Europe's culturally diverse borderscapes: The EGTC from the perspective of minority studies

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Abstract

Many European borderscapes have historical legacies and local and regional cultural specificities. They are multiethnic and multicultural borderscapes and include areas with regionally rooted identities as well as residential areas of national minorities. This contribution uses the specific lens of minority studies to look at the EGTC tool in such diverse borderscapes. From a conceptual perspective, it builds on minority studies literature to distinguish between legal, political and socio-economic layers of cross-border cooperation in multiethnic and multicultural contexts. However, the role of national minorities in cross-border cooperation networks, as well as multiethnic and multicultural drivers of cooperation, have not yet been studied comprehensively. In view of these constraints and gaps, the empirical part of the chapter aims at providing for the first time a comprehensive empirical illustration of the multiethnic and multicultural contextual elements of EGTCs. It does so by presenting some basic data for all EGTCs, followed by a closer look at some selected EGTC examples. The empirical section is mainly informed by the EGTC Monitoring Reports as well as by some analysis conducted for the Report Dynamics of Integration in the OSCE Area: National Minorities and Bridge Building and by own studies on minority regions. Overall, the data demonstrate possibilities for further research and for strengthening the nexus between minority studies and border studies. In particular, local and regional political and socio-economic practices in minority cross-border contexts can be an interesting venue for further research and can feed into concepts and theoretical frameworks of border studies. Finally, the chapter also reflects on challenges and prospects with regard to the European political level and outlines thoughts on mainstreaming the multiethnic and multicultural dimension of cross-border cooperation in EU cohesion policy.

Keywords: Minorities, cross-border cooperation, reconciliation, diversity, EU cohesion policy

I. Introduction

Peacebuilding and economic regeneration are core aims of European integration to counterbalance national and territorially driven ideologies that prioritise state borders as separation defensive barriers (McCall, 2013; Klatt & Wassenberg, 2017). In this perspective, cross-border cooperation can have a mediation and reconciliation function, especially in border areas with minority populations (Palermo & Woelk, 2005; O'Dowd & McCall, 2006; McCall, 2013; ECMI Report, 2016; Klatt & Wassenberg, 2017).

During the negotiations on the EGTC tool in 2004, reconciliation was also considered as a possible issue for EGTCs. The European Parliament proposed to explicitly refer to the possible reconciliation function of EGTCs, in addition to the purpose of enhancing economic, social and territorial cohesion. The Commission however rejected such an explicit reference (Engl, 2014: 182) and continued to perceive reconciliation as a 'by-product' of cross-border contact in pursuit of economic development (McCall, 2013).

Cross-border cooperation has, however, a substantial multicultural dimension due to the historical significance of borders and the ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of border regions; a legacy of the processes of state formation and nation building in the 19th and early 20th century. This becomes evident when looking at border issues through the lens of minority studies. Especially after World War I, the intermingled settlement of numerous linguistic and religious groupings on the respective territories prevented the creation of ethnically, linguistically or religiously homogenous nation-states. Instead, large portions of populations found themselves as national minorities in newly founded nation-states after the dissolution of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires (Marko & Constantin, 2019). New borders divided cultural, social and economic landscapes as well as entire communities. In view of these processes, borders have often been metaphorically characterised as 'scars of history' (Klatt, 2005).

Although European integration has generally fostered good relations between states and border regions, minority issues can still become contentious subjects of inter-state relations (Jackson-Preece, 1997; Jackson-Preece, 2005; Marko & Constantin, 2019). After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, minority protection paradigms in the international community shifted from general individual human rights to the idea of special minority rights, which recognised cultural diversity as a basic value of democratic societies (Marko & Constantin, 2019; Malloy, 2010). However, when new capacities emerge and "new spaces for politics" become defined, such as the EGTC, national minorities are rarely seen as primary actors (Malloy, 2010). Still, nowadays one can note a statist doctrine (Malloy 2005) that acknowledges the need

for minority protection to prevent conflicts; but rather neglects the active role of minorities in constructing political, economic and social spaces, especially in border regions where they mostly reside.

Border region studies and minority issues are highly intertwined, however. From the perspective of cross-border cooperation, one can assume a potential normative role of minorities in such cooperation processes because of their knowledge of the (neighbouring) kin-state's culture, language and political system or their bilingual and bicultural skills. There are studies that sketch the intertwining of minorities and cross-border cooperation (Markusse, 2004; Engl & Woelk, 2007; Malloy, 2010; Klatt, 2013; Engl & Mitterhofer, 2015; ECMI Report, 2016), and question the dynamics that cross-border cooperation unfolds in multicultural contexts and, conversely, how intercultural dimensions of cross-border cooperation can be grasped. This contribution follows this approach and studies the EGTC tool in multiethnic and multicultural contexts. Generally, border regions are multicultural areas and thus almost each form of cross-border cooperation has an inter-cultural dimension. This contribution aims to explore the role of EGTCs through the specific lens of minority studies.

