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**The European cross-border cooperation in the Balkan countries:  
Marking space and the multi-scalar production of locality**

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Considering borders as the limit of the States' sovereignty and territorial competency is not enough. During the past thirty years, more and more authors have shown the necessity to take into account the complexity of the processes related to the border issue and have called for a postmodern perspective<sup>1</sup>. This theoretical approach will constitute our basis for observing border reconfigurations in the Balkans.

The border, being a separation line between two entities, has a boundary dimension. At the same time, it is an interface, a contact zone that regulates cross-border transfers and supports hybridisations. Borders, in particular states' borders, are politically, historically and socially built<sup>2</sup>: Their form and their path reflect specific periods and configurations. It is essential to understand this time-related aspect and to put into perspective the way borders are constructed, deconstructed, reconstructed, and the symbolic part attached to these processes<sup>3</sup>. As Anssi Paasi and David Newman stated, "*State boundaries are equally social, political and discursive constructs, not just static naturalized categories located between states. Boundaries and their meanings are historically contingent, and they are part of the production and institutionalization of territories and territoriality*"<sup>4</sup>. These re- and de-bordering processes are particularly observable in the Balkans region since the fall of socialist regimes and the beginning of the European integration period.

Thus, borders may and should be observed as a dialectic issue. If they constitute political, institutional and legal boundaries, they should also be considered as limits and contact zones between – at least – two material and ideal space that influence socio-spatial relations between groups and individuals. At the symbolical level, referring to the border implies referring to the *Other*, its history, its territory. Thus, the territories play a strategic role for the definition and differentiation of territorial identities. The duality of borders, representing both boundaries and interfaces, results in the existence of two territories with the appearance of borderlands duplicated on each side of the line<sup>5</sup>. In fact, borderlands are included in the national territory contributing to its definition while being a periphery of it. More precisely, the latter are located at the territorial and

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance : E. Balibar, *La crainte des masses*, Galilée, Paris 1997 ; Groupe Frontière, 2004, "La frontière, un objet spatial en mutation.", *EspacesTemps.net*.

<sup>2</sup> M. Anderson, 1997, « Les frontières : un débat contemporain », *Cultures & Conflits*, No. 26-27, 15-34.

<sup>3</sup> M. Foucher, *Fronts et frontières, un tour du monde géopolitique*, Fayard: Paris, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> A. Paasi, 1998, "Fences and neighbours in the postmodern world: boundary narratives in political geography", *Progress in Human Geography* 22, 2, pp. 186-207.

<sup>5</sup> J. Levy et M. Lussault, *Dictionnaire de la géographie et de l'espace des sociétés*, Belin: Tours, 2003, pp 384-385.

ideological limits of Nation-States embodying the National construction of the society<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, the very nature of state-borders implies that they are those places where States are exposed to danger<sup>7</sup>: border areas, as transitional zones, may be a place where more activities, networks and political institutions, which are in opposition to the State or call into question its action, are taking place<sup>8</sup>. The local configuration of borderlands, especially the question of minorities, is a key element while studying border issue. As Minghi noticed, “The presence of ethnic minorities is frequently a feature of European borderlands”,<sup>9</sup> even if (and because<sup>10</sup>) borders have often been drawn as much as possible among ethnic divisions during the post-World War I treaties and more recently during peace agreements in former Yugoslavia.

If the association of borders to the notion of risk has been predominant for a long time, a new perspective has emerged in the 1980s. The Council of Europe, through the Madrid Convention<sup>11</sup> in 1980, and then the European Union, through INTERREG<sup>12</sup> programmes firstly launched in 1989, have settled policies to facilitate cooperation at the local scale between borderlands’ communities. Apart from cross-border economic development, one of the most important aims is to bring together European nations. These policies have led to the progressive institutionalization of borderlands, borders being lately considered as a support permitting links<sup>13</sup>. In other words, borders in Europe have become EU territorial laboratories. They are no longer considered as an object of

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<sup>6</sup>O. Denert et H. Hurel, « De l’espace frontalier au territoire transfrontalier », *Labyrinthe* 6 (2000), pp. 141-148.

<sup>7</sup> They are not the only space exposed to danger since borders become more and more reticular and are projected inside the inland (e.g. in airports) but also out of the limits of the States (e.g. to protect the territory from immigration through camps for migrants situated in neighboring countries). For more details about this postmodern evolution of the nation-States and of borders, see: D. Bigo, 2011, “Frontières, territoire, sécurité, souveraineté”, *Ceriscope Frontières*, 14p.

<sup>8</sup> G. de Rapper, P. Sintès ; *Composer avec le risque : La frontière Sud de l’Albanie entre politique des Etats et solidarités locales* ; Revue d’études comparatives Est-Ouest, No. 37, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> J. Minghi, “Changing Geography of Scale and Hierarchy in European Borderlands”, in *Boundaries and Place: European Borderlands in Geographical Context*, D. H. Kaplan and J. Häkli. (eds.), MD: Rowman& Littlefield, 2002

<sup>10</sup> Since it is barely impossible for each nationality to be contained into the boundaries of one State, the principle of nationalities comprises automatically the notion of minority. See: Blondel C., 2013, « La coopération transfrontalière un levier potentiel des réconciliations interethniques en ex-Yougoslavie ? », *Cybergeo : European Journal of Geography* ; Gossiaux J.-F., 2002, « La Fin des Yougoslaves ou l’ethnicité toujours recommencée », *Anthropologie et Sociétés*, vol. 26, No.1, 53-68.

