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# RUPTURES IN THE DANUBE REGION: TERRITORIAL CO-OPERATION AS A PLAYGROUND OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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## THE TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL SPATIAL STRUCTURES IN THE DANUBE STATES AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

Europe is facing one of its biggest challenges at the turn of the millennium. *Competition generated by globalisation, the establishment of the frameworks and the internal regional structures of European integration, the challenges of the eastern enlargement of the EU*, the competitions with the economic power centres of the Americas and Asia make the old continent gather its energies on a large scale. It is not only the expansion of the external borders of the EU and the preparation of a prognosis on its new geopolitical changes that require hard preparatory work.

All these changes may have serious impacts on the small states of East Central-Europe which are unprepared for integration. Not only because their economies and democratic institutional systems need serious further efforts to meet EU requirements but also because the establishment of the inner regional structures requiring the decentralisation of the state may meet serious problems in these countries. *The revival of nation states after the change of regime was very often accompanied by strong centralisation efforts which resulted in a total absence or a weakness of the decentralised institutional system and autonomies in countries of the region.* At the same time, this very region may be the largest beneficiary of macro-regional co-operations as during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the borders of small states—very frequently established irrationally—are politically the most disputable since they do not match the ethnic borders and strongly limit the economic, cultural and residential interrelationships of lands historically bound together (Illés, 2002).

In the 1990s the fundamental changes in macro-regional relations created new historical situations, challenges and risks for the often conflicting regional transformation processes. While West-European regional co-operation is

actually an integral part of a comprehensive process and the macro-regional co-operation systems are parts of the integration process in the member countries, the East Central European macro-regional co-operations with their internal decentralisation processes and strengthening interregional co-operations may be regarded as the 'test areas' of European accession.

### **THE INTEGRATING AND DISINTEGRATING ROLE OF THE RIVER DANUBE IN THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN REGION FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Besides the future development programmes the study of *the changing historical role of the river Danube* in the formation of life, natural economy, the settlement network and the transport structure of the Danube countries also seems to be an issue of equal weight.

The river Danube is the second longest river in Europe (2850 kilometres) connecting ten countries in Central East Europe and the Balkans (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, the Ukraine and Moldavia). It is the only major river that flows eastward from Western Europe and connects very heterogeneous territories of the continent. The river Danube *is not only a geographical notion but also a transport corridor and has been in the focus of several ecological, political and economic conflicts*. Its economic importance, its role in waterway transport has always changed in the course of time but the river itself has always had a minor role in the international division of labour.

*The River Danube has served several times as a natural border* between civilisations, political systems and governments. The river Danube was already an important frontier zone separating the barbarian and civilised worlds in Romans times and later as well marking the borders of several empires. Important military roads also crossed the river and its zone (Avarian, Frank, Byzantine, Bulgarian empires). From the early Middle Ages the commercial activity of the Danube nations increased but natural obstacles (water falls), the Black Sea's peripheral location and the fragmentation of feudal powers all hindered the use of Danube for long-distance commercial purposes. For several centuries the Central Danube Basin was a frontier zone between Christian Civilisation and the Ottoman Empire. For several centuries the river Sava and the line of the Lower Danube served as a kind of European frontier separating the civilised world from the Balkans which should be

regarded in terms of civilisation as a gateway to the East<sup>1</sup>. The Iron Curtain set up following World War II also ran along the Danube region separating the Eastern and Western world. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the river's role as a natural state border was questioned several times, which further emphasised the river's separating functions (Gál, 2003a). (Table 1)

Table 1. *The Danube as a border river*

Country	Length of the Danube in a given country (km)	The Danube as a international border (km)	The Danube as a regional border (km)	The Danube as a internal river (km)
Germany	647	cca 25	cca 4	cca 618
Austria	350	cca 35	cca 35	cca 280
Slovakia	172	cca 150	0	cca 22
Hungary	410	140	cca 230	cca 40
Croatia	188	188	0	0
Yugoslavia	588	cca 408	cca 90	cca 90
Bulgaria	470	470	0	0
Romania	1075	cca 853	cca 60	cca 62
Ukraine	163	163	0	0

Source: Illés (2002)