Overall, minority-related aspects are a compelling perspective to be considered within border studies. The conceptual frame of this chapter builds on minority studies literature to filter important elements regarding border issues and cross-border cooperation in multiethnic and multicultural contexts. It distinguishes between legal, political and socio-economic layers of cross-border cooperation in minority contexts. This distinction is helpful to get a deeper understanding of the different contexts of cooperation and embeds the analysis into the field of border studies (see section 2).

The empirical part in section 3 illustrates some EGTC data related to their multiethnic and multicultural context. It addresses the challenge that the participation and contribution of national minorities to such cross-border networks have not been catalogued and studied comprehensively. To give empirical evidence despite the lack of comprehensive information, it builds on a two-step approach. First, it presents some basic data collected from the Committee of the Regions' (CoR) EGTC platform and EGTCs websites. Second, it provides some selected examples which are informed by the EGTC Monitoring Reports, some analysis conducted for the Report *Dynamics of Integration in the OSCE Area: National Minorities and Bridge Building* (ECMI Report, 2016) and by own studies on minority regions. This chapter neither compares the empirical data and examples nor comprehensively evaluates them. The purpose is to provide a comprehensive empirical illustration of the multiethnic contextual elements of EGTCs for the first time and to conceptually add the minority studies' perspective to the larger field of border studies.

The chapter concludes by outlining some thoughts on further research on the academic level and by reflecting on challenges and prospects for the European political level.

II.   The legal, political and societal layers of cross-border cooperation in minority contexts

Within border studies, it is widely acknowledged that there are multiple types of borders (administrative, economic, social or cultural etc.) (Kolossov & Scott, 2013), which do not overlap but rather crosscut each other. Thus, the fragmentation of the economic, social, cultural and political landscape goes beyond the administrative division of a territory. Ethnic, cultural and linguistic boundaries that do not correlate with state borders feed into this segmentation. They make border regions culturally diverse in the sense that they are residential areas of one or more national minorities and render multiple boundary processes in border regions even more complex.

There is no generally accepted definition of 'national minority'. Over time, scholars and international organisations such as the UN and the Council of Europe proposed several working definitions (Henrard, 2000; Alfredsson, 2005; Eide, 2014). An overview of these definitions would go beyond the scope of this chapter. Here, therefore, I will refer to the definition proposed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in its Recommendation 1201 of 1993 (Marko & Constantin, 2019). According to this definition, "the expression 'national minority' refers to a group of persons in a state who: a) reside on the territory of that state and are citizens thereof; b) maintain longstanding, firm and lasting ties with that state; c) display distinctive ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic characteristics; d) are sufficiently representative, although smaller in number than the rest of the population of that state or of a region of that state; and e) are motivated by a concern to preserve together that which constitutes their common identity, including their culture, their traditions, their religion or their language" (Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1201, 1993). Though this definition has some critical aspects, such as a certain degree of permanence and numerical thresholds (Medda, 2009; Roter, 2002; Shoraka, 2010), I rely on it for the purpose of this contribution because the Council of Europe has been a leading standard setter for minority protection and for cross-border cooperation between local and regional authorities in Europe (Engl, 2014). Some minority groups have no kinship with the titular national population of another state, whereas others are culturally and linguistically akin to the population across the state border, referred to as the kin-state of the respective minority. Moreover, minorities vary in size and scale of their area of habitation ranging from numerically rather small minorities in local places to numerically larger minorities in regional homelands (Markusse, 2011).

The complexity of cross-border cooperation in minority contexts can be broken down into three layers, which can be embedded into the multidimensionality of cross-border integration (Durand & Decoville, 2019; Durand & Perrin, 2018; Durand, 2015; Kolossov & Scott, 2013): a legal layer (normative standards), a political layer (political relations and policies) and a socio-economic layer (socio-economic practices). These layers can feed into theoretical frameworks of border studies by enhancing a deeper understanding of the different contexts of border regions with minority identities.

II.1.   The legal layer

The legal layer comprises normative standards that have been developed regarding cross-border cooperation in minority contexts. These standards follow the normative approach of conceiving cross-border cooperation as a tool for peacebuilding, conflict resolution and empowerment of minorities. Such a normative approach is grounded in the perception that cross-border cooperation "can open the territorial cage of the state to enable the development of inter-communal relations and intercultural dialogue with those on the other side of the border" (McCall, 2013: 198).

