

Foreword

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Let me warmly greet the readers of this volume on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the EU Regulation on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). In my view, the EGTC instrument mirrors perfectly those principles by which Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi and Jean Monnet initiated the creation of the European Community and of their vision for its future. The European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation embody in parallel

1. the solidarity and mutual respect of European nations whereby the national governments put their trust in an organisation established in another country; enabling them to realise developments and importantly, to provide services on the territory of the other state;
2. the reinforcement of European competitiveness when paving the way for joint development of peripheral regions previously separated by strictly protected administrative borders;
3. the European Union's principle of subsidiarity – originating from Catholic Social Teaching – because the tool, in harmony with the model of multi-level governance, equally facilitates the participation of national, regional and local governments in institutionalised cross-border cooperation.

Therefore, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation is a symbol of European peace, prosperity and democracy.

For Hungarians this is an especially valuable EU instrument. First, exactly one hundred years ago, as a result of the peace treaties that ended World War I, a number of our previously flourishing towns became border cities; characterised by hyperperipherality, losing their natural hinterlands. In other cases, the same treaties caused some towns to shift into the periphery of neighbouring countries, depriving Hungarian rural areas of their natural centres. This resulted in depopulation and the collapse of these border regions' economies. Furthermore, again as an outcome of these treaties, one-third of the Hungarian-speaking population found themselves living outside Hungary. Still today, 2.5 million Hungarians are living in these countries. Constituting a bridge between Hungary and her neighbours, these minorities always help local leaders who wish to trigger cross-border cooperation.

Second, similarly to other small and medium sized EU Member States, almost the entire territory of Hungary can be considered as a border area: 14 of the 19 NUTS III-level regional authorities ('megye') lie at the state border and 15 of them take part in cross-border cooperation programmes. While one-third of the EU population lives in border regions, in the case of Hungary, this rises to more than 80%.

Third, Hungary's economy is highly dependent on trade with neighbouring countries – including the nearby Germany as the main partner. Likewise, cooperation in water management is also imperative for Hungary, as 95% of our surface waters arrive from the neighbouring territories. Lack of water management coordination would be an existential risk for our country.

It is not a coincidence that after the fall of the communist regime and the Iron Curtain every form of cross-border cooperation has become extremely popular in Hungary, including the establishment of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation.