From a geographical aspect the Danube region is considered a land-locked continental area, although even in the early Middle Ages very important trading routes were set up in an east-west direction along the region. For centuries these routes served as important innovation channels and were considered to be the *axis of Western civilisation*. The Rhine-Danube axis running in an east-west direction had key functions as the continent's land-based and waterway transportation routes reached the Levant area along the river Danube. After the 16<sup>th</sup> century the role of the Danube axis in transportation was re-evaluated. Until the mid-1900s the Danube states served as suppliers of agricultural products for the industrialised West European countries as part of the European spatial division of labour. The key role

<sup>1</sup> The marking of the geographical borders of the Balkan Peninsula and the Danube region (Danube space, Danube landscape) is hindered by the fact that both space categories identify a changing political, cultural and value content not only in a geographical but also in a historical sense. The geographical borders of the Balkan Peninsula are marked by the rivers Sava and the Lower Danube but in the political sense the northern border of the Balkan cannot be exactly located. Some experts mark the Balkan Peninsula as the areas remaining from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while others identify the Balkans with the territory of the Balkan states including the new states formed after 1918 (Romania and Yugoslavia) (Jelavich 1996). The frequent changes in the geopolitical relations between the Balkan states and the countries of Central Europe further complicate the marking of the border between the Balkan and Central Europe. This is based on the fact that the 'Huntington' civilisation (religious, cultural) frontiers not only separate but in several cases also divide the Danube region—the common terrain—in a mosaic like pattern.

within this system was first played by the waterway route of the river Danube and later by the railway lines following the Danube axis (Gál, 2002).

*From geopolitical and economic aspects* the eastbound flow of the river Danube from West Europe to the European peripheries is a disadvantage for the countries of the Danube region because it may strongly work against the river's integrating force and role. *Access to the Black Sea via the river Danube was hindered by several factors.* On the natural side Porțile de Fier (Iron Gate) used to be the major obstacle because, until the regulation of the river at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and until the 1960s it hindered both navigation of the river and access to the Black Sea (Stephen G., 1964). On the economic side it was a problem that unlike several other smaller rivers in its neighbourhood which were, however, more important for navigation the river Danube avoided the Adriatic space and flew into the Black Sea across an economically more disadvantaged, locked-up and peripheral area situated outside the major routes of international marine transportation. Apart from the lower Romanian section, important for the export of cereal goods, the river's shipping traffic was very low (in 1913 the whole length of the river produced a lower traffic volume than the lower section of the river Rhine) (East, 1935). The volume of shipped goods decreased after World War I. The common customs area of Austria and Hungary was broken up and the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy introduced high customs duties in 7 new independent customs areas. The first peak period in the history of Danube shipping was the expansion of Nazi Germany's military economy to Southeast Europe, which—at the same time—put an end to the freedom of navigation. Imported food, Romanian crude oil and raw materials for military use were mostly transported on the Danube into Germany and the turn of 1939-40 was the top year considering the volume of shipped cargo (Ránki, 1983).

In a geopolitical sense the *landlocked* character of the *Danube Basin* was emphasised by the fact that it was surrounded by political (imperial) borders and the river's area turned into a site the rivalry for the great empires. Granting the right of free shipping was a fundamental pre-condition for the navigation on the river Danube. This was granted by international treaties signed by the representatives of the Danube region's great empires and by the Danube states. The Paris Treaty of 1856 and the Versailles Treaty of 1919 declared the river Danube an international waterway and set up the Danube Committee authorised with administrative

competences related to Danube navigation. With the election of the Danube Committee an international organisation was created to guarantee free rights for shipping on the river Danube.

### **THE ROLE OF THE RIVER DANUBE IN THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL SPACE IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES**

The historical-political dimension of *the Danube region and political tension in the area increased in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*, which turned into several bloody conflicts during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The spatial possibilities of creating nation states showed totally different perspectives from that of in Western Europe. While in Western Europe nation states resulted from the integration of smaller regions into a homogenous state, in the ethnically most mixed 'Danube' region of Europe multinational 'nation states' were formed at a later stage, only after the disintegration of the *supranational* (Hapsburg, Russian, Turkish, Soviet) empires (Breu, 1971). Unfortunately the establishment of the area's nation states in the 19<sup>th</sup> century coincided with the increasing influence of superpowers and this led to a situation where decisions on the borders of the newly formed Balkan states depended mainly on those superpowers most capable of articulating their interests in the Danube region (Macartney, 1944). In the Danube region homogenous political structures have always been created by the pushing force of an external power or by economic pressure. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Danube Valley was a place where the interests of four superpowers conflicted the most (Germany, the Hapsburg Empire, Turkey and Russia/The Soviet Union). The political structures of the Danube space enabled the Hapsburg Empire to maintain an economically sustainable integration for 400 years. The confederal efforts of the past two centuries emphasizing the need for the co-operation of the Danube nations against the external superpowers were also associated with the river Danube and considered it as a symbol linking the confederation of small nations (Hanák, 1990). Although *the voluntary integration of the Danube Valley nations had no feasible alternatives*, all its ideas and concepts remained mere plans. In the Danube region only superpowers were in a position to make decisions, *consequently only superpowers contacted with the area's peripheral zone could maintain integration systems quite often endangering each other's power ambitions* (Gál, 2003b).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the failure of empire integrations, the Danube region still missed the preconditions for a conflict free integration. The EU's initiative for a 'Common Europe' can be the only real alternative for the countries of the Danube region.