The development of normative standards regarding cross-border cooperation in minority contexts is often linked to historical developments related to state borders and international relations, or so-called momentums of peacebuilding and de-bordering (Scott, 2011). Early bilateral state-agreements to ease minority questions at the Austrian-Italian and the German-Danish border were adopted after the Second World War. The Gruber-Degasperi-Agreement (1946) between Austria and Italy and the Bonn-Copenhagen Declaration (1955) for the Danish-German border area make reference to cross-border contacts and relations with regard to minority populations in border areas (Klatt, 2005; Palermo & Woelk, 2005; Engl & Zwilling, 2007; ECMI Report, 2016).

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, international organisations, such as the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), took the lead in setting further legally binding and non-binding standards. A key legally binding instrument with regard to the rights of minorities is the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), which was opened for signature by the Member States of the Council of Europe in February 1995 and entered into force in 1998. Article 17(1) of the FCNM expressly recognises "the right of persons belonging to national minorities to establish and maintain free and peaceful contacts across frontiers with persons lawfully staying in other States, in particular those with whom they share an ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, or a common cultural heritage"(FCNM, 1995). Thus, Art. 17 codifies an individual right

to maintain transfrontier contacts, whereas Art. 18 deals with the relations between states (Lantschner, 2018). According to Article 18, states shall conclude bilateral and multilateral agreements to protect national minorities and, where relevant, "shall take measures to encourage transfrontier co-operation" (FCNM, 1995). Also the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) – equally adopted under the auspices of the Council of Europe and in force since March 1998 – deals with transfrontier exchanges. Article 14 of the ECRML calls the state parties to conclude agreements to foster contacts between the users of the same language in the States concerned in the fields of culture, education, information, vocational training and permanent education; and to facilitate and promote cooperation across borders for the benefit of regional or minority languages, in particular between regional or local authorities in whose territory the same language is used in identical or similar form (ECRML, 1992).

Subsequently, many European states adopted bilateral agreements, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, that make reference to cross-border contacts and address the cross-border dimension of cultural, linguistic and economic relations (ECMI Report, 2016; Lantschner, 2002; Lantschner, 2004). Examples of such treaties are the Treaty on Good Neighborly Relations and Friendly Cooperation between the Republic of Hungary and the Slovak Republic (1995), the Treaty between the Republic of Hungary and the Republic of Croatia on Friendly Relations and Cooperation (1992), the Convention between the Republic of Hungary and the Republic of Croatia on the Protection of the Hungarian Minority in the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian Minority in the Republic of Hungary (1995), the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation in the Fields of Culture and Education between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Slovenia (1994), or the Polish-Lithuanian Treaty on Friendly Relations and Good Neighbourhood Co-operation (1994) (Lantschner, 2009).

Moreover, the OSCE seeks to provide guidance for its Member States on how to manage their relations with neighbouring States when they concern the issue of national minorities. For this purpose, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities adopted in 2008 the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations.[1] Recommendation 16 entails a normative view on cross-border cooperation and affirms its possible contribution to tolerance and prosperity, strengthening inter-State relations and encouraging dialogue on minority issues. The Explanatory Note to these Recommendations explicitly mentions

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[1] The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations provide guidance to OSCE participating States on how best to manage their relations with neighbouring States when they concern the issue of national minorities. The recommendations are accompanied by a set of explanatory notes. For details, see https://www.osce.org/hcnm/bolzano-bozen-recommendations.

the EGTC as an important contribution in developing the legal instruments for transfrontier co-operation (Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations, 2008).

II.2. The political layer

Normative standards meet political dynamics at the state level as well as at the local and regional level. Political dynamics at the state level are for example international and bilateral state relations, kin-state activism, and foreign policy interests. Dynamics at play at the regional level are regional para-diplomacy, ethno-regional activism as well as the interplay between minority and majority actors (Engl & Woelk, 2007; Engl & Mitterhofer, 2015). These dynamics shape political practice and thus form the political layer of cross-border cooperation in minority contexts. Though these dynamics are highly contextual and movable, i.e. they differ in space and time and are regularly renegotiated and revised (Markusse, 2011); it can be argued that a certain openness or exposure to other cultures (McCall, 2013) is favourable for cross-border cooperation, whereas exclusionary nationalist agendas – of both majorities and minorities – can impede cooperation.

The active involvement of minorities in cross-border activities cannot be taken for granted due to real or perceived risks for national security and integrity of the borders; especially if this cooperation involves entities of the kin-state of the respective minority (Engl & Woelk, 2007). Political elites of national minorities living in border regions may promote irredentist aspirations threatening the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation-state (Klatt, 2005; Marcusse, 2011). This might actually prevent the majority population from engaging in cooperation and instead focus on the importance of the border and its protective function (Klatt, 2005). Moreover, when states unilaterally take steps to defend, protect or support what they describe as "their kin" outside their sovereign jurisdiction, there is a risk of political tension or even violence (Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations, 2008).