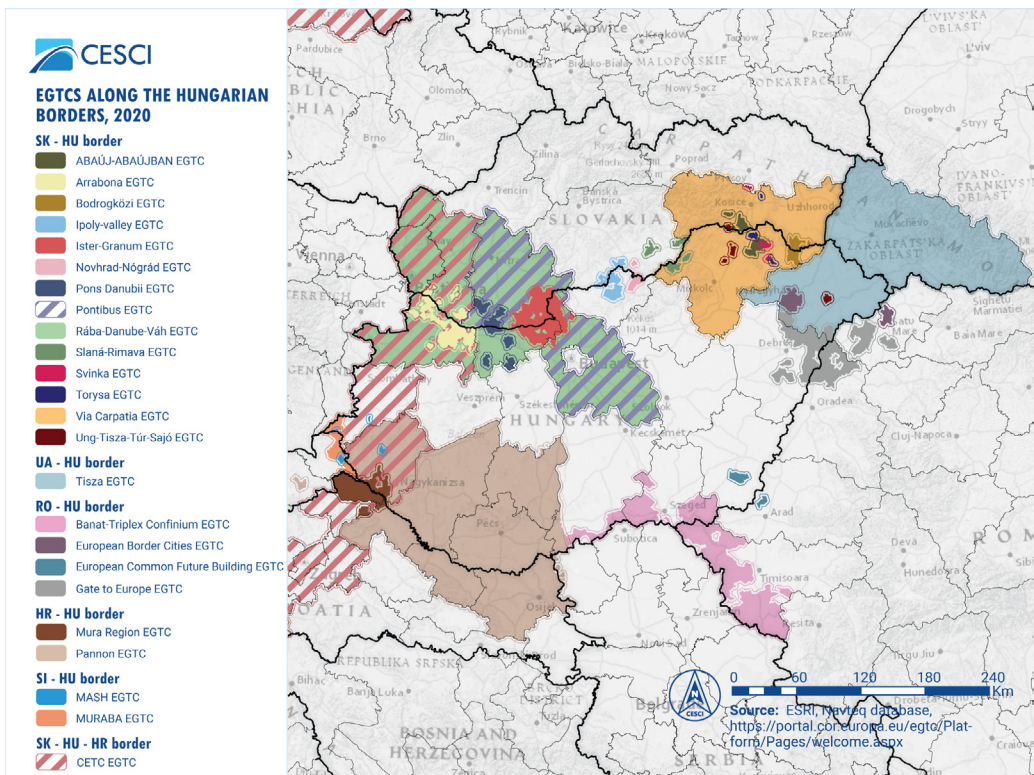
Today, 77 EGTCs are operating in the EU of which almost one-third (24) have Hungarian members and 21 EGTCs are based in our country. Although high quantity in itself is not a measure of high quality performance, this fact does underline Hungary's pioneering role in this field. This is mainly thanks to the agency of the Hungarian MEP (EPP), Mr István Pálfi deceased at a tragically young age (39) in 2006. Having like myself grown up in a borderland, he not only took part in the preparation of the EGTC Regulation as a member of the REGI Committee but (being already seriously ill) he also organised a roadshow in the borderlands to inform local stakeholders on the coming cooperation tool. Therefore, it is not surprising that

- our Parliament was the first to adopt EU law XCIX on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation which took effect on 1st July 2007, prescribed by the EU Regulation;
- the Parliament was one of the first to adopt the amendments to the Regulation in 2014;
- the second EGTC in the EU and the first one in Central Europe – the Ister-Granum – was established in 2008 with its seat at Esztergom.

Since that time, Hungarian groupings have implemented several exemplary initiatives. For instance, the Small Project Fund of the Slovakia-Hungary Interreg V-A Programme is managed by two EGTCs: Rába-Danube-Váh EGTC in the western; and Via Carpatia EGTC in the eastern border region. Groupings are permanent invitees to the programme Monitoring Committee. It is unprecedented that Ister-Granum EGTC, which has its seat in Hungary, takes part in the construction of a ferry service across the Danube as the Slovak (!) partner. In addition, the grouping will operate the Slovak ferry port in the future. Tisza EGTC, which was the first

grouping involving a third country entity from outside the EU, realises large investments in Transcarpathia (Ukraine). The grouping will construct the first ever solid waste treatment plant in the region. The EGTC also coordinates the exploration of the damage to and the rehabilitation of the collapsed salt mines in Solotvyno. MURABA EGTC develops an integrated cross-border silver economy and elderly care system. Mura Region EGTC re-animates tourism along the Hungarian-Croatian border river, the Mura, partly mined during the Balkanic wars in the '90s. Since 2008, Hungarian EGTCs have realised projects amounting to more than EUR 60 million, employ more than 60 people and unite nearly 400 local and regional municipalities.

Figure 1: EGTCs around the Hungarian borders



Source: CESCI

The reader may therefore feel it justified that at the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the EGTC Regulation, the Hungary-based Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) publishes this volume with financial support from the Ministry of Justice. Our purpose is not only to sum up the lessons learnt from this one and a half decade history, but to look also to the future.

The authors primarily present the EGTC as a legal, governance and territorial development tool. At the same time further topics like the Europeanisation of state borders, territorial justice and interethnicity are also addressed.

We are pleased and honoured that our authors are leading experts on the subject from Finland to Italy and from France to Poland. Thanks to their comprehensive knowledge and expertise, this volume will be a useful tool for practitioners of both law and cross-border cooperation.