Council of European Municipalities and Regions* (CEMR), created in 1951 in Geneva by a group of Belgian, French, German, Dutch and Italian mayors. Currently the CEMR is the largest lobby organization of local governments in Europe.

The *United Towns Organization* (UTO) was born from the association called *Monde Bilingue*, created in 1957 in Aix-les-Bains to promote French-English bilingualism. Today the UTO is considered an international “umbrella organization” of settlements and local governments, which in 2004 integrated the *International Union of Local Authorities* (IULA), an organization founded in 1913 in the Hague.<sup>6</sup> Some of its major objectives are the consolidation of peace, solidarity, co-operation, the democracy of participation, consequently, from its foundation the organization promoted the establishment of East-West town twinning relations.

From the 1980s the *European Community* allotted more attention to support the twin town movement, therefore at the proposal of the Commission, from 1989 it subsidizes projects aimed at reinforcing the twin town relations. The financed activities: exchange programmes between the citizens of existing or planned twin towns (*partnership* strengthening), organizing conferences, reinforcing the already existing relations (*co-operation*), training the managers of the twin town movements (seminars, trainings).<sup>7</sup>

The applicants range from towns, counties, local, to municipal or county self-governments, including their associations and committees (‘old’ and ‘new’ members), to whom since 2003 new partner settlements have been invited from South-Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia).<sup>8</sup>

“Town twinning is a great tool in bringing forward the integration of Europe at grass-roots level” – said Viviane Reding, European Commissioner for Education and Culture in 2003. “European integration could not have progressed so far without the willing efforts of individuals who dedicate their time to establishing partnerships with people and organizations from other cities, towns and municipalities throughout Europe. This year the European Commission is funding some 1,400 town twinning partnerships worth EUR 12,000,000, in

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<sup>6</sup>Its new name is United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and is seated in Barcelona.

<sup>7</sup>From 1990 to 2003 more than 11,000 European cities benefited from the Commission’s financial aid to town twinning. The largest number of towns participating in the twinning actions come from France (2804) and Germany (2327).

<sup>8</sup>For example, Hungary received European financial support for 47 projects in 2002, 54 in 2003, and 79 in 2004.

which two or more towns or cities from different countries share ideas, explore solutions to common problems and discover each other's cultural heritage".

The programme entitled "*For Active European Citizenship*", launched in 2006, financed projects which "contribute to the development of the European identity, strengthen the relations and networks between local authorities, deepen the dialogue between the European citizens".

The new programme called "Citizens for Europe" 2007–2013 continues to promote the above mentioned objectives and formulates actions aimed at supporting the meetings of the citizens from twin towns, as well as the creation of thematic networks.

In 1993 the European Commission created the *Golden Stars of Town Twinning Prize* awarded to the best town twinning projects. Its aim is to recognize the best-practice-projects and facilitate the wide dissemination of their results. The projects are assessed by members of the European Parliament, the Commission, the CEMR and the UTO, the prize being awarded during an official ceremony.

At the 2008 awards, the European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, Ján Figel said: "Europe needs participation, needs the feedback of its citizens. The Europe for Citizens programme endorses and promotes successful efforts of active civic participation with concrete results. It is therefore not a surprise to find among the Golden Stars winners systematic, reflection-provoking initiatives that point in the same direction: the participation in, and promotion of common European concerns."

### **1.3 Town twinning in Hungary**

The results of the national survey, which are related to the "*2002 Database of Self-Governments*" processed by TÁRKI, are based on the information provided by the self-governments on a voluntary basis.<sup>9</sup> The results of the survey have been evaluated by Johanna Giczi and Endre Sík in a paper which concludes as follows below.

*At the turn of the 21st century 33% of the Hungarian settlements had foreign twin town partnerships.* Out of these 62% had only one, 18% had 2, 10–10% had 3 and 4 partnerships respectively. As far as their foundation year is concerned, the researchers identified two major periods (before and after the change of

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<sup>9</sup>24% of the mailed questionnaires were returned, from altogether 736 settlements without Budapest.

regime), the latter one was further divided according to governance cycles and settlement types.

Table 1: Town twinning by year (according to period and settlement type)

Settlement	Period			
	1940-1988	1989-1993	1994-1997	1998-2002
County seat	34	10	6	3
Town	30	40	27	15
Village	36	50	67	82
Total	100	100	100	100

**Source:** GICZI, J., SÍK, E. (2007): A testvértelepülések kapcsolati tőkájének egy típusa – a testvértelepülések. *Szociológiai Szemle*, No 4.

As far as the number of the partnerships is concerned, before the change of regime county seats were leading the way (with 40% of the relations), the balance among the other settlement types remaining relatively even. Following the change of regime, villages became the major actors in initiating new relationships making up 80% of the town twinnings established at the turn of the century.<sup>10</sup> Before the change of regime the settlements in Transdanubia and the Northern Great Plain were the main initiators; the Transdanubian region having preserved this role till the middle of the 1990s. The settlements in the Northern and Southern Great Plain regions only caught up around the year 2000.

With respect to *geographical orientation*, in the Western partnerships before the change of regime German and Finnish relations were preferred, while the Eastern ones were mostly marked by the Soviet and the Polish relations.

*Right after the change of regime, relations with Austrian settlements added to the German partnerships.*<sup>11</sup> Gradually English, French, Dutch town twinning co-operations were also created. Additionally, the period is marked by an extensive increase of the relationship between Hungary and the Romanian settlements inhabited by Hungarian minorities, a co-operation that has remained very strong to the present time.

*The mid-1990s were marked by intensive activities in building Hungarian-Romanian and Hungarian-Slovak relations*, to which new partnerships were added with Greece, Serbia and Israel. In 2000 the majority of the town twin-

<sup>10</sup>This percentage was counterbalanced by the fact that usually the county seats and the towns established several partnerships.

<sup>11</sup>60% of the Hungarian-Austrian twinnings were established in this period.

ning relations were carried out with three countries – Romania, Slovakia and Germany – to which tight Hungarian-Polish, Hungarian-French and Hungarian-Italian relations were added. In 2002 the results ranged as follows: Romania (67), Germany (63), Slovakia (28), Finland (24) and France (24). At the turn of the century, as far as the initiative is concerned, 33% of the partnerships were with Romania, whereas in terms of intensity the Hungarian-Slovak town twinning relations were leading the way.

According to the latest, *2009 twinning relations survey*, the 19 county seats (without Budapest) have a total of 208 twin town agreements. This number shows that Hungarian county seats have a similar number of co-operations as their Western European counterparts. This number ranges from 6 (Tatabánya) to 18 (Szeged).<sup>12</sup> The foreign sister towns of county seats are the following, in decreasing order: German, Romanian, Finnish, Slovak, Polish and Italian.<sup>13</sup> One fifth of the relations existed before the change of regime, half of them having become official by the mid-1990s.

Before the change of regime the foreigners – mainly the German towns – initiated co-operation with self-governments and schools. The network of these relations spreads along the entire country and includes all types of settlements.<sup>14</sup>

The Hungarian initiatives speeded up from the beginning of the 1990s and oriented towards German and Austrian settlements, as well as Hungarian minorities in Romania and Slovakia. Before the change of regime there were only few Hungarian-Romanian relations, the majority of which were initiated by Hungary. Following the opening of the border, one third of the Hungarian settlements was looking for a strengthened co-operation in the aim of specific assistance. At the turn of the 21st century these relations were led mainly by cultural interests. The same process can be observed on the other side of the border: reviving the traditions, friendship, mutual understanding – and from both parts a loosening of reserves towards each other. Along the Hungarian-Slovak border, where we can find the largest number of small twinning settlements, after the change of regime the Slovaks proved more active in the field of reviving cultural relations. In addition to governmental and family relations, this region displays the largest number of civil organizations. The Finnish and

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<sup>12</sup>Veszprém has 8 sister towns (Gladsaxe, Rovaniemi, Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve, Tartu, Bottrop, Passau, Sepsiszentgyörgy, Tirat-Carmel) and 3 partnerships (Saumur, Sibenik, Ningbo).

<sup>13</sup>Veszprém has German, Finnish, Estonian, Belgian, Danish, Romanian and Israeli sister towns.

<sup>14</sup>Most Hungarian-German twinings are in the Balaton Highlands, in Tolna and Somogy counties and Budapest.



Polish relations have been set up mainly at the level of larger towns between governments and NGOs.

Table 2: Town twinning by factors of foundation (%)

Reason of twinning	Period			
	1940-1988	1989-1993	1994-1997	1998-2002
History, politics	12	12	7	9
Economy	33	29	29	26
Culture, traditions	38	51	47	45
Tourism	4	2	7	2
Education, youth exchange	9	5	7	9
Other	4	1	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100

**Source:** GICZI, J., SÍK, E. (2007): A testvértelepülések kapcsolati tőkájének egy típusa – a testvértelepülések. *Szociológiai Szemle*, No 4.

The reasons behind these co-operations can be considered constant.

*The major role in setting up the co-operations has always been the transmission of cultural values, the safeguarding and promoting of traditions.* The results of the research show that education and youth relations have been a highly motivating factor in a larger number of small settlements than in towns or county seats, where the economic contacts outnumber the average relation types (joint projects, economic partnerships). It is also worth considering that only 10% of the answering self-governments listed among their reasons for setting up a partnership the “brotherhood of Hungarian identity”. This reason is more frequent in case of small settlements.

Generally, it can be stated that the number of relations, their chance of establishment and continuous operation is proportional with the size of the twinning settlement. A town or a county seat has more resources necessary for the development of the relationship (information gathering, travel, ceremonies) than a small village of only a few inhabitants. Setting up a partnership and the intensity of the activity are also influenced by geographical vicinity and shared language, as this can facilitate the financing of the co-operation, from schools to cultural ensembles. An important role is also played by shared history (German and Hungarian minorities in foreign countries), ‘historical friendship’ (Polish towns) and shared language origins (Finnish relations).

Based on research carried out on the relations between Veszprém and its sister towns we can answer questions inquiring to what extent these twinnings can be regarded as self-supporting, *how important the relations will remain for the participants*, how the common values will survive along direct economic and material interests. Taking the Hungarian examples into account we can admit that after the change of regime, setting up the town twinning movement has become an important element of the international strategy of self-governments and has been integrated into the standard values of most Hungarian settlements and citizens. Though lacking updated national data, we presume that in relation to 2002 the number of registered relationships has been on the increase.

There is also a large number of settlements that have not formalised their international relations yet, but have taken the first steps at the level of civil organizations (schools, associations safeguarding traditions) or at citizens' level. The variety of the co-operation forms of these settlements is narrower, the financial resources being fewer than those of larger towns, but the need for the relationship has been formulated and presently they are at the stage of information gathering.

*Our positive answers* are built not only upon data provided by self-governments, as these, together with the mayors, can influence the setting up or management of a partnership. Actually, it is the schools, the civil organizations, the local small communities that can keep twinnings alive. A partnership can be launched top-down but can only be sustained bottom-up. As individualized as modern people might be, research proves that after meeting the physiological needs, all other needs are primarily met through societal relations (from local to transnational) and values ranging from security, confidence, volunteering to penchant for co-operation. Quoting Václav Havel: "Humans are not merely industrial actors, profit chasers, but deep inside they are all social beings longing for different forms of cohabitation and co-operation, who wish to influence the happenings and await appreciation for everything they do for their environment ..." – and this is the greatest self-sustaining power of twinning co-operation.

## 2 Co-operation of microregions

“Build bridges”<sup>15</sup>

### 2.1 “Way of Region” – Trans-European Municipality Association

A new form of this type of co-operation, which prolongs the twin town partnership, is a new, higher level local initiative, the first example of which lies in the creation on October 13, 2001 of the *Trans-European Municipality Association T.E.M.A.* (based on the Várpalota Agreement) with the participation of 40 local governments of four small regions (Várpalota, Valée Lavant, Fermano in Marche region and Koroška) in four countries (Hungary, Austria, Italy and Slovakia).

The former bilateral Hungarian-Austrian, Hungarian-Italian, and the emerging Austrian-Italian partnerships have been developed into a higher level international co-operation. The initiative was launched and accepted during the Várpalota Days in 2000, at an event called *Way of Region*, which by the intermediary of Lavant, also added the North Slovenian Koroška. The agreement formulated the main joint actions such as developing human relations based on the “basic European integration”, improving living standards, safeguarding social values, protecting the environment, developing regional economy. To quote Samuele Biondi’s words as mayor of Grottazzolina: “let each small brick contribute to build the peace and Europe.”

In the spring of 2004 the original four-party co-operation extended to five countries when *The Association of Self Governments from the Jiu Valley (Romania)* joined the partnership. Meanwhile the 5-year old TEMA enlarged to a 50-member transnational organization, with a new Italian partner joining (*The Association of the Localities in the Aso Valley*). Meanwhile the mayor of Kremnica expressed the intention to join the partnership, and the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie small region in Silesia (southern Poland) received an observer status.

The most successful domains of co-operation are the partnership forms also recommended by the European Commission, characteristic of the *Youth for Europe programme*, which play an important role in the mutual understanding of the national cultures and the creation of the cohesion of common social values. These forms of co-operation enlarge the partnership of the T.E.M.A. participants in the field of sports, culture, arts and education.

<sup>15</sup>Treaty of Várpalota, 2000.

*The programmes launched by the T.E.M.A. and their results:*

- Camps for primary school children in the field of national history (“*The paths of memory*”),
- International linguistic camps (for primary and secondary school children)
- Dialogue for secondary school students on the internet in the field of environmental protection – in view of further personal and family communication (“*Environmental Legacy*”)
- International youth choral festivals (St. Andrä, Ravne Na Koroskem, Várpalota, Fermo)
- International drawing competition (theme: Peace and Tolerance)
- Participation to each-other’s cultural and sports events and festivals (for adults)
- *T.E.M.A. – logo* (Build Bridges) and homepage design.

All the T.E.M.A. participants share the opinion that education and cultural relations are the ones that serve best “the reputation of the regions and the integration of the people”. This is also a field in which co-operation can be financed in the easiest way. The continuation should focus on the so far poorly exploited domains, such as economic development, employment, a task which seems to be more difficult to accomplish.

## 2.2 Pays-de-la-Loire and Veszprém – a three level network

*The 15-year old co-operation that was established between the Pays-de-la-Loire Region and the Balaton is a particular type of partnership which includes different forms of co-operation, from the twin city, twin county to the twin region.*<sup>16</sup> The initiative for the partnership originated at the beginning of the 1990s from Olivier Guichard, President of the Regional Council of Pays-de-la-Loire, a person fully devoted to the concept of “the Europe of regions”. The first Eastern-Western interregional co-operation started with the relationship between the French region and the Federation of Lake Balaton.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Pays-de-la-Loire, stretching along the Atlantic coast, is the fourth most developed industrial region of France (processing, automobile and aircraft industry), with extensive tourism and developed agriculture. The territory of 32,000 square kilometres is inhabited by 322,000 people. The region consists of five counties: Loire-Atlantique (Nantes), Maine-et-Loire (Angers), Mayenne (Laval), Sarthe (le Mans) and Vendée (La Roche-sur Yon).

<sup>17</sup>The Balaton ‘Region’ (officially: Balaton Resort Area) including 152 localities and 11 smaller regions from three counties (Veszprém, Somogy and Zala) has 250,000 inhabitants,

*The French and Hungarian representatives signed the agreement between the Balaton Region and the Pays-de-la-Loire on June 6, 1996 and established the five main domains of co-operation* (European integration, education and training, tourism, economic development, culture). As a first step, in April 1998, the town of Keszthely accommodated the “Balaton European Information Point”. In addition to providing information on the EU, the EIP played a major role in training teachers (activities within the “*Teachers for Europe*” programmes) and managing youth movements (“*Europe Circles*”).

An important domain of co-operation included the development of the industry of tourism, sharing the experiences, elaborating regional marketing programmes in tourism, training (the RIGO-RET programme, the COFRAT trainings, COFRAT supported Leonardo da Vinci projects with Hungarian and Italian partners). Through the French partners, the Balaton Regions could participate in the VITOUR project as well. In the economic partnership so far the major part has been played by the chambers, the entrepreneurial co-operation still remaining incidental. On the other hand, the cultural and education relations are more than fruitful.

*On June 6, 1997 the General Assemblies of Veszprém and Maine-et-Loire counties signed the co-operation agreement*, which has been renewed every three years. The main domains are:

- Joint trainings in tourism
- Organization of conferences on environmental protection
- Search for joint investment
- Artistic exhibitions in Anjou and Balatonalmádi
- The Ferenc Széchenyi Professional Institute in Balatonfüred has successful co-operation with the Agricultural College in Angers, as well as the Brissac and Montreuil-Bellay secondary schools of vini- and viticulture.
- Within the Tempus programme, the University of Angers supported the setting up of the EU information centre of Veszprém.
- The University of Veszprém (from 2006 University of Pannonia) founded the Department of French Language and Literature, which is in close partnership with Maine-et-Loire County and the universities of Angers (scholarships, student mobility).

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most of whom are employed in the tertiary sector. With the seasonal inhabitants (owners of resorts, entrepreneurs), the population reaches half a million. After Budapest, the region of Lake Balaton is Hungary's second highlight.

The town of *Saumur*, a beautiful historical city situated in the valley of the Loire River, famous for its equestrian traditions and wine, and *Veszprém* ‘the Town of Queens’ has had close relations with each other since 2000, which in the spring of 2007 resulted in the official signature of a partnership between the two cities.

*Altogether we may say that the three-level (Pays-de-la-Loire and the Balaton Region, Maine-et-Loire and Veszprém counties, as well as Saumur and Veszprém cities) co-operations are very intensive, successful and offering a wide range of programmes, thus setting a model-like example for the other regions.*

### 3 Cross-border co-operation – euroregions

*“From I to US. A major goal which is often difficult for individual citizens to appreciate and understand.”<sup>18</sup>*

Following World War II, which caused the death of millions of people, the political elite of Europe realized that the conflict between the nations should be replaced by co-operation, friendly relationship reaching across the borders and mutual respect. *The concept of ‘euroregions’* and the implementation of this new approach originated in the minds of the Western European countries (or more precisely it emerged from the European Community).

From an economic and political point of view, the free crossing of borders is a most important factor. Joining their economic potential and exploiting all the advantages, the partners can stretch their markets, thus opening new perspectives of development and levelling the differences between the people living on both sides of the frontiers. As a result, the incentives for migration might diminish. In the light of this co-operation the importance of state frontiers becomes relative, as they become reduced to mere administrative bordering lines. Consequently, the instincts feeding the need to conquer new territories, as the major motives of the former wars in Europe, can fade away. Therefore, *the cross-border co-operation* turned into a major factor of stabilization, not only in the functioning of the Common Market, but also in the creation of the European Union.

Although the first cross-border initiatives date back to the 1950s, their administrative form was finalized only in the 1960s. In addition to the top-down initiatives along which the national governments have established intergovernmental relations, the local bottom-up endeavours and self-organizations are

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<sup>18</sup>EuRegioWest/Nyugat-Pannonia, Broschüre EU 1/5. 0/11/9\_4

gaining importance. Depending on the geographical expansion, the co-operation can have different forms, according to which we distinguish eurozones and working communities.

To sum it up, the concept of *euroregion* covers the union of the actors along the borders of two or more countries (local and regional authorities), who surmount the obstacles of the political borders to form an association created in the aim to provide the necessary financial resources that facilitate the implementation of their common economic, social, environmental and cultural development. In most cases these are bottom-to-top initiatives, launched by the local inhabitants or NGOs within the framework of everyday diplomacy, which sooner or later acquire a stable institutional form.

The first initiatives came into being on the Dutch-German border, when the successful cross-border co-operation – *Enschede-Gronau Region* <sup>19</sup> – was created in 1958. This initiative set a positive example which was followed in Western Europe by different other frontier regions. (1965: Regio Basiliensis on the German-French-Belgian border, 1977: Ems-Dollart on the Dutch-German border.)

The importance of euroregions is also indicated by their increasing number. Today almost the entire border of the European Union is organized into either regions or forms of regional co-operation. In 2008 their number outreached 200. The major aim of this co-operation is to facilitate the social, economic and cultural integration that leads to the implementation of joint regional administrative objectives. Its operation has been financed from several resources, including the European *INTERREG* programmes, which in 2007 was replaced by the European Regional Co-operation. Its main aim is to decrease the dividing character of borders, to foster cross-border infrastructure development and co-operation and to strengthen partnership between communities along the border.

While the euroregion is a local organizational form consisting of smaller territories, the working community is based on the co-operation of macro-regions. Due to the large number of participants, working communities are always multilateral organizations, most of which were founded between 1975 and 1978. Some examples are ALGE-ALP (1972), Alps-Adriatic Working Community (1978), Working Community of the Western Alps (1982), Working Community of the Pyrenees (1982) or the Working Community of the Jura (1985).

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<sup>19</sup>Enschede-Gronau Region, from 1965 'EUROREGIO' – not only by name but also in its institutional structure (Council, Presidium, Secretariat, Work Groups) – served as a model for further co-operation. The EUREGIO, which has already 128 members, unites the activity of self-governments of townships, chambers and NGOs.

### 3.1 Cross-border co-operation – “East-West”

The turnaround of the beginning of the 1990s and the permeability of the frontiers led to an increasing number of cross-border co-operation forms in Central and Eastern Europe. These instances of co-operation covered the border zones of the EU member states and of Central European countries and macro-regions. On the East-West axis, the most active countries were Germany and Poland. In Hungary the idea of a united Europe was experienced live for the first time through the *EuRegio West/Nyugat-Pannónia* cross-border co-operation.

The region, composed of the province of Burgenland and three Hungarian counties (Győr-Moson-Sopron, Vas, Zala), situated ‘in the heart of Central Europe’, is equally a gate to the East and to the West. The 15,000 square kilometres are home for 1.3 million people. Although the borders established by the Treaty of Trianon and later the ‘iron curtain’ divided the territory, the several-century-old economic and cultural relations have never been fully eradicated. The inter-institutional co-operation had been flourishing from the 1970s to set up in 1992 the predecessor of the euroregion, namely the Cross-Border Regional Council (with the participation of Burgenland and two Hungarian counties, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Vas.)

*The agreement documenting the creation of the euroregion was signed in Eisenstadt on October 7, 1998 by the Territorial Chairman of the Burgenland and both Chairmen of General Assemblies for the counties Vas and Győr-Moson-Sopron.*<sup>20</sup> The main idea of the co-operation was formulated by Ferenc Ivanics, president of the general assembly of Győr-Moson-Sopron county: “The euroregion is a region created by the people for the people, which provides the necessary framework for extended co-operation and meanwhile represents the common interests of its members.” The main aims of the *EuRegio West/Nyugat Pannónia* region is to promote the joint regional development, the partnership in social, labour and educational affairs, to support the investments in economy and tourism, to safeguard the cultural patrimony, to enhance co-operation in environmental and water protection as well as in catastrophe relief. Priority was given to the preparation of Hungary’s accession to the European Union and to the levelling of economic differences with the help of joint European projects, such as *INTERREG-PHARE CBC*.

The *EuRegio West/Nyugat-Pannónia* is at the crossroads of five countries, merging different peoples and cultures. Its previous activity consisted in large-scale partnership, *varied and multifaceted forms of co-operation*, backed up by

<sup>20</sup>The Hungarian county of Zala joined in 1999.



open and transparent structures. The mission of the region is to cherish the patrimony of the peoples and the cultures, recognizing that only joint efforts can lead to success in Central and Eastern Europe and in the European Union at large. Therefore, this co-operation is continuously strengthened by involving new partners from the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy and Serbia. Its future is defined by regional issues. *Its main objective is 'to form the new heart of Europe'. The whole future lies in the strong regions, in 'the Europe of the regions', where it assumes full participation.*

### 3.2 Cross-border co-operation – “East-East”

The political elite of the post-socialist countries recognized in their rhetoric the importance of subregional co-operation, but in the beginning they preserved the level of traditional intergovernmental partnerships (the Visegrád Group).