Such political dynamics can best be illustrated with concrete examples of perceived threats emanating from regional para-diplomacy and tense interstate relations related to minority contexts. Along the Italian-Austrian border, the Austrian Land Tyrol and the Italian autonomous provinces of South Tyrol (which is the homeland of a German-speaking minority with strong historical ties to Austria) and Trentino intensified their cooperation after Austria's EU accession in 1995. The three regions drafted a statute to create a Euroregion based on public law and established a joint representation office in Brussels. The Italian government perceived both steps as irredentist and illegitimate regional para-diplomacy. Security reports of the Ministry of the Interior declared the Euroregion as provocative and subversive, which impeded its formal establishment as a public law institution. The establishment of the Brussels office was challenged before the Constitutional Court. However,

the Court upheld the right of Italian regions to establish direct contacts with EU institutions and thus legitimised the common representation office of the three regions in Brussels (Engl & Zwilling, 2007).

Recently, relations between Italy and Austria tensed at the end of 2017, when Austria's government proposed to offer Austrian citizenship to German-speakers in the province of South Tyrol in Italy. Separatist parties in South Tyrol welcomed this proposal and pursued their own agenda towards getting Austrian citizenship. After Austria's change of government in May 2019 and January 2020 respectively, the new coalition between conservatives and greens no longer prioritised this issue.

Likewise at bilateral state level, relations between Hungary and Slovakia are at times problematic. Slovakia has been criticised for not complying with measures on minority rights, especially in the aftermath of the adoption of the controversial state language laws of 1995 and 2009, which limited the use of minority languages by government officials and employees in most official situations (Lantschner, Constantin & Marko, 2012; Constantin, 2010). Likewise, Hungary has been criticised for conflictual kin-state activism regarding the Hungarian minorities in its neighbouring countries, in particular related to the controversial 2001 Act on Hungarians Living in Neighboring Countries and the 2010 amendment to the Hungarian Citizenship Act providing for fast-track citizenship procedure for Hungarians living in neighboring states (Liebich, 2019; Pogonyi, 2017). Slovakia reacted harshly to this new Hungarian regulation. It amended its own citizenship law, stripping anyone of their Slovak citizenship if they apply for Hungarian citizenship (BBC, 2012). To remedy conflictual state relations regarding minority issues in both states, a Joint Commission for the Issues of Minorities monitors the state's compliance with the 1995 Treaty on Good Neighborly Relations and Friendly Cooperation between the Republic of Hungary and the Slovak Republic (ECMI Report, 2016). During its meetings, each party expresses its concerns and makes proposals. Decisions are taken by consensus. If the parties do not agree on an issue, it is postponed to the following meeting, but if the relations between the two states are bad, meetings may be postponed *sine die*.

The complex political dynamics of cross-border cooperation in minority contexts are to a certain extent disentangled by EU regional policy and its funding for cross-border projects (for the Austrian-Italian example see Marcusse, 1999; Palermo & Woelk, 2005; Engl, 2011). Regional and local minority actors from political, economic and social spheres implement EU funded cross-border projects. The attendant cultural interaction of such cross-border contacts is an important consideration, especially where there is a legacy of border conflict and lingering suspicion, although this potential political dimension and reconciling function has never been made explicit in EU policies (McCall, 2013).

II.3.   The socio-economic layer

The socio-economic layer depicts social and economic practices in border regions or, in other words, the ways in which regions are lived and created through everyday practices (Löfgren, 2008: 196). Culture, economy and social practices are strongly intertwined and produce collective and individual patterns of action. Collective action includes for instance place branding and marketing of regions, towns or municipalities that promote cultural heritage as a brand, whereas the individual behaviours are socio-economic habits of people living in a border region. Both rely on cultural capital, the knowledge and skills, the attitudes and values which shape people's perception and use of a cross-border region (Löfgren, 2008).