<sup>11</sup> The name exact being the “European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities”

<sup>12</sup> The Interregional co-operation programme is a EU initiative that aims to stimulate cooperation between regions of members States (specific programs concerning also candidate countries and neighbouring countries). This programme is financed under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

<sup>13</sup> A.L Amilhat-Szary et M.C Fourny, « Introduction, Territorialité et nouvelles évolutions de la frontière », in *Après les frontières, avec la frontière, nouvelles dynamiques transfrontalières en Europe*, A.L Amilhat-Szary et M.C Fourny (dir.), La Tour d’Aigues: Editions de L’Aube, 2006

division but as an object of union. The status of borderlands evolves from separation to community<sup>14</sup>. Formerly symbols of separation and marginalisation, they become in Europe a symbol of proximity and a tool for development<sup>15</sup>.

The object of this chapter will be analysis of the interrelations between the local configurations in borderlands and the implementation of the cross-border cooperation through the building of institutionalized cross-border territories. What is the spatial impact on the assignation of cooperation territories in an area eligible to cross-border programs? How is this cooperation influenced by the territorial, political and social configuration of the concerned regions? Moreover, how are these cooperation projects included into larger processes of perpetual evolution of the cross-border relations?

To answer these questions we will first focus on the process of institutionalization of border areas through the example of the EU cross-border cooperation. We will analyse, in particular, the consequences of the assignation of a cooperation territory on practices and representations of the concerned participants. The last part of the text will be dedicated to the study of the interaction between the cross-border cooperation and the historical, social and political (re)configuration of places located in the eligible area. We will look at the narratives and representations of space and people that can be conveyed through these processes.

In order to do so, our analysis is structured around the experience of three different borderlands: Croatia-Serbia, Albania-Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Macedonia-Greece. These sites were chosen because they have distinctive recent heritages and represent a wide range of situations regarding their integration into the European Union<sup>16</sup>. By comparing them, our intention is to highlight common and distinctive trends in the reconfiguration of cross-border relations in the Western Balkans. Concerning to our methodology, the three borderlands have been approached through (qualitative) empirical works that have conducted during several periods from 2009 to 2013. They consist of interviews with individuals and groups of the borderlands: inhabitants, politicians, NGOs' leaders, as well as managers in charge of certain EU projects. We have chosen to focus our attention on 2007-2013 initially for the reason that it is the

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<sup>14</sup>Minghi, 2002, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> A.L Amilhat-Szary et M.C Fourny, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Greece is an EU member since 1981. Croatia will become a member in June 2013. The Republic of Macedonia (since December 2005) and Serbia (since March 2012) are official candidates although the accession negotiations are still not open. In early 2013, Albania is still a potential candidate. After having formally applied in April 2009, the country is waiting for the Council of the EU to grant it official candidate status.

ongoing EU programming period, which allows us to observe and to question reconfigurations in progress. Furthermore, 2007 reforms have led to the homogenisation of the EU pre-accession process that has made the comparison between these three cases possible - the EU influence respecting the same normative approach.

### **An institutional success in spite of the technical complexity**

We have chosen the situation of candidate countries in the Western Balkans is more peculiar as cross-border cooperation is, since 2007, the second component (out of five) of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)<sup>17</sup>, which supports the Stabilisation and Association Processes (ASP) signed with each country of the region. The main goals of the cross-border cooperation programs, each pair of Nation-States being responsible for their elaboration in collaboration with local authorities and EU delegations, are to encourage socio-economic development of cross-border regions, to prepare regional actors to deal with the future cohesion Fund at the cross-border level, to bridge population situated in marginal spaces of their national territories by establishing a common cross-border development process, and to promote good neighbouring relations. With the purpose of helping Balkan countries in the elaboration and in the implementation of cross-border programs, the EU Commission has even established a specific initiative CBIB – Cross Border Institutional Building. This support, conjugated with the national governments good will<sup>18</sup>, has led to the implementation of cross-border

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<sup>17</sup> If the IPA is implemented since 2007, some EU cross-border cooperation were already pre-existing between some few Balkans countries through initiatives PHARE CBC (from 1994 to 2006) and CARDS (2000-2006) (Ce serait bien de rappeler les dates d'application de ces programmes, car vous passez rapidement des années 1980 à la fin des années 2000, on ne voit pas très bien ce que 1989 et les années 1990 ont représenté dans la conception de la coopération transfrontalière). These two programs (and other pre-accession programs existing before 2006) were in fact merged in the IPA instrument. The instrument includes five components (1. support for transition and institution-building, 2. cross-border cooperation, 3. regional, 4. human resources and 5. rural development). The two first components concern all the EU candidate and potential candidates while the three last components only concern the candidate countries (for the 2007-2013 period, the candidate countries are Croatia, Republic of Macedonia and Turkey ; while potential candidate countries are : Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania). Although candidate country status was awarded in 2010 to Iceland and Montenegro and in 2012 to Serbia, these three countries have remained outside the scope of intervention of IPA components three, four and five. That situation should evolve in the next programming period 2014-2020.