### **POSSIBILITIES FOR TERRITORIAL CO-OPERATION IN THE DANUBE REGION AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM**

*The River Danube is not only a transport corridor, a constant conflicting point of ecological and political issues but it is also an important spatial organisational power that may serve as a framework for interregional co-operations as well. At the turn of the 1980s/90s with the disintegration of the last great empire the Danube space is again disintegrating into nation states and this process is more intensive than it was after the First World War. With the collapse of the three socialist pseudo-federations: the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (the disintegration of the latter leading to a bloody war) the Danube region continued its way towards 'cantonisation' (today the region has 22 states).*

Parallel to the region's fragmentation the other side of Europe is undergoing a regional self-organisation and integration process within the supranational framework of the European Union. *In the 1990s three alternatives seemed to be open to the countries of the Danube region reviving their old conflicts: (1) The confederational integration of the region's small states (a new renaissance of the Central European idea), which was deemed to failure from the beginning. (2) The redistribution of the territory among superpowers which may be compensated for by the collective defence guarantees of the NATO's eastern expansion and by the weakening powers of Russia. (3) EU accession could be an alternative for certain countries in the area but this would also create breakpoints among the nations of the Danube space (Illés, 2002).*

The problem of integrating the Danube countries into a broader European space can be solved only by accession which could also terminate unreal expectations and worries. Being aware of the different scenarios we can now see that macro-regional co-operations covering the area of Central and Eastern Europe may have a special role in integration, in the intensification of internal decentralisation and in terminating mutual distrusts and worries.

There is an increasing and a widening trend in the co-operations crossing the borders of the former iron curtain states and the enlarged EU. The site and the

role of the Danube Basin co-operation should be examined from this aspect too. The Visegrád countries' initiative for a Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA) in 1991, the Central European Initiative proposed by Italy in 1988 for the replacement of Pentagone and the co-operation of Danube regions in the institutional form of the Danube Region Working Community since 1992 may all be regarded as precedents of macro-regional co-operation of the Danube states.

Real macro-regional co-operations should meet two criteria: more than two countries should participate in it and it is not necessary for the full territory of all participating countries to be involved in it. Macro-regional co-operations are initiated not by the EU but rather by the participating regions or by a third party. Macro-regional co-operations may operate in the following forms: twin-city co-operation, interregional co-operation (Danube regions) cross-border co-operation, macro-regional co-operation (CADSES), environment, water management and tourism oriented professional co-operations (Illés, 2002).

The increasing importance of cross-border regional co-operation in Europe is a very significant development of the last decade. Two reasons are worth mentioning of those that have led to this situation. The first comes from the very nature of economic and environmental issues. Environmental problems do not stop at the borders—their efficient management requires cross-border co-operation. Economic issues cross the borders because a more efficient division of labour requires a better utilisation of competitive advantages. However, this presupposes roads, railway and infrastructure which also require co-operation on an international level. In East Central Europe the political motivation for such co-operations is even higher. Regionalism has democratic functions too, which may counterbalance the predominance of state power in the centralised state systems of East Central Europe.

The importance of macro-regional co-operation in East Central Europe should be greater than in other parts of Europe. The countries of Central and Southeast Europe are small continental states with long land-based and non-natural borders in the majority of cases. While 80% of the borders of EU-15 member states are sea borders, this is true only for 10% of Central and Southeast European countries. This explains why these countries are in need of international regional co-operation. And last but not least the present state borders of Central and Eastern European countries were formed quite recently. Until the mid-1990s these countries had lived in an empire without borders to separate them in the majority of cases. The intensive

division of labour followed this pattern but today's new state borders separate areas that used to be integrated in the past. None of the 19 nations in the Danube space with the exception of the Czech Republic no nations are living in full number within the borders of their state. There are 10 ethnic groups in the region with more than one million members living outside the borders of their own state. In this context there is no need to further emphasise the importance of cross-border co-operations.