Scholars who studied cross-border socio-economic practices in minority contexts apply concepts of border studies, such as the concepts of 'regionauts' (Klatt, 2015), or study minority action through the lens of capacity-building (Malloy, 2010). Regionauts are people who have skills to use in the world on both sides of a border and move in both the physical and mental landscapes of border regions (O'Dell, 2003; Löfgren, 2008). Bilingualism and biculturalism of minorities can be important assets to act as regionauts. In this view, minorities can foster cross-border interaction through their economic and social practices that are based on their multilingualism and cultural ties. The need to define a border region's profile can attract minorities' cross-cultural knowledge and social capital and create a role for minorities in regional development and branding (Malloy, 2010). A specific study on minorities and dynamics of integration in the OSCE area developed the following key findings:

> *"By drawing on their intercultural knowledge and social capital, members of national minorities have initiated cooperation across state borders as well as within communities where several groups live side by side. Being bilingual and conversant in several cultures, minority actors can identify issues and areas where joint action across borders or cultural divides will benefit the whole of society. In such cases, they have been referred to as 'bridge builders' and even innovators. […] National minority communities often have an array of such connections available through their knowledge and understanding of two or more societies and their corresponding cultures, languages, and other characteristics"* (ECMI Report, 2016: 9).

> *"Due to their bilingual and bi-cultural identities, members of national minorities monitor economic developments not only in their own community but also in their kin-state communities, and they may spot gaps or lack of policy making earlier than local authorities precisely because of their bi-cultural knowledge. Unfortunately, this is an area where national minorities are almost entirely invisible, as their contributions are often subsumed into general monitoring of regional development programmes"* (ECMI Report, 2016: 27).

However, there are also some critical views that question such cross-border cultural impacts and soft factors and outputs like social capital and trust. This criticism is raised in particular with regard to EU tools and programmes for cross-border cooperation (McCall, 2013; O'Dowd, 2002). But overall, the role of minorities in socio-economic development is becoming a firm strand in minority studies (Pan, 2018; Bober, 2019; Willis, 2019), as likewise socio-economic practices and interactions of minorities in border regions can be a compelling aspect in border studies.

III. EGTCs and culturally diverse borderscapes: An empirical showcase

This section illustrates some data related to the multiethnic and multicultural context of EGTCs. It provides some basic data for all EGTCs, followed by a closer look at some selected EGTC examples. Gathering empirical data has been challenging for two main reasons: First, conditions for cooperation vary enormously among the EU states and have produced a great variety of EGTC borderscapes. Second, minority related aspects are often not evident or explicit and thus hard to measure. Hence, the role of national minorities in such cross-border cooperation networks, as well as multiethnic and multicultural drivers of cooperation, have not yet been catalogued and studied comprehensively. In view of these constraints and gaps, the purpose of this section is to provide a first empirical showcase of the multiethnic context of EGTCs. The described examples are neither compared nor comprehensively evaluated but aim at distinguishing minority-related and multicultural aspects as stimulating facets of further research agendas.

As cross-border constructs with members from different states, most EGTCs have *per se* multiethnic and multicultural features. These elements manifest in some basic data related to their working languages and their geographical location.[2]

An investigation of the EGTCs' working languages reveals that only 4% of the 75 EGTCs that exist by mid-2020 are monolingual (i.e. one working language defined in the statute), whereas 96% of the EGTCs are bi- or multilingual (i.e. two or more working languages defined in the statute).

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2   The EGTC data used stem mainly from the EGTC annual monitoring reports commissioned by the Committee of the Regions, publicly available at cor.europa.eu, and the information available on the CoR EGTC online platform. Where needed, further information has been compiled by the author, with the support of Bibimaya Larice (University of Vienna). Approximations and errors remain the author's.

Table 1: EGTCs and their statutory working languages

	monolingual	**bilingual**	**multilingual**
no. of EGTCs	3	51	21
percentage	4%	68%	28%

Source: Own elaboration (n=75).

Out of the 21 multilingual EGTCs, 12 are multilateral with partners from more than two states, and nine are bilateral with partners from two states. Some of the nine multilingual bilateral EGTCs cover regions with strong linguistic and cultural identities, such as Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia in Spain or South Tyrol in Italy. Some of these EGTCs include regional or minority languages, such as Catalan, Basque, Occitan, Galician and Ladin, as possible working languages in their statutes.

Interesting contextual data can also be caught by exploring cartographic information on EGTCs and minorities. A basic comparison of the geographical location of EGTCs[3] and the geographical mapping of minorities[4] reveals that a high proportion of EGTCs geographically overlap with minority settlement areas. In fact, 84% of the EGTCs existing by mid-2020 (63 of 75 EGTCs) include a member that is located in a minority settlement area. Though this neither automatically means that these EGTCs have been established because of minority communities nor that they play a role in the EGTCs' cooperation, it does illustrate the multiethnic and multicultural context in which many EGTCs operate. Furthermore, this confirms earlier findings that cross-border cooperation in minority areas often builds on commonly used legal instruments, such as the EGTC. For instance, numerous EGTCs are located along Hungarian borders, mainly focusing on issues of interest for Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries, to improve regional development as well as to intensify the connection between Hungary and the Hungarian communities abroad (ECMI Report, 2016; Scott, 2020).