<sup>18</sup> This good will may be associated to two main reasons. Firstly, the implementation of these programs is one of the main conditions to access to the EU. Secondly, albeit the money concerned represent small amounts in comparison with the support given to internal EU cross-border cooperation programs, it still represent a non-negligible provision to the region. For more details, see: Blondel, 2013, op. cit.

cooperation programs between all Western Balkans countries, the only exception being Serbia-Kosovo for the 2007-2013 period.

If the EU cross-border cooperation programming is not the only way for the emergence of institutionalized cross-border areas, the scale (concentration on bilateral regional cooperation) and the sophistication of these programs are significant. Implementing an IPA CBC programme is a process highly standardized and organized through the regulation 718/2007 of the European Commission establishing the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance. Contracting authorities have to be defined and a Joint Technical Secretariat and a Joint Monitoring Secretariat have to be set up through cooperation between the participating countries. The building of these institutions is of a crucial importance, as eventual prolongation of the setting of joint management structures might influence the delay of launching of the calls for proposals. The areas eligible to this cross-border cooperation are also very technically determined: they are defined by the IPA Implementing Regulations, whose article 88 states that *NUTS III<sup>19</sup> level regions (or equivalent) along borders between the Community and the beneficiary countries, taking into account potential adjustments needed to ensure the coherence and continuity of the co-operation action<sup>20</sup>*. The potential adjustments are also defined by such a regulation, the regulation n° 97 foreseeing *that the possibility to finance expenditure incurred in implementing operations or parts of operations up to a limit of 20% of the amount of the Community contribution to the cross-border in NUTS III regions (or equivalent) areas adjacent to the eligible areas for that program<sup>21</sup>*.

Even if the establishment of the eligible areas is the result of a very technical process, its institutionalisation is the starting point to its building. If few signs make it visible on the field, the creation of new cross-border institutions, and the development of EU framed cross-border projects<sup>22</sup> asset a new dimension to this area. The territorial diagnosis of the cross-border territory is an important starting point for the elaboration of the programme and for the projection of development of borderlands beyond the borders. It may also provide renewed identification schemes for the inhabitants of the region, which sometimes overlap, reproduce or create previous ones. We present in this chapter the observation of how such a policy, conducted by states in the frame of European

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<sup>19</sup> Administrative entities of NUTS III level run from 150 000 inhabitants to 800 000.

<sup>20</sup> *Programming document for the Greece – The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-border Programme 2007-2013*, document CCI 2007 CB 16 I PO 009, [www.mls.gov.mk](http://www.mls.gov.mk)

<sup>21</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>22</sup> The technical process of building cross-border cooperation is conceived by the EU as a way to set up a neutral framework for cross-border cooperation, in order to develop new but standardised cross border relations in a specific area.

programs, can be reappropriated by local actors and conduct to the evolution of their declared social and territorial belongings.

### **Perpetuating imbalances at the Albania-Macedonia border**

The EU cross-border cooperation, as we already mentioned, may represent a significant way in the process of overcoming regional fragmentation and improving many of the living aspects of the population.

In the case of the cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and Albania, the two territories of these states have shared for a certain period (under the Ottoman rule until Balkan wars in 1912-13) the same history. Since then, they have gone and developed into two different directions. For this reason, it seems essential for them to find the right balance and to build their own (and common, through CBC programming) paths toward the EU accession. Republic of Macedonia, as one of the beneficiary countries of the IPA II component funds for cross border cooperation, signed the Financial Agreement in 2007 instead of 2008. Nevertheless, due to the prolongation of the setting of joint management structures, the calls for proposals could not be launched.

Since the implementation of projects was supposed to be realized jointly on both sides of the border, a suitable organizational structure had to be set. The Contracting Authority for Macedonia was the Delegation of the European Commission in Skopje and the Contracting Authority for Albania was the Delegation of the European Commission in Tirana. Besides, the Delegations, the Ministry of Local Self-Government of the Republic of Macedonia and the Ministry of European Integration of the Republic of Albania were also associated institutions for the implementation of this IPA CBC program. The implementation of the programme was overseen by the JMC - Joint Monitoring Committee - consisted of representatives of the civil society from both countries. Furthermore, the office of the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) was settled in Struga, Macedonia, one arm was also opened in Elbasan, Albania, in order to deal with the day-to-day management programme organizations.

Prior to the opening of the first call for applications, few joint meetings were organized with the stakeholders and the interested parties from both sides of the border. The first call for proposals for IPA Cross-border cooperation projects between Republic of



Macedonia and Albania under the 2007 annual allocation was opened about two months before the deadline for proposal submission that was set on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2009. The global objective of the programme was “Promoting sustainable development in the cross-border area”. It was supposed to initiate joint cooperation, to improve social cohesion and secure economic development.