In the 20th century the drastic changes of borders reshaped the relationship between the peoples living in the area. The conflicts and ordeals were worsened by the relocations following the war (mainly along the Polish-German, Polish-Russian, Czech-German and Hungarian-Slovak borders). Another example of ethnic tension is the instance when the same ethnic group lives on both sides of a frontier (e.g. almost the entire exterior border of Hungary is inhabited by Hungarian minorities), a main source of tension in the past, and occasionally also at present. In the past decades the area was characterized by the birth of new states (the emergence of the Czech and Slovak republics, of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia). While in the EU the main issues were the abolishing of borders, in this part of Europe countries were reshaping them peacefully or through agreements following the war. This is why the cross-border co-operation is an urging need. In many instances the politically sensitive real or imaginary problems impede the efficient co-operation.

*The success of cross-border co-operation did not depend only on the main political trends.* The real success has been guaranteed by the members of the partnerships, by the intentions and actions of the people living along the borders. Nevertheless, the setting up of regions caused conflicts in most countries, as previously these levels of administrations had not been recognized as such, and regional policy did not have any traditions in Central Europe. The creation of the regions was not only a requirement of the European Union<sup>21</sup> but a prerequisite for becoming eligible for the INTERREG programmes in financing cross-border co-operation.

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<sup>21</sup>The region = NUTS III level, the most important supporting level of the structural and cohesive policy.

*The first cross-border chain of co-operation was the partnership between large territorial units* (Alps Adriatic Working Community, the Carpathian Euroregion), which provided important information and tasks in the pre-accession period to the EU. These regions contributed to the strengthening of stability in the large regions, providing a coordinating framework for the complex social, economic and cultural co-operation stretching across the borders.

The founding document of *the Carpathian Euroregion* was signed on February 14, 1993 by the governmental representatives of Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Slovakia and representatives of two Romanian counties. But due to the reluctance of the administrative policy, the two Romanian counties as well as the Slovak region gained full membership only in 1997 and 1999, respectively.

Presently the territory of the Carpathian Euroregion is 160,000 square kilometres and is inhabited by 16 million people. Its administrative organization – similarly to the other Central and Eastern European countries – follows the models of Western European euroregions. In the light of Convention EC 106, the mission of the region is to provide a well-functioning framework assisting the faster regional and economic development and promoting mutual understanding with the neighbours.

The almost 15-year-old *transnational institution* has served as a precedent. Western European models could not be successfully adopted as local conditions did not prove mature enough. The political elite of the five countries had not yet realized the role of joint development and levelling of the border regions. Co-operation was also set back by the economy of the less developed peripheral areas, where the low economic potential could not meet the set up requirements. The regions poor in capital were suitable only for illegal economy. Representatives of the economic and political elite pronounced only on the level of rhetorics on the importance of innovation. The initiatives, if any, were directed towards their own regions rather than towards the development of the bordering areas. Successful steps were only the cultural relations and the co-operation between universities. To the present time the economy of these bordering regions could not be levelled, as the time span proved relatively short.

Co-operation within the Carpathian Euroregion did not fulfil the objectives set by the founding members. A successful continuation could be provided by a change within the administration (eventually turning into an umbrella institution), the strengthening of co-operation between the smaller units of the region, rethinking the objectives and the tasks, exploiting successfully the projects financed from European resources. (The situation has improved since Romania's accession to the EU in January 2007.)

The operation of the Carpathian Euroregion, as well as the political history of the recent past in the Carpathian Basin reflect the poor chances for successful co-operation in extended regions. On the other hand, what seem feasible are the cross-border partnerships that have tangible objectives, best illustrated by *the euroregions set up along the Slovak-Hungarian border*, where from the end of the 1990s the improved political relations and the new reform in public administration resulted in generating an increasing number of interregional partnerships.<sup>22</sup>

Experts believe that the success is due to the fact that following World War I the Hungarian territory called Upland did not constitute a compact economic, geographical and administrative unit with the mother country from which it had been disannexed, as the area belonged to different centres (Budapest, Bratislava, Košice). Therefore, the people living in the region had more of a local, provincial identity rather than a regional one. This situation was fully exploited by the founders of the *Ister-Granum Euroregion*.<sup>23</sup> Its symbolic unity was actually restored on October 11, 2001 with the *opening of the Mária Valéria Bridge linking the towns of Esztergom and Štúrovo*. The regional co-operation agreement was signed on October 13, 2000 by the representatives of the Južný Region, of the Regional Development Association of Esztergom and Nyergesújfalu as well as of Tokod and Tokodaltáró, in the presence of Hans Beck, leader of the EU delegation in Hungary. On May 31, the area was named Ister-Granum Cross-Border Region. On November 17, 2003, 73 settlements along the border decided to create the Ister-Granum Euroregion.

*Successful projects:*

- Displaying the signboards indicating the tourist highlights of the euroregion
- Creating a thematic cycling track in the Pilis Mountains
- Setting up a regional economic e-portal for small enterprises
- Development of the NGO sector (trainings in project writing, editing a Hungarian-Slovak-English catalogue of the NGOs in the euroregion)

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<sup>22</sup>Presently 95% of the 697 kilometres of borders belongs to cross-border regions, (some border areas participating simultaneously in several different partnerships).

<sup>23</sup>The territory of the euroregion, which is a historical and cultural district bearing the Latin names of the rivers Danube and Garam, exceeds 2,000 square kilometres and has 200,000 inhabitants.

*Launched programmes:*

- Expertising Governance for Transfrontier Conurbations (CEGTC-Urbact)
- Development of regional information bases for the NGOs

*Future projects:*

- New bridges of the Ister-Granum Euroregion (restoring the bridges on the lower parts of the river Ipoly).

The running and planned project will result not only in re-building the bridges on the river Ipoly, but also in strengthening the concept of euroregion, underlying the importance of co-operation on both sides of the border. The main idea of transnational co-operations was formulated by Hans Beck, representative of the Hungarian Regions in Brussels: “In the EuRegion people can live in peace, mutual respect and appreciate the other culture. It will be a pleasure to live and work in the enlarged Europe. With joint efforts and determination we can create our sustainable future.”

### 3.3 CENTROPE – a unique region in Europe

*“We shape the future”<sup>24</sup>*

“CENTROPE – is a unique region in Europe considering that it borders three ‘new’ EU-member states (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary) and an ‘old’ EU-member state (Austria). This region not only looks back at a long common history, but had strong functional ties in the past as well. It was only the political events of the 20th century and the ensuing changes to the borders (1918, 1921, 1993) that turned the region into a border region. Even though economic and systematic differences currently exist, the forthcoming accession to the EU of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary revive the spatial functionality of the region that is reflected in cross-border economic, cultural and social activities and transform it into a palpable experience” – these are the opening lines of the regional analysis of CENTROPE Region.<sup>25</sup>

*In the summer of 2002, recognizing the economic potential of the spontaneous co-operation launched in this ‘four-nation’ quadrangle (tourism, entrepreneurial and cultural partnerships), Vienna started the preparation to form a region within the INTERREG IIIA programme. Vienna’s intention*

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<sup>24</sup>Vision Centrope 2015.

<sup>25</sup>Annex: Table 3.

was to strengthen the synergic attraction of strong capital, therefore it concentrated on providing EU funds to assist the co-operation between the SMEs of the Austrian, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian regions. The declaration of the intention to set up the region was signed in September 2003 in Kittsee. Following the motto “We will be a Euroregion” the participants, building on the advantages of the already existing network, expressed their wish to create an internationally acknowledged multifunctional centre (the Central European Region, CENTROPE).

*The participants in the co-operation:* provinces, townships, counties and cities. The Centrope region in Austria covers the Vienna Region (the Austrian provinces of Burgenland, Lower Austria, Vienna and the cities Vienna, St. Pölten and Eisenstadt); in the Czech Republic the regions of South Bohemia, South Moravia and Brno city; in Slovakia the township of Bratislava, Trnava and the cities Bratislava, Trnava, and in Hungary the counties Győr-Moson-Sopron, Vas and Zala and the cities of Győr, Sopron and Szombathely.

The preparations of the CENTROPE programme, which lay on large-scale conceptions and long-term objectives was fully served by *OPENING (OPTimized ENlargement TrainING Academy) model project*, which ended on July 1, 2005. Objective: to strengthen and institutionalize the co-operation between local and regional authorities and offices. Activity was built around seven themes (e.g. integrative town development, cross-border co-operation in the field of training management, renewing professional training, regional development of tourism industry, joint statistical database). The participants of the Vienna-Burgenland-Bratislava-Győr-Moson-Sopron-Brno regions attending the international conference shared their transnational experiences and discussed the conditions of further actions (appointing target groups, developing co-operation skills, project management, financing resources, etc.).

*On April 19, 2005 in St. Pölten the representatives of the Central European Region in a closing conference memorandum formulated the future actions aimed at reinforcing the co-operation.* Besides long-term objectives, the participants decided to launch pilot projects within specific domains:

- *LABOUR* – working out a long-term human resources development strategy, involving all the actors of the labour market, in order to enhance employment
- *MAP* – database for common regional planning and development
- *Bio-materials* – working out the future “biosphere region”, with the exploitation of the regions’ natural resources

- *Enter Centrope* – video films for the international marketing of the regions
- *IMAGE* – creating long-term PR and marketing products
- *Sound* – organizing joint concerts
- *Sailing* – organizing sailing competitions on Lake Fertő for the young generation in the region
- *Regional Management* – a project uniting development offices and organizations in the region. Objective: to assure the sustained development of rural areas. The main fields of co-operation are: tourism, regional environmental technologies, setting up clusters, creating the network of historical parks and castles.<sup>26</sup>

*In March 2006 the first stage of the CENTROPE co-operation ended. At the political conference entitled “CENTROPE 2006+” the “Vision CENTROPE 2015” contained the strengthening of the union of the four regions, the four central domains of co-operation and the tasks leading to its implementation. (Available on the homepage of the region). The members of CENTROPE and the designers of the ‘vision’ 2015 have envisaged the following:*

“April 2015. Today the mayors, county presidents and governors of the Central European Region will meet for their annual General Assembly to discuss and adopt the CENTROPE working programme for the next two years. The annual assembly is also attended by prominent representatives of key enterprises and universities of the entire region, which play a vital role in the joint development of the Central European Region as associated CENTROPE partners.

The roughly six and a half million persons living and working in the Central European Region feel strong ties with this economic and living space at the heart of Central Europe and have an increasingly clear understanding of the many factors that link them and the potential advantages these harbour ... The citizens of CENTROPE use the same currency, move freely across the borders, and the last transition periods for the labour market and service sector

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<sup>26</sup>The *institutional network* of CENTROPE has also been established. Its main governing body is the Council, formed by the representatives of the regions. The council ensures the proper platforms and forums to negotiate the form and content of the co-operation. *The Steering Committee*, made up of the town mayors and the leaders of counties and townships, is responsible for the accomplishment of the tasks. The *CENTROPE Working Community* is provided by the permanent co-operation between institutions and organizations such as ECO PLUS, Europaforum Wien, Regional Consulting Ziviltechniker Ges.m.b.H, WIBAG, WWFF, Centrope Platform.

have long expired. Although they have remained Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians and Austrians, they self-confidently use their different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to exploit the opportunities the Central European Region offers as an economic, cultural and living place. People are proud that obstacles that formerly had seemed insurmountable were overcome in just a few years through a manifest decision . . . The Central European Region is today known as a model where European integration at the interface between ‘old’ and ‘new’ EU Member States has been achieved quickly and smoothly.”

In order that this vision turns into reality, in addition to mutual efforts, there is also need for long-term multilateral strategy and action in the field of economy, labour market, administration, environmental protection, education, R&D, culture. The economic and innovative potential of the area bordered by CENTROPE should be tuned according to the priorities of the 2007-2017 EU budget. Meanwhile, an effective communication should reinforce the inner cohesion of the region as well as its international reputation.

Wolfgang Weisgram, analyst for *Der Standard* wrote the following in April 2005: “The area which used to be called ‘Vienna Region’, an area which is called CENTROPE today, and whose official foundation ceremony was held in the autumn of 2003 in the castle of Kittsee, is already on its way. It is a logical historical consequence that the Czech, the Slovak, the Hungarian and the Austrian regions and cities started to co-operate in order to bring about an economic unity, a joint flourishing, the framework of industrial and infrastructural development, common plans for exploiting the economic and natural resources . . .” Hans Nissl, governor of Burgenland affirmed that the “growing together” i.e. the integration cannot be “ordered and imposed”. It has to proceed from bottom-to-top. We have already taken many steps, but these are not enough. This feeling is shared by the nearly six million people who are living and working in the area and send their children into the future.

## 4 Summary – One tree, one country

The ever strengthening political, ideological and cultural variety of modern age Europe has faded or fully eradicated the formerly binding strings, since ethnic and social groups, previously organically belonging together and mutually co-operating, have turned into enemies. Although the conceptions that shaped the vision of a co-operating peaceful and solid Europe, which guarantees high living standards, date far back into history, the process that began to turn the partnership between the European citizens from theory into practice appeared only half a century ago.

We know that everybody agrees to the need of a ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ development of the European Union, and day by day we meet its most remarkable fulfilment in the form of good practices worth following. The transnational – local, micro- and regional – partnerships are gaining ground and this way help patching together the threads torn by the stormy historical past.

The summer of 2004 (Santander, Spain): 15 young secondary school students from the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ Europe were getting acquainted in the international camp organized by FACE (Federation of Association of Young Citizens of Europe). They shared views about the future of the integration, migration, ethics and development, violence and solidarity. At the end of the event the young people planted a tree, as the symbol of a united Europe . . . . A few years have passed since then. The leaves of trees are rustling merrily in the wind. They will turn into a forest while the young grow old. And these forests will calm the winds and tame the devastating tempests. But stopping the political storms, erasing the evil historical conditioning, appeasing the real or imaginary grievances will remain the task of those who have planted the trees – both ‘at the bottom’ and ‘at the top’.

## ANNEX

Table 3: General Strengths and Weaknesses of CENTROPE Region

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Geographical position at the heart of Europe	Distance to the West European economic centres, especially for the peripheral regions
The metropolitan area Vienna-Bratislava-(Győr) as the core of the region	In the rural regions, the poor situations of competition with regard to hard and soft location factors
Access to the Eastern European market	Differences in legal frameworks, administrative and regional competence structures and standards (e.g. environmental, technical)
Dynamic urban centres	Disparities as a consequence of the differences in prosperity and development level of the countries and regions
Region highly attractive for investment, attractive location for international enterprises and headquarters	Lacking development of cross-border regional competencies and development of locations
Cultural and social relationships between the 4	CENROPE countries lacking knowledge of the language of the respective neighbours
Existing contracts and cross-border co-operation structures	Varying speeds of the development process
Variety of languages	

**Source:** Regional Analysis of the CENTROPE region, *DIANE Project* (Direct Investment Agency Net) Vienna, September 2003, 50.



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