The policy fields language and culture are key issues of cooperation in many EGTCs. The CoR EGTC Monitoring Reports give an insight on the EGTCs' activities in the policy areas language and culture; albeit with some limits because culture is grouped with sports and language is incorporated into education and training (CoR, 2017; CoR, 2018). According to the 2017 and 2018 EGTC Monitoring Reports, culture and sports activities are the second most popular EGTC activities while education and training follow at the fourth and fifth place respectively (see figures 1 and 2).

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3   The geographic location of an EGTC is defined by identifying the EGTC members and their geographical location.
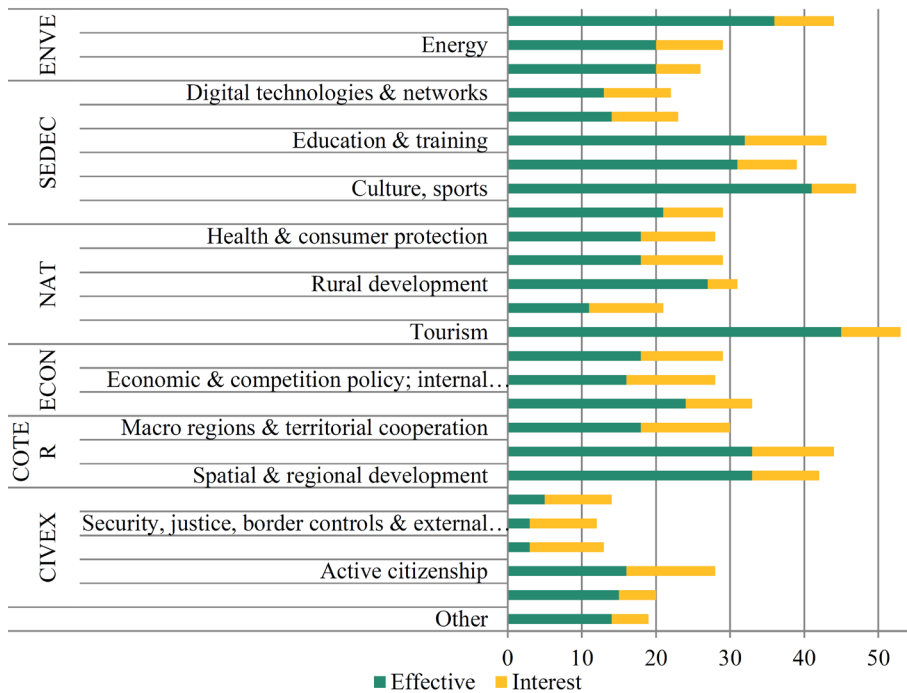4   The minority settlement areas were defined according to the cartographic reproductions in Pan, Pfeil and Videsott (2018).

Figure 1: EGTCs fields of activities according to the 2017 EGTC Monitoring Report
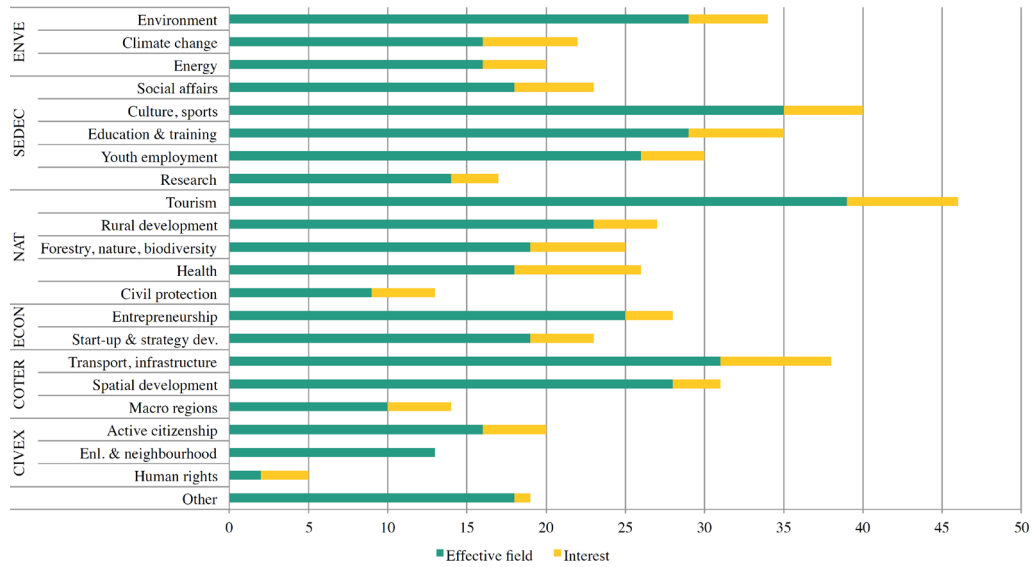
Source: CoR, 2017: 120.