Specific objectives of the programme were:

- to support the establishment of joint actions and strategies aiming at protecting and valorising the natural resources of the region.
- to foster sustainable economic development of the region.
- to develop long term partnerships and networking between civil society organizations (NGOs, sport organizations, etc), professional organizations (i.e. Chambers of Commerce, entrepreneurs and farmers’ organizations) and decentralized institutions, particularly schools and faculties, including research and development units<sup>23</sup>.

According to these objectives, three measures were approved for project application with a total allocation of 1.000.000 of Euros:

- Measure 1: Economic development
- Measure 2: Sustainable environmental development
- Measure 3: Social cohesion

The number of submitted applications until the dead line of submission, that was 60, was considered as a promising one for a first Call. 14 applications for Macedonia and 15 applications for Albania were selected for the implementation. From this number, 12 of the projects were supposed to be jointly implemented and the rest of them will be implemented on one side of the border but they are expected to have impact in the cross border region.

Regarding the localisation of the selected projects, it is possible to observe that from 15 applications for the Albanian applicants, 8 are going to be implemented in the region of Elbasan. On the other hand, in view of the Macedonian applicants 6 applications will implement their activities within the region of Ohrid and Struga. As H el ene V elasco-Graciet noticed about in the case of the Aquitaine-Euskadi-Navarre Euroregion, it seems that the leading partners of project are mainly localized in regional centres<sup>24</sup>. As an

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<sup>23</sup> Guide for grant applicants, page 4

<sup>24</sup> H. V elasco-Graciet, *op.cit*

example, the multi ethnic cross-border region of Prespa was considered by the IPA programming document as one of the most favourable to cross-border cooperation. However, no projects from this poor and rural area were selected. It seems that the complexity of the project building implies a high selection into the actors able to realize an application. We are facing at this point the question of the development of an *economy of the project*, in which certain people are using their skills and experience as resources for the process of project application. The institutionalization of border area not only leads to the creation of a cross-border space for cooperation but also to the generation of practices. This technical dimension of the project application looks like a way to reproduce the territorial imbalances of the eligible area. Furthermore, the proximity of main offices of the IPA CBC programs in Elbasan and Struga looks like an advantage, allowing individual contacts with the persons in charge of the programme, which may provide more easily direct answers and advices to the applicants.

Aside from these difficulties and its spatial consequences in the case of Albania-Macedonia CBC, the next example of cross-border cooperation, between Croatia and Serbia, shows how this frame allows the actors to let aside the blocking in their relations to meet on a new point of interest that is the access to EU funds through the programs.

### **Insufficient to overcome national disputes, but pragmatically used to foster cross-border economic development in the case of Serbia-Croatia**

The Kopački Rit natural park is a marshy zone situated in the North of the borderland (North-East of Osijek) at the confluence of Danube and Drava rivers. Created during the Tito's Yugoslavia, the park was situated in Croatia, following the border between republics at that time. After several changes during the war, the Croatia-Serbia international border stabilised after the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia (Croatian border region) into Croatia territory after UNTAES<sup>25</sup> peacekeeping mission was concluded in January 1998. Since then, it has been the object of a border dispute between Serbia and Croatia. This dispute has a direct influence on the park territory since its Eastern limit is the international border. Serbia claims that the border should follow the natural border (the Danube in this northern part) and be situated in the middle of the

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<sup>25</sup> United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium

river. Oppositely, Croatia argues that the border should correspond to the former internal border between republics of Yugoslavia, basing their argumentation on the 1991 Badinter arbitrary decision<sup>26</sup>.

The actual border corresponds to actual Serbian claims and it is situated in the middle of the Danube River. Thus, several former ‘Croatian’ zones have become parts of Serbian territory (in red on the following map) and reversely two small former Serbian zones becoming Croatian (in light blue on the map).

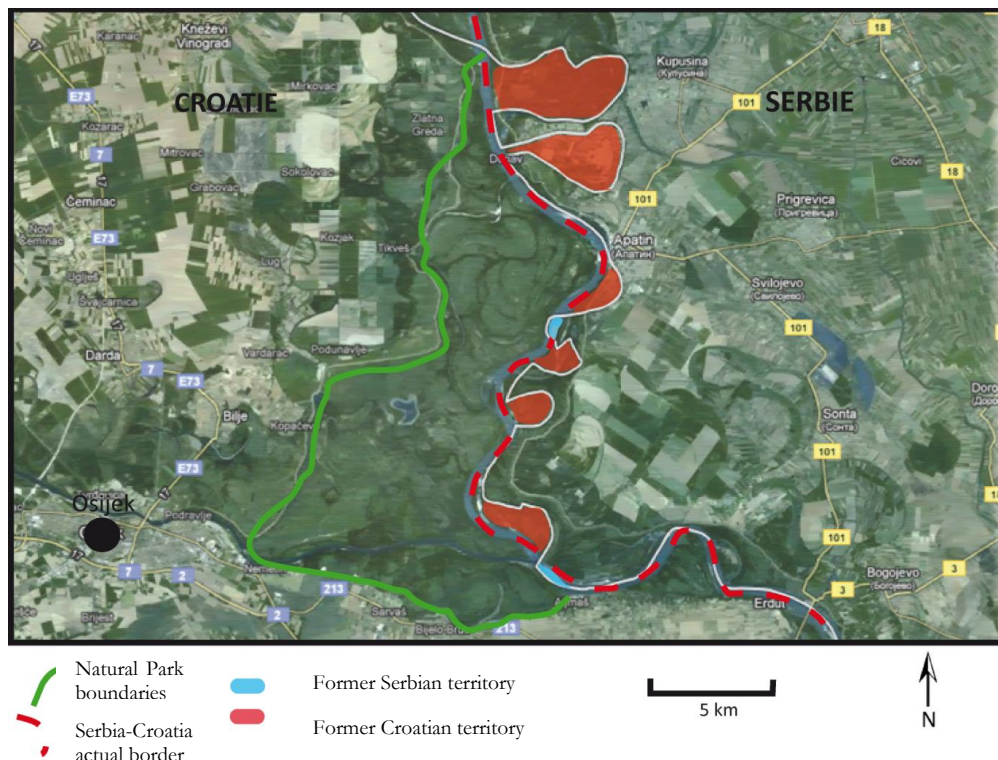


Figure 1: The Croatia-Serbia border dispute around the Kopački Rit Natural Park  
 Source: Barbier et al., *La coopération transfrontalière Serbie-Croatie : potentialités, enjeux, réalités*, Atelier de DA5 : Ecole Polytechnique de l'Université de Tours, Département Aménagement, 2011

This border issue has impact on the way local authorities of the park manage its protection, maintenance and valorisation. These latter are simply not in charge anymore of Serbian parts of the park. As no protection has been established concerning these zones in Serbia, the forests situated at the North of Apatin are now commercially

<sup>26</sup> This decision has stated that all internal borders between Yugoslav republics have become international.

exploited. Furthermore, this international dispute even prevents the staff of the park, albeit showing good will, from cooperating with Serbian scientists in order to organize the protection, even informal, of these (Serbian) zones<sup>27</sup>. In other words, the governmental incapacity to solve an apparently too sensitive question prevents local authorities to organize a cross-border management of the protection of the Danube-Drava confluence. Environment protection is not the priority in comparison with the National symbol of control over borderlands, even when they are small and uninhabited portions of territory.

Nevertheless, even in a complicated context, small but working spaces of cooperation are emerging. Several project leaders of the IPA cross-border cooperation programme Serbia-Croatia have declared that the organization of this kind of projects relies first on the good will of technical actors and on the good relationships between them. In some cases, the possibility to obtain European funding has simply rekindled old cross-border friendships affected by the war<sup>28</sup>. In others, they have created them.

This dynamism of Croatia-Serbia cross-border economic exchanges is also observable in the 2010 first call for projects. Forty-eight (on one hundred ten) applications to this call and seven of the eleven selected applications, pertains to the economic development measure<sup>29</sup>. It shows a clear preference of local actors for economic cooperation than for environmental or social cooperation. The economic and demographic crisis, that takes place in the countries of the region since 2008, is certainly one very significant explanatory factor. The high number of applications is also an indicator of the high demand for economical support in this border region. In this economic crisis time, many actors interviewed have indeed indicated that the IPA funds represent a providential financial boon when every local community and the State are reducing their budget and consequently their support. This phenomenon is amplified by the fact that, in the pre-accession context, all money is provided by the EU at the beginning of the implementation of the project, when it is for member States only possible to get reimbursed of a certain part of funds, which has been already used in the project. These two points (total support of the EU plus money given in advance) have been crucial for some of the project leaders<sup>30</sup>. In contrast, although the programming document for the

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<sup>27</sup> Interviews at the Serbian-Croatia border, February 2011

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. There are three identified measures in the Croatia-Serbia programme: economic development, environment protection and people-to-people.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

IPA cross-border cooperation programme between these two countries mentions the presence of ethnic minorities in the eligible area, it does not seem to be a key element of the cross-border relations.

The implementation of the IPA CBC tool sets up a new institutional territory that aims at supporting cross-border relations. Areas are thus differentiated between those which pertain to eligible regions and which might receive the EU money and those which are not. Most of the time in the Western Balkans, because of the relative small size of the countries and because of the overlapping CBC programmes, the border regions are in fact eligible to several of them at the same time. An important factor in the capacity of absorption of EU funds in the region is doubtless the local territorial configuration that benefits to main cities, concentrating technical knowledge in local authorities and NGOs. Similar to our conclusion in the Albanian-Macedonian context, it seems that this factor is a quite common trend in the impacts of cross-border cooperation, not only in the Western Balkans.

The political will to cooperate is another important factor, both at the local and national scales – the border stays excessively symbolical area for being only of local interest – not mentioning the supranational interest in the case of the Western Balkans. In the Serbian-Croatian case, we have seen that a local political blockage may prevent a cross-border cooperation project to emerge, even though the maintenance of an apparent reconciliation is very important in the pre-accession process for Croatia, Serbia and the EU. In the next paragraph, we will observe, for the Macedonian-Greek case, the exact opposite. In spite of a serious political disagreement between the two countries, cross-border cooperation projects have emerged and been implemented.

After discussing about the influence of the territorial configuration on the geography of the projects, we will tend to analyse the influence of social and historical factors on the establishment of the relations in the frame of the IPA CBC. If IPA CBC may be an opportunity for relations to be set up, it may also be an opportunity for the expression or re-expression of older cross-border relations, as T.H. Malloy stated about the borderlands between Denmark and Germany<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> “*constructing anew an “old” border region through the politicization of regional territory; re-framing ideologies of EU polity building; mobilization of intra-regional networks; usage of intra-state territorial politics*” Malloy, T. H., “Creating new spaces for Politics? The role of National Minorities in Building Capacity of Cross-Border Regions”, *Regional and Federal Studies* Vol. 20, No. 3 (2010)

## **Remobilization of history and identity, and political influence on the Greek - Macedonian borderland**

The cross-border cooperation between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia gives us a very relevant example on the re-activation of old connections. This is also observable to a certain extent in the Croatian-Serbian case. Some projects have been and are developed between partners that used to know each other before the war. In that case, the EU cross-border programme appears as re-catalysing war-damaged ties. Nevertheless, this “fresh start” is only observable in politically and socially acceptable contexts. It is reasonable for Osijek (in Croatia) to cooperate with tolerant and partly Croatian-populated Subotica (in Serbia), less with Novi Sad. From the Serbian perspective (politicians and NGOs), it seems this unwillingness is linked to the memory of the active participation of Novi Sad regiments in the bombing of the city during the first steps of the Croatian War in 1991. Novi Sad officials declare that it is easier to develop a cooperation plan with Istria than with Slavonia<sup>32</sup>.

To come back to the Macedonian-Greece cooperation, few will focus in this section on the project of cross-border cooperation between the city of Kruševo (in the Republic of Macedonia) and Megala Livadia (Greece). This application was made in November 2010, in the frame of the first call for proposal of IPA CBC between the two countries. This project, for the development of tourism in the city of Kruševo through the promotion of its architectural heritage, was officially led by the two municipalities. Nevertheless, the initial idea came from a small local association called *Saint Nicholas for friendship and cooperation between Kruševo and Greece* that has firstly contacted the Macedonian municipality. Created in October 2009 through the joint action of the Greek consulate in Bitola and the members of two other cultural associations located in Bitola, this association is mainly offering Greek language lessons. It also gives the possibility to its young pupils to go to summer camps in Greece and help them apply for a scholarship to study in Greece if they wish to. If the association does not present itself as ethnically-oriented, some elements are reserved for people identified as members of a specific ethnic group: “*The children who want to apply for the scholarships can do it through the association. They must of course*

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<sup>32</sup> Interviews at the Serbian-Croatia border, July 2010, August 2012.

*have good marks in high school, have learned Greek with us and have a satisfying level, but they must, before all, be Vlachs”.*

The emergence of this ethnic criterion next to others common criteria for the application to a scholarship may first appear surprising since the lessons and the summer camps organized in Greece are supposed to be open to everyone. However, the discussion with one of the leaders of this association made this point clearer. During the interview conducted in January, a month that comprises several events, this person started slowly to make a systematic distinction between what he called “Us” (the Vlachs) and those he called “Them”, the Other (the Macedonians). Each traditional event was an opportunity to underline this distinction by evocating the different traditional practices between each ethnic group for the same event: *“We are trying to keep our customs. For Badnik (the Orthodox Christmas Eve)<sup>33</sup>, the children go from house to house, singing with a red representing the evening star in the hand. This is only in Kruševo and Jerusalem”.*

Initially appearing through his discourse about the activities of the association and about traditions, the ethnic dimension of the association is also perceptible through its cross-border relations. When created, the association was twined with another one from the Greek village of Livadia in the Olympus. This village is identified as a Vlach village in Greece and in particular among the Vlach community. It is the birthplace of so-called Konstantinou Nikolaidou, who published an etymological dictionary of the Koutsovlach language in 1909<sup>34</sup>. The purpose of this dictionary was to illustrate the proximity between the Koutsovlach language and the Greek language. This argument is mainly based on etymology and on the assumption that Koutsovlach was not a written language or written in Greek alphabet. On the occasion of this twining, an important reception was organized in Bitola (because of the unavailability of a place that was big enough in Kruševo) in a place specialized in organizing big events and generally weddings, owned by a Greek company and under the patronage of another Greek company that financed it.

#### *Promotion of the Vlach identity in Kruševo and the Greek Policy.*

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<sup>33</sup> The Orthodox Christmas Eve, on January 6th in the Republic of Macedonia.

<sup>34</sup> K. Nikolaidou, *Etymologikon lexikon tes koutsovlachikes glosss*, Athenai, P.D. Sakellarios, 1909. Romanized version.

The situation of this association, in particular the way it has been created, is not an isolated case regarding the Greek foreign policy. In the Republic of Macedonia, these kinds of associations were created in other cities such as Bitola, Štip and even Skopje. The abilities to make contacts were also noticed by Gilles de Rapper in the late nineties<sup>35</sup> in the case of the Vlachs of Albania and the Greek administration. Similarly, Pierre Sintès gave detail on the process of the accession of the Vlachs of Albania to the *omogenia*<sup>3637</sup>. This access to the *omogenia* is not possible for the Vlachs of the Republic of Macedonia, in spite of that, their relations with the Greek consulate were also made easier<sup>38</sup>. This peculiar status comes from the fact that one of the narratives on the origins of the Vlach population is that they belong to the Greek Nation. According to this vision, the Vlachs are the Romanized descendants of Greek population. As Pierre Sintès noticed in its article about the Vlachs of Albania, the narrative of the Hellenism of the Vlachs is widespread among the political circles and scientific networks in Greece. It is also spread to the “targeted” people on the field through active associations<sup>39</sup>, resembling the case of Kruševo. This ethnic assimilation process is also visible during the selection for Greek scholarships in the Republic of Macedonia. As mentioned above, to declare a student as an *Ellinovlach*, as the association of Kruševo does, is a condition to obtain it.

*Conveying narratives through the marking of space.*

This position had a consequence in the area of Kruševo where the cooperation between the local association, the Greek consulate of Bitola and the association in Livadia led to the installation of a spatial marker connecting the history of the city to the history of Greek Republic. It consists of a board step up on a house standing at a place where the

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<sup>35</sup> G. de Rapper, *La frontière albanaise. Famille, société et identité collective en Albanie du Sud*, thèse de doctorat, Université de Paris X-Nanterre (1998), p. 308-310 ; mentionned P. Sintès in P. Sintès, *Les valaques du sud de l’albanie et la grèce*, in *Nommer et classer dans les Balkans*, P. Sintès and G. De Rapper (dir.), Athènes: Ecole Française d’Athènes, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> P. Sintès, *Les valaques du sud de l’albanie et la grèce*, in *Nommer et classer dans les Balkans*, P. Sintès and G. de Rapper (dir.), Athènes: Ecole Française d’Athènes, 2008.

<sup>37</sup> The status of *omogeneis* is an administrative category used by the Greek state to qualify population considered as Greek but leaving outside of Greece. According to K. Tsitselikis, this status is like semi-citizenship, conferring the right to work in Greece and to get full citizenship through a favourable process.

<sup>38</sup> This was particularly the case before the abolition of the visa regime for the citizens of the country in December 2009 when the access to visa for Greece was easier for the people declaring themselves as Vlach. As an example, A Macedonian citizen from Štip in Crete in 2010 stated that getting a Greek working permit was much easier regarding his ethnic affiliation.

<sup>39</sup> P. Sintès, *op. cit.*



birth-house of Alexandros Svolos used to stand<sup>40</sup>. This board contains the following text: “Here was born Alexandros I Svolos 1892-1956 prominent Greek professor of constitutional law and politician”.



Figure 2: The board about A. Svolos in Kruševo, photography by G. Javourez, January 2011.

that “*The Vlachs should not be considered as a colourful vestige of a past and achieved pastoral life, neither as a kind of Museum (master)piece, nor as a minority that would be easily manipulated by any skilful supervisor. The Vlachs do not constitute a minority and cannot be reduced to people speaking the Vlach language (...) nor to Fustanella-dressed people. The Vlach are not a minority and they are not just Vlach-speakers (...) they are originally urban people present in almost the whole continental Greece and who brought a significant contribution to the edification of their Homeland, Greece*”<sup>42</sup>.

If there is no mention of an eventual Vlach origin of A. Svolos only presented as a Greek professor, the languages in the text are quite explicit regarding the connection established here by this board between the Vlach question and Hellenism. Indeed, four languages are present: Macedonian, Greek, English, and Aromanian (Vlach). But usually written in Latin alphabet in the Republic of Macedonia, the Vlach language is here written in Greek letters, coming back to the dispute around the Vlach question in the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, and to the *etymological dictionary of the Koutsovlach language* of Konstantinou Nikolaidou. The twinning with the association of Livadia, very active in this marking of space, appears as meaningful. This position is

<sup>40</sup> Alexandros Svolos was born in Kruševo in 1892 and died in Athens in 1956. He was professor of constitutional law in Athens and also served as president of the Political Committee of National Liberation during the World War II.

<sup>41</sup> President of the Hellenic Republic from 1995 to 2005.

<sup>42</sup> C. STÉPHANOPOULOS, in A. I. KOUKLOUDIS, *Οι Μητροπόλεις και η Διασπορά των Βλαχών*, Thessaloniki, 2001, quoted by P. Sintès in *Les Valaques du Sud de l’Abanie et la Grèce*, op. cit.

reinforced by the fact that the mayors of Livadia and Megala Livadia, the two villages involved in the cooperation with Kruševo, in 2001 signed with 29 other mayors a declaration stating that Vlachophone Greeks never asked to be recognized as a minority because they have always been, historically and politically, an integral part of the Hellenic nation<sup>43</sup>.

### *Ethnicity, IPA CBC and pragmatism*

In the case presented above, the mobilization of the Vlach identity appears as a fundamental dimension into the building of these cross-border relations. This was successful since these projects have been financially supported by the European Union through the IPA CBC programme. Ethnicity is here mobilized in order to establish connections and to initiate cooperation. The declarations of the responsible for the association of Kruševo confirm this assertion: *“I want to reconnect with the important Vlach centres of Greece in order to continue the cooperation after the consuls’ departure (...) It is important for the Greek tourists who stopped coming in the 1980’s to come back in Kruševo and to stimulate the economy of the town: to go to the hotels, to buy lokoums, ... Plus, many people living nowadays in Greece have members of their family who came from Kruševo”*. Ethnicity and history are seen by this actor as a way to promote the economy of the city through the ethnic-tourism or memory-tourism.

The municipality, ruled by right wing conservative from VMRO-DPMNE, has connected with the association<sup>44</sup> because it offered them the possibility of being a part of an IPA CBC project and to access to some EU funds. Ethnicity appears as the central piece for the establishment of cross-border relations since the association is marked as Vlach and the promotion of a certain heritage is an imposed step toward the project. This led to the promotion of a specific narrative of Vlach ethnic identity in a Macedonian area. The marking of space through the board is the visible side of this operation, promoting this narrative and this vision in the local public space. On the side of the Greek partners, the establishment of these relations and the cross-border cooperation seems to be a tool for the promotion of a certain narrative on the place of Kruševo and for ethnic mobilization. The fact that the Greek consul in Bitola appears as a key actor of

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<sup>43</sup> It was a consequence of a report of U.S state department characterizing the Vlachs as a minority, [http://www.farsarotul.org/nl27\\_1.htm](http://www.farsarotul.org/nl27_1.htm)

<sup>44</sup> *“The consul told the municipality is cooperating through the IPA if they do it in partnership with us”, interview with a person in charge of the association in July 2011.*

this cooperation, shows the political use that may be done on this occasion. It also highlights the way narratives of the Vlach identity are constructed through cross-border relations despite the difficult bilateral relations between the Greece and the Republic of Macedonia.

In the Serbian-Croatian borderland, the situation is quite different. Ethnicity also matters but members of the ethnic minority of the other side State<sup>45</sup> are suspiciously observed, their allegiance being questioned in the post-war context<sup>46</sup>. Local authorities held by right and far-right parties are especially attentive to ethnic affiliation of project leaders when they choose to associate to the application, or not. Besides, there is no observable linkage effect on other minorities taking advantage of pre-existing cross-border links – not even from the numerous and organised Hungarian minority. Unsurprisingly, their narratives are constructed mainly on cross-border relations with their “kin State”<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> i.e. Serbs in Croatia and Croats in Serbia.

<sup>46</sup> Interviews at the Serbian-Croatia border, July 2010, August 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

The implementation of the IPA CBC programmes produces, to a certain extent, new territories dedicated to the promotion of the cross-border practices. Projects of cooperation convey certain narratives on the perception of space. Borderlands are ought to be places of cohesion instead of places of division. Cross-border cooperation through targeted actions should be a way to achieve this goal.

In Western Balkans, these pre-accession projects also aim at being a learning process for local actors to get ready to implement ERDF funds when their state is a EU member. They are in particular supposed to develop their skills in developing EU project applications, which should correspond to the EU specific requirements, in other words, to the EU specific language. We saw in this chapter that this highly technical dimension of the EU pre-accession process consequently results in reinforcing territorial imbalances by favouring bigger and more institutionalized local communities and NGOs. Furthermore, they are most of the time better connected with the other side of the border.

Nevertheless, we also noticed that borderlands stay sensitive spaces in a political way. It can concern national interest but sometimes just local incapacity to cooperate. For instance, the Prespa Park (between the Republic of Macedonia, Albania and Greece) is an example of a declining space of cooperation. The main reason is the incapacity of local actors to overcome the tensions in this sensitive area. The use of nature as a neutral object, as in the Serbian-Croatian case, is not an important-enough lever in the region for the moment.

Though the examples that have been developed in this chapter, we highlighted the significance of historical, social and political dimensions in the (re)building of cross-border cooperation. The example of the mobilization of ethnicity and history in the CBC project concerning the city of Kruševo is a striking case. The project has emerged based on the pre-existing cross-border relations founded on ethnic factors. And it has resulted in the reinforcement – at least the promotion - of certain narratives of the place that constitute social images which may be used by certain ethnic groups to reinforce their coherence in a specific way<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> In that aspect, we assent with Di Méo assumption that space constitutes a powerful material in the constitution of individual and group identities; Di Méo G., 2009, "Le rapport identité/espace. Eléments conceptuels et méthodologiques", in Grandjean P. (dir.) *Construction identitaire et espace*. Paris : L'Harmattan, 19-38.

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