The European Union has been supporting macro-regional co-operation in East Central Europe since the mid-1990s only. It was initiated in the middle of the 1990s that besides the support limited to local cross-border co-operations only, a comprehensive strategy should be prepared for larger regional structures. This co-operation strategy involves the following targets:

- The intensification of macro-regional integration processes within the region, the increase of the region's internal cohesion through the promotion of decentralisation processes;
- The organisation of 'actions' and institutions to facilitate catching up and prepare the region for EU integration;
- The testing and involvement of the peripheral areas outside the EU as potential partners. This can be interpreted as an incentive for integration or as an initiative for creating a federal and influence zone as an external impetus for non-EU states for integration.

The Community Initiative INTERREG was prompted by the rapidly growing awareness of two essential truths: (1) the growing interdependencies of the various components of the European territory and (2) the considerable impact of many Community policies on territorial development and planning. Realising these challenges, the Commission of the European Communities—at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1994—decided to establish a Community Initiative for cross-border co-operation (INTERREG II A) and selected energy networks (INTERREG II B). Almost two years later, at its meeting of 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1996, the Commission decided to include a third programme (INTERREG II C) for 'trans-national co-operation in spatial planning'.

The main objectives of INTERREG II C were to contribute to a balanced spatial development in the EU, by reducing inequalities in development and improving the spatial impact of Community policies with regard to spatial development; In the next programming period (2000–2006) trans-national spatial planning co-



operation programmes were continued. On 28<sup>th</sup> April 2000 the Commission of the European Communities decided to establish a Community initiative concerning trans-European co-operation (INTERREG III B) for this period. In the previous period INTERREG II C allowed participants to gain some experience regarding co-operation in 7 larger trans-national territories (Northwest European Metropolitan Area, Baltic Sea, Southwest European Space, North Sea, West Mediterranean and South Alps, Atlantic Area, CADSES), involving national, regional and local authorities, with a view of achieving a higher degree of territorial integration of these areas. The main challenge for INTERREG III therefore was to build on the positive experiences and progressively developing structures for such co-operations across the Community and with neighbouring countries. Due attention was to be given to

- the external borders of the Community, taking into account enlargement in particular;
- co-operation with the outermost regions of the Community;
- co-operation for the further stabilisation and association process in the western Balkans; and
- co-operation concerning insular regions.

Among the current macro-regional initiatives the Danube region is involved in CADSES (abbreviation for Central-European, Adriatic, Danubian and Southeast-European Space) programme. The delineation of the CADSES area was one of the most hotly debated issues of trans-national co-operation, the reasons for which are manifold. The original definition of the CADSES area was not based on geographical criteria (Figure 1).

Figure 1 CADSES: Central European, Adriatic, Danubian and Southern European Space



Source: ESDP

The CADSES area is one of the largest co-operation areas of all the INTERREG III B areas, with its 18 co-operating countries (also the largest number among all co-operating countries) covering a total area of 1.814 million km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 209.6 million (46.5% and 45.8% of the EU<sub>25</sub>, respectively). The primary and basic reason for defining and delineating the CADSES area in 1996 was that it comprised the member states (Germany, Austria, Italy and Greece) neighbouring the eastern enlargement area and other neighbours beyond the external EU border. The fundamental goal was to establish spatial co-operation across the external border (former Iron Curtain) of the EU with larger spaces than the narrow border area. A special goal was for Greece to develop co-operation links with EU partners in the North. The CADSES programme was by no means meant to homogenise these countries but to draw the attention of the EU to countries excluded from it in the first period and involve them to some extent into the integration processes (Illés, 2002). In the second programming period (1997-99) the CADSES co-operation basically

fulfilled this task<sup>2</sup>. Various kinds of co-operation networks were established, despite the fact that there was no or very modest EU funding for non-EU partners. In 1999, at the end of the programming period, the European Commission proposed to split the space into two co-operation areas, arguing that it was too large (including 18 countries) and hardly manageable efficiently. However, the historic moment was not suitable for implementing this change and the Commission changed their minds on that issue. At present 79% of the area covered by the CADSES programme is outside the EU15 territory and 63% of the population lives in these areas. Obviously, these non-EU15 regions have some common challenges with the regions of the EU15, but they also have a lot of challenges and tasks specific to these countries and regions. The large number of partners and the high degree of heterogeneity significantly increase the difficulties of CADSES programme management for several reasons:

- a. Though the number of countries incorporated into the CADSES area was very high (18), the number of EU member states among them, fully eligible for ERDF financing was only four. There is no other co-operation area with so many eligible countries (the second largest is the Baltic Space with 8). The number of eligible NUTS2 regions is 110 (the next highest number is 96 in Northwest Europe). It is certainly a very large managerial and administrative burden for the institutions involved.
- b. Embracing old and new member countries in one and the same co-operation area is justifiable and even desirable. Nevertheless, the experiences of two programming periods have demonstrated and proved that the spatial planning problems and the priorities of the old and new member states are, in many respects, totally different. What is a serious and fundamental problem in the new member states (agricultural overpopulation, dramatic lack and weakness of SMEs, high number and ratio of the Roma population, large and deteriorating urban housing estates, lack and weaknesses of regional administrative and management structures, consequences of recent mass privatisation and so on) are not problems in the old member states. Similarly, problems of the old member states (large immigration, guest workers, displacement of workplaces

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<sup>2</sup> Macro-regional initiatives are bound to the geopolitical considerations of the EU-15 member countries selecting the regions they wish to establish a closer connection with for the enhancement of their (market and investment) relations. In CADSES the four participating member states are located in different regions thus they have different interest areas (Greece – Southeast Balkans, Italy – Adriatic Space, Austria South-Eastern Europe, the Bayern Danube axis).

to cheap labour areas and so on) are not (yet) problems in the new member states. Even in issues of common concern (environment, accessibility, natural and cultural heritage) the dimensions and priorities are different in the two groups of countries and regions. Therefore, to find common priorities for these mixed co-operation areas is not a simple task.

The fact that CADSES has a rigid management mechanism and the tendering system is appropriate only in the EU-15 member states also originates from the region's heterogeneity. The macro-regional co-operation of Danube countries is hindered by the fact that *the development potentials and the economic structures of the Danube Valley* influencing 14 countries of Europe *show significant spatial differences* in the utilisation of the river and there are further differences in the state of the natural environment in the participating countries.

The delineation of the Danube region as a *geographical unit* is not an easy task either as the river's water catchment area (817,000 km<sup>2</sup>) is strongly fragmented, lacking a homogenous geographical space. It is a region of extreme differences in economic development since both Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, Europe's and Germany's richest regions are located in the Danube Valley and Europe's poorest regions can also be found here. The difference between the GDP of Upper-Bavaria and Teleonnán, a county in Romania, is twentyfold. Planning co-operation is an extremely hard task in such circumstances.

The introduction of more intensive forms of co-operation is hindered by several factors. The *low utilisation of the river Danube as an international waterway* is not only the outcome of the Yugoslavian crisis because the low values of shipped cargo volume started to appear in the 1980s (between 1980-1994 the volume of cargo shipping dropped to ¼ of the initial value) and besides the deteriorating infrastructure the opening of the Danube-Main-Rhine Canal further decreased the volume of shipped goods on the river Danube (Erdősi, 2002).

The shortage of bridges is another hindering factor of cross-border co-operation between the river's two banks. The river Danube is a natural border between countries on nearly 1,000 kilometres (996 kilometres precisely) which is 36% of its total length. This means that in these sections co-operation across the river Danube is at the same time a bi- or (trilateral) cross-border co-operation. This 1000-kilometre section of the river is crossed by 8 bridges only. This means

one bridge on the average for every 125 kilometre. In these circumstances the river Danube as a border river has a separating rather than a connecting role. It is also striking that the 470 km section between Romania and Bulgaria is crossed by one bridge only. This situation is unique in Europe (even if there are five ferry crossings along this section). The river Danube is crossed by 149 public road bridges. 99 of them are located in Germany, 20 are in Austria and the remaining 30 are scattered along the further sections of the river.

The coordination of environmental and water management tasks is also a problem to be solved. Although the river Danube is not among the most polluted rivers of the European continent (thanks to its self cleaning ability), in the vicinity of large cities and at the meeting point of some of its side rivers carrying pollutants 'lethal' for the river's ecosystem (cyanide and tin) the values of pollution exceed by far the environmental limits. Environmental and water management problems can be tackled only in the framework of international co-operation as 96% of Hungary's, 87% of Moldavia's, 83% of Romania's and 79% of Yugoslavia's surface waters originate from other countries. There are some issues which should be solved by the involvement of not only the Danube countries but of the whole catchment area of the river. Such issues are water management and the protection against floods. The CADSES area as a whole, but within it especially the Danube area is seriously exposed to flood hazards. Probably due to human activities (deforestation in the Carpathians, reduction of the natural vegetation cover etc.) the level of floods and their frequency increases year by year.

Border areas and border regions should enjoy specific attention not only in cross-border, but in trans-national co-operations as well. The reason is that half of the length of European land borders (16,000 km) is found in the CADSES area. The countries in the area are small states (7 of them land-locked) with long continental borders. Sixty-five percent of the territory can be regarded as border region and the same percentage of the population is living there (the respective percentage in the EU15 is only 17 percent). Crossing these borders is still a problem in many places, because of the poor infrastructure and the control or administrative procedures.

Considering the development of the area, the conditions of entrepreneurship and sustainable growth should be among the priority topics in co-operation. Support for and strengthening of SMEs is a specific problem here, considering that 15 years ago SMEs did not exist in these countries. Rural areas and their common

problems have special importance in this space. The share of agricultural and rural population is still much higher than in the countries of Western Europe. In some countries, 20 to 30 percent of the active population is still engaged in agriculture. In centrally planned economies the method of solving the employment problems in small and medium size cities was to establish there a single large industrial plant. In the period of transition a large number of these plants proved to be non-competitive and were closed down, consequently several of these cities remained totally without an economic base. This is a typical problem in the Eastern half of the CADSES area; therefore a common analysis of best practices would be very useful.

While East-West transport and telecommunication corridors have developed dynamically, the development of North-South corridors is lagging behind for the time being, although they are of equal importance for the development and integration of the area.

Since the establishment of the CADSES area, circumstances have changed substantially. The original motivation was to group member and non-member states along the Eastern external border of the EU into one common co-operation area. In the meantime, however, the EU's external borders have moved several hundred kilometres eastward and they will move even farther at the beginning of 2007. Germany, Austria and Italy are not the Eastern border states of the EU any more. There are additional reasons for co-operation, first of all in order to enhance integration between the core area and the peripheries. However, this would require a new configuration and delineation of co-operation areas. The original definition of the CADSES area was not based on geographical criteria because the main factor defining the space was the external border of the EU. Consequently, the application of geographical criteria would mean substantial changes in the present constitution of the area. It belongs now to the catchment area of four European seas (the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea and the North Sea). If geographical and hydrological criteria were applied it should be divided into four parts. A comprehensive spatial planning perspective should be prepared not only for the co-operating areas as a whole, but also for their important and distinctive sub-areas, like the Danube Basin, the Adriatic Basin, and the Carpathians.

## CONCLUSION

The Danube region's sharp economic and social inequalities, the intensive conflicts, the low degree of decentralisation and the absence of a comprehensive integration process may restrict the possibilities of co-operation in the short term. The differences in the development and socio-economic structure of the Danube territories do not exclude the possibility of a broader territorial co-operation but surely raise difficulties in its implementation. By all means, cross-border and twin-city co-operations on a smaller scale are indispensable on the one hand as complementary programmes to macro-regional co-operation on the other hand for the benefit of the territories and cities involved. These co-operations will enable the participants to break out of the deadlock situation caused by the river's state or the regional border character. The management of these territories within the framework of macro-regional co-operation requires different development techniques, similar to the EU's community support programmes for the development of cross-border co-operations.

In summary we can conclude that the integration and the coalition of the Danube countries have not provided well adaptable examples yet. The Danube as a cultural and transport axis raises positive associations with the meanings of openness, the exchange of goods, ideas and the common fate of the Danube nations. During the past two centuries we could witness—instead of integration efforts—mainly differentiation processes and political powers overstressing national interests, acting even against the interests of integration.

In its Europe 2000+ Report the European Union refers to the Danube Valley as a potential axis which might turn into a new power line for the development of the East Central European region and a territorial basis for the new division of CADSES macro-region. The river's water catchment area can be a new direction for the enhancement of the integration process. Some common geographical, social and cultural features and the river Danube as an integrative line may bring a chance for the continuation of macro-regional co-operations and their complementary interregional co-operations.

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