Figure 2: EGTCs fields of activities according to the 2018 EGTC Monitoring Report

Source: CoR, 2018: 116.

The following parts give a few concrete examples of EGTCs' activities related to language and culture, followed by a brief glance at other policy areas.[5]

Language

The EGTC Eurorégion Nouvelle Aquitaine-Euskadi-Navarre between France and Spain declares multilingualism as one of its key issues, and hence the EGTC invests in promoting the study of the four languages spoken in the area covered by the Eurorégion: Basque, Spanish, French and Occitan. With regard to schooling, the Euroregion has developed a programme to train French- and Basque-speaking bilingual primary teachers. This program addresses the need for more bi- and multilingual teachers that stems from increasing French/Basque bilingual classes due to increasing parents' demands. Likewise, the EGTC Eurodistrict PAMINA at the French-German border created an educational online game to allow children to playfully discover the cross-border territory and engage them in learning the neighbouring language. This tool is used in schools in the framework of 'cross-border class meetings' (CoR, 2020). The MURABA EGTC between Hungary and Slovenia aims at promoting and supporting bilingual education and training with an explicit reference to the minority communities in the area. According to the EGTC Monitoring Report 2017, this EGTC aims at facilitating the implementation of statutory rights of Hungarian and Slovene national minorities in the territory and the preserving of their language and culture (CoR, 2017). The EGTC Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai at the border between France and Belgium developed an experimental Interreg microproject for language teaching. This project twins 12 primary and secondary schools (6 in Flanders, 3 in Wallonia and 3 in the European metropolis of Lille) around a pedagogical and linguistic project that deals with sustainable development (CoR, 2017). The EGTC European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino at the Austrian-Italian border established a Euregio masters programme in public administration for graduates working in the public administrations of the three EGTC members. The two-year curriculum promotes multilingualism as it is in English, German and Italian. It addresses intercultural topics and public management in the Euregio enhancing the participants' understanding of EU law and policies in view of the sub-state level (CoR, 2020).

Culture

The EGTC Eurorégion Pyrénées-Meditérrannée between France and Spain has established a common fund for cultural projects by uniting distinct calls for projects that had been managed by Catalonia, Languedoc-Roussillon, Midi-Pyrénées and the

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5   The following examples stem from the CoR EGTC Monitoring Reports, the research conducted for the Report *Dynamics of Integration in the OSCE Area: National Minorities and Bridge Building* (ECMI Report, 2016) as well as own studies.

Balearic Islands into one call managed by the Euroregion. The fund aims at valorising and promoting the cultural diversity of the territories and creating a benchmark cultural hub for artistic creation. Projects that have been financed through the call also include initiatives dedicated to the Occitan and Catalan languages. The EGTC Chaves-Verín is a cross-border conurbation around the cities of Chaves in Portugal and Verín in Spain which has been established to promote the area as a competitive and inclusive Eurocity. The EGTC jointly manages several public services and engages, among others, in cultural heritage and cultural promotion. It offers for instance a Euro citizenship card that gives residents of both cities access to different municipal public facilities in the two cities, including the use of cultural facilities. Moreover, the EGTC publishes a cultural agenda on a monthly basis. The EGTC Abaúj-Abaújban at the Hungarian-Slovakian border initiated a Historical Memorials project to showcase historic cultural relations in the border area. The project should raise awareness about the shared history in the cross-border territory and introduce habits, clothing and food from the past into people's daily lives. The EGTC mobilised young and older generations from both sides of the border to visit and become actively involved in cultural groups. The project indirectly helped cross-border tourism businesses by generating new events increasing tourism from the other side of the border and from abroad (CoR, 2020). The EGTC Pays d'Art et d'Histoire Transfrontalier (PAHT) at the border between France and Spain implemented the Patrimc@t project to create a territorial system for interpreting architecture and heritage in the Catalan Valleys and to implement the 'Country of Art and History' brand to a cross-border territory. The project creates a network of heritage sites and interpretive routes for locals, young audiences and visitors. So, the project contributes to economic development in the rural areas and reinforces culture and tourism professionals by developing new activities and access to professional resources (CoR, 2020).

Economy, transport and environment

Apart from language and culture, EGTCs are active in numerous other policy fields that are of common concern for populations on both sides of a given state border. Thus, the empirical section concludes with some examples beyond language and culture stemming from EGTCs with straightforward minority contexts.

The reconstruction of the Maria-Valeria Danube Bridge in 2001, connecting the minority inhabited cities of Esztergom in Hungary and Štúrovo in Slovakia, is a bridgebuilding infrastructure project in both a literal and figurative sense. This cross-border initiative formed one of the first steps towards the (EGTC) Ister-Granum, which today benefits the local area in the fields of industry, tourism and labour market (ECMI Report, 2016). The MURABA EGTC at the border between Hungary and Slovenia is intended to prevent the emigration of young people from

the area, explicitly referring to members of national minorities; by working out and disseminating alternative employment opportunities, as well as implementing related education and practical training (CoR, 2018). In 2014, the Gate to Europe EGTC at the border between Hungary and Romania was awarded with the "Building Europe across Borders" prize, which is awarded by the EU's Committee of the Region to EGTCs generating growth and jobs. The EGTC obtained the award for its project "Together without borders", which provided young entrepreneurs with new skills, developed an agricultural organisation (Agricultural Cluster) to solve problems of land fragmentation, and developed new brands in the area (ECMI Report, 2016). The EGTC Eurorégion Nouvelle Aquitaine-Euskadi-Navarre aims at boosting innovation and economic development by intensifying the collaboration among the Chambers of Commerce of the EGTC members and by launching calls for economic projects. Furthermore, the EGTC develops a Euroregional source of employment that should generate a dynamic zone of economic opportunity both for companies and for the citizens on the cross-border territory. The European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino established a Euregio Science Fund in order to encourage young researchers from the cross-border territory to initiate interregional research projects and to strengthen the scientific performance of the region and create jobs. The fourth call just started with a budget of three million euro.

Transport is likewise an issue in many EGTCs. The Eurorégion Nouvelle Aquitaine-Euskadi-Navarre, for example, wants to improve the mobility of people and goods, watching over the preservation of the territory, guaranteeing the sustainable use of its resources, and optimising its potential and attractiveness, through shared strategies. The Euroregion has launched a multilingual web portal to improve cross-border transport information and introduced combined cross-border transport tickets. The European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino has developed the Euregio Familypass that pools together the different bonus cards for families of the three regions. The Euregio Familypass offers numerous discounts from over 1,000 benefit providers throughout the cross-border territory, including swimming pools, museums, ski resorts and transport facilities. Once a year, the Euregio organises a so-called "mobility day" on which people who possess the Familypass or any other subscription for public transport can use public transport free of charge throughout South Tyrol, Trentino and Tyrol. In August 2020, the Euregio launched the Euregio Ticket "Euregio2Plus", a day ticket for 39 euros for two adults with up to three children that permits ticket-holders the use across the entire range of local transport services in Tyrol, South Tyrol and Trentino.

Finally, also environmental issues are usually a common concern for populations on both sides of a given state border. Closer contacts between culturally diverse communities and intensive socio-economic relations have helped to further amplify the already existing cooperation at the Croatian-Hungarian border along the river

Mura. This multiethnic area has seen a qualitative transformation from a previously underdeveloped border area to a complex and institutionalised cooperation, which has taken the form of an EGTC since 2015. The EGTC aims at the implementation of environmentally sustainable projects and eco-tourism (ECMI Report, 2016).

IV. Conclusion

This chapter aims at illustrating that minority-related aspects are a compelling perspective to be considered within the multidisciplinary field of border studies. Some basic data reveal that many EGTCs display multiethnic and multicultural contextual elements, which however have not yet been thoroughly studied. Adding the lens of minority studies to border studies can be a fruitful ground for further research. It can contribute to grasping the localness instead of state-centeredness in border studies and to understand the emergence of a sense of locality in bordered spaces (Kolossov & Scott, 2013). Moreover, it can help to get a deeper understanding of the context in border regions, which can feed into the theoretical frameworks of border studies (Durand & Decoville, 2019).

In particular, local and regional political and socio-economic practices in minority cross-border contexts would be an interesting venue for further research. So far, these aspects have been addressed by a few empirical snapshots, for example in the Danish-German border region and the border region between Italy and Austria, but lack a comprehensive investigation across several cases. Likewise, kin-state activism and extra-territorial ethnopolitical nationalist agendas under the umbrella of European cross-border cooperation should be devoted more attention in the field of minority studies.

Moreover, the European Union should give itself a start to mainstream the multiethnic and multicultural dimension of cross-border cooperation in EU cohesion policy. Three reasons make the post-2020 scenarios an opportune moment for such a mainstreaming.

First, EU policies for cross-border cooperation have become a very dynamic policy field that gets increasing attention within EU cohesion policy and beyond. Past reforms have witnessed a continuous extension of aims and tools and this trend is likely to continue in the next funding period (Engl & Evrard, 2019). This dynamic at the EU level risks being decelerated by states' reