

FACTORS AND WAYS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION DEVELOPMENT OF BORDER REGIONS OF UKRAINE

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Abstract:

The paper justifies that cross-border cooperation (hereinafter — CBC), as part of state policy, now holds a high position in the system of priorities of both socio-economic development and European integration of Ukraine. But in Ukraine it is a typical situation when decisions, taken by state administration bodies regarding the development of CBC, do not fully take into account the real situation in this area, because they do not rely on a deep knowledge of the subject in sufficient volumes. The adverse conditions and obstacles of CBC development in the border regions of Ukraine were found, based on the results of the sociological and expert research (public opinion research of the border areas inhabitants, experts, representatives of civic organizations, regional development agencies, scientists, entrepreneurs, officials of local government agencies and local self-government bodies). The obtained results helped the authors to provide a rationale for the priority actions to be implemented to enhance CBC based on the research findings.

Key words: cross-border cooperation, border regions, priority measures and ways of development, factors and obstacles.

JEL classification: H10 Z30 Z10

1. INTRODUCTION

CBC, as part of state policy, now holds a high position in the system of priorities of socio-economic development of Ukraine. The existing problems are discussed more and more actively at different levels of government, starting from the President of Ukraine and ending with local authorities, and prospective proposals regarding the development of CBC are formulated for both western and southern borders. At the same time, in Ukraine it is a typical situation when decisions, taken by government, do not fully take into account the real situation in CBC area. This leads to a certain declarative public policy and its inconformity to the interests and needs of the relevant institutions and ordinary people who carry out the practical implementation of cross-border projects.

A huge amount of scientific publications, political debates, civic initiatives, as well as numerous legal acts of central, regional and local authorities concern with the problems of CBC development. The CBC as an essential attribute of effective partnership between Ukraine and the EU is constantly mentioned during the proceedings of joint working groups and committees, as well as by the representatives of the European Union and members of the delegations of the European states. The works of M. Dolishnii, P. Belenkyi, Z. Burechko, N. Mikula, A. Mokiy, S. Pysarenko, V. Tkachenko, O. Topchiyeva, L. Yaremko and other national scientists are devoted to the studying of the problem of cross-border cooperation.

2. THE ESSENCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION: ASSESSMENT OF THE RESPONDENTS

A sociological and expert survey were conducted in order to study the current state of affairs in the field of CBC of border regions of the country (the case of Lviv region), based on the assessments of its direct participants — residents of border areas, experts, representatives of civic organizations, regional development agencies, scientists, businessmen, officials of local government agencies and local self-government bodies.

The results of the surveys revealed the following: the understanding of the specific of CBC is almost equal (Table 1). The most common interpretation of this concept is the realization of joint projects by NGOs using grant resources and financing of corresponding activities by the European Union. However, it is worth noting that in this case the contradiction of the use of the term *CBC* in this perspective occurs when the thorough analysis of the institutional support of collaboration processes is made, which today is at a critical pass and in fact prevents the formation of effective relations with the EU member states.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by the familiarization with the term "cross-border cooperation"

Showings	Total	Are you familiar with the term cross-border cooperation and its meaning?				
		I hear this for the first time	I have heard this term, but I hardly know what it means	Yes, I know the specific nature and key problems of CBC	I know this term very well and am familiar with key aspects of CBC development	I'm not only familiar with CBC agenda I'm but also its active participant
Number of respondents, persons	250	37	103	73	27	12
Weight percentage, %	100	15	52	29	11	5

The answers to the question regarding the identification of the factors of the most negative impact on the development of Ukrainian-Polish CBC as of today (Figure 1) should be considered as an important part of the study.

According to the answers to these questions the conclusion can be made that visa regime and other regulatory restrictions still have the huge impact on the development of CBC. What is more, after Poland's accession to the EU and the introduction of a Schengen visa the importance of this factor has increased significantly (almost by half).

The respondents also have noted the increase of the negative impact of the complicated border crossing procedures on the development of CBC that is explained both by the objective difficulties, caused by more strict regime of border control after Poland's accession to the EU, and subjective factors coming from the underdeveloped border infrastructure and weak staffing of relevant services, first of all customs and border services, in terms of growing traffic and people flows, who are going to cross the border. It shows the necessity to develop a network of border crossing points at the Ukrainian-Polish border and significant improvement in their technical equipment and staffing.

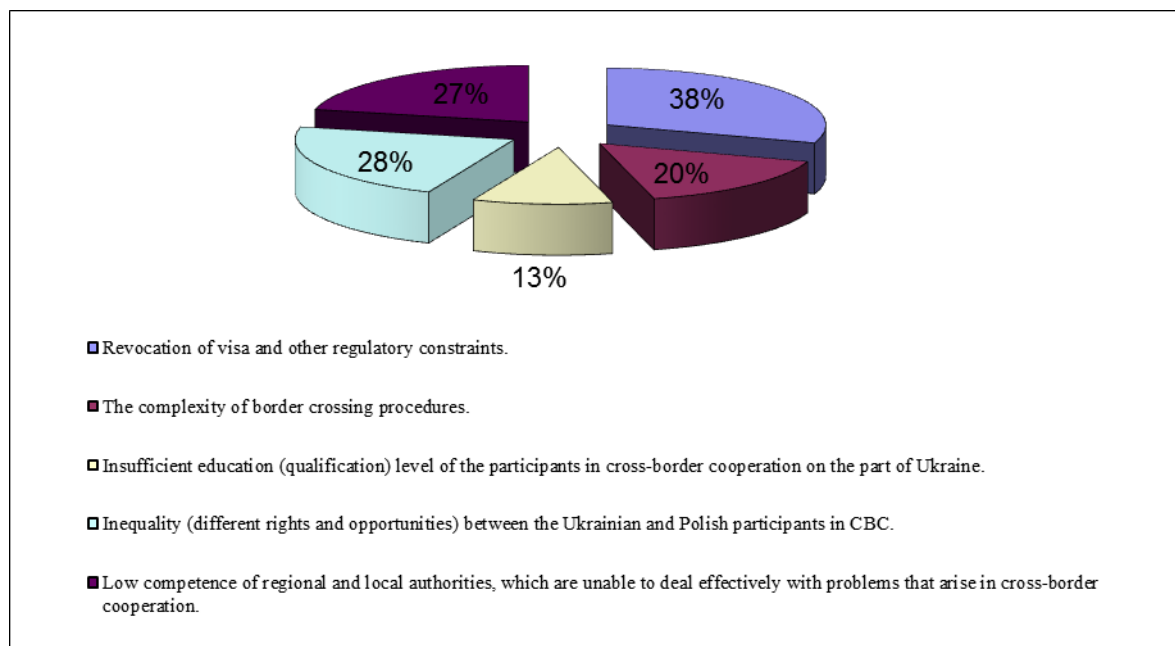


Fig. 1. Distribution of respondents according to their vision of the factors that have the most negative impact on the CBC development

According to the respondents, low competence of regional and local authorities, which cannot solve effectively the problems that arise, also have stable negative impact on cross-border cooperation in recent years. Moreover, the negative impact of this factor increases, which may indicate an attempt of the people to shift the responsibility on the authorities' officials, including local ones, for the complication of visa obtaining procedures and border crossings.

At the same time, the respondents noted the growth of the education (qualification) level of the CBC participants on the part of Ukraine, namely the reduction in the percentage of negative influence of this factor on the intensification of cross-border activity. This trend can be regarded as positive, since the transition of Ukrainian regions to the more civilized forms of cooperation with its European partners should be considered in the sphere of raising the qualification level of CBC participants.

However, the most unexpected result is a superior point of view about decrease of the inequalities between the Ukrainian and Polish participants of CBC, despite the existence of the asymmetric visa regime between Ukraine and Poland, as well as the constant criticism in the mass media and at the mundane level of the infringing the interests of the Ukrainians in obtaining visas and crossing border. This can be explained primarily by the fact that the abovementioned inequality concerns, first of all, the participants of "shuttle trade", which importance in today's cross-border cooperation, according to respondents, is not decisive.

The logical conclusion, obtained through questioning, is that the main directions of solving the CBC problems in the short term are the opening of new crossing points at the Ukrainian-Polish border and simplification of border crossing procedures (43%) and establishment of a simplified border crossing procedure for residents of border areas (36%) (Figure 2).

Educational dimension of the reform of CBC area plays also an important role TCS as suggested by the percentage of respondents who mentioned introducing retraining programs and the implementation of educational projects for residents of border areas in order to create the civilized business system in the border regions (26%).

At the same time, one can positively consider a small quantity of respondents who tend to think about tackling the CBC issues in line with the egalitarian approach, in particular through the introduction of visa restrictions for entry into Ukraine for foreigners or of special status of depressive territories and corresponding benefits for residents of border areas.

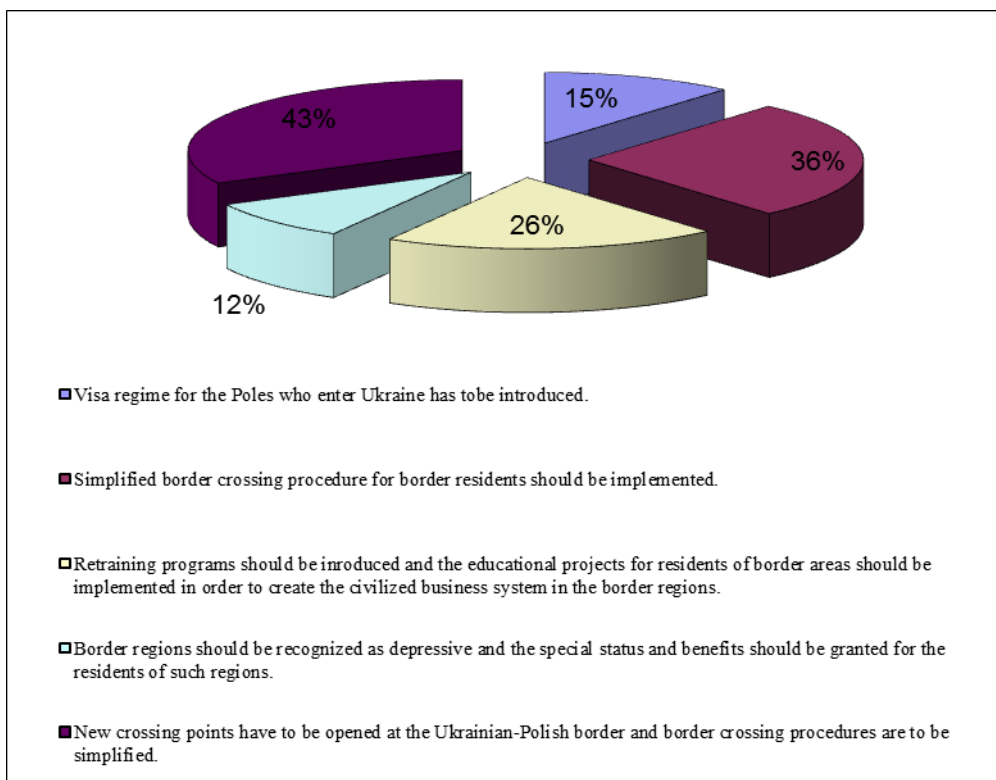


Fig. 2. Distribution of respondents according to their vision of the main ways for the tackling CBC issues between Ukraine and Poland in the nearest

In general, the results of the survey suggest the need to reform the infrastructure and staffing of CBC system in order to enhance its effectiveness and the intensity of the impact on the international activities of the regions and European integration of Ukraine. In addition, the results of the expert survey (opinion of independent experts — representatives of civic organizations, scientists, who specialize in CBC problems, officials of local authorities, entrepreneurs who have experience of implementing cross-border projects) reveals some regularities and obstacles of CBC development of border regions at the present stage of European integration of our country.

3. THE MAIN DISADVANTAGES OF INSTITUTIONAL AND REGULATORY SUPPORT OF THE CBS SYSTEM OF UKRAINIAN REGIONS

It should be noted that the institutional and legal and regulatory support system of CBC of the Ukrainian regions has not been completed so far. Despite the fact that this area is regulated by a significant number of both international and national legal acts (The European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, which Ukraine acceded to in 1993, the Law of Ukraine "On Transfrontier Co-operation", State program of cross-border cooperation development for 2007-2010, Program of Euro-regions development and many other regulatory acts, adopted by the highest state authorities in Ukraine), the main problems of their integration and implementation are:

- the established practice of unfair execution of acting laws and state programs, unequal understanding of the certain legislative acts not only by the ministries and departments but also local administrations;
- dissemination of the regulatory functions, related to the development of CBC area, between the various public authorities;
- preservation of the practice of excessive administrative impact on regional development, in particular its cross-border component;

- lack of criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of CBC, which leads to disorganized formation of regulatory support and prevents to subordinate all legislation to achieving a single strategic goal;

- insufficient level of the provisions of regulatory acts (in particular, the provisions of the Law of Ukraine "On Transfrontier Cooperation") on the course of processes in CBC; fuzzy mechanism of allocation and the use of money for the CBC development; lack of attention to such forms of CBC promoting as legal, organizational, informational and analytical, methodical, marketing and others.

Besides that, there are some shortcomings of the institutional support of the promotion system of CBC development in the border regions of Ukraine, such as:

- central government authorities, in particular ministries and departments, do not consider objectively in their rule-making activity those problems and the real processes that occur in the CBC of Ukrainian regions;

- local authorities and local self-government, as well as Euro-regions, which concentrate at the regional level, do not have sufficient rule-making capabilities because the administrative system of Ukraine today is so centralized that the regulatory acts of the regional government cannot significantly influence on the CBC development;

- lack of self-organized institutions as an element of institutional support of the CBC system in general. Most people either are not united in such organizations or do not expect significant assistance from them, they are deprived of appropriate administrative and financial leverages, and NGOs work primarily in as contractors for donor organizations for implementing the relevant cross-border projects, performing rather quasi- entrepreneurial function than the role of self-governing institutions.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Having regard to the above, based on the results of the sociological and expert surveys, the priority efforts to overcome the obstacles that exist on the way of the CBC development of the Ukrainian border regions with their partners from the EU countries, as well as to boost cross-border activities at the level of local communities and make them more civilized, it is necessary to make efforts in five key areas:

1) Improvement of the efficiency of the Foreign Ministry and the diplomatic corps of Ukraine towards providing the CBC a special status in the EU-Ukraine partnership policy. It concerns both the liberalization of visa obtaining procedures and border crossing for the Ukrainian participants and the implementation of special programs aimed at the development of infrastructure of border areas. In addition, special attention should be paid to a substantial increase in the number of educational projects which are carried out within the framework of the EU Neighbourhood policy and stipulate further training of senior officials of local self-government bodies and small enterprises in the border regions of Ukraine, as well as getting new, marketable specialities for the residents of border areas of our country;

2) Development of a system of permanent partnership relations and business communications between government, business and civic society, on the one hand, and the central, regional and local authorities, on the other. This would allow to discuss in a constructive manner and to overcome timely those problems, which have a destructive impact not only on the deepening of CBC of border regions, but also on the economic development of Ukraine as a whole;

3) Significant increase of training and educational components of the CBC of the Ukrainian and neighbouring EU regions in the weight and importance, especially in terms of the adaptation of Ukrainian residents of border regions to the new requirements of cooperation with the European partners in the context of the neighbourhood of our country and the EU. Both officials of local authorities and self-governing institutions, and academic institutions and educational establishments of the border regions should be actively involved in this work, especially those that are financed from the state and local budgets;

4) Liberalization of economic policy in general and its external economic component in particular. First of all, it concerns the simplification of procedures for the creation of new enterprises and the reduction of fiscal and administrative and bureaucratic burden on their activities for the purposes of reaching fuller entrepreneurial potential and raising civic engagement of the population. This will allow to create favourable conditions for enhancing cross-border business and to stimulate the formation of new civic organizations in the borderland, which will be accompanied by their increased cooperation with foreign partners;

5) Carrying out the administrative-territorial reform aimed at considerable decentralization to bring the budget system and the government system in Ukraine to the European standards, based on the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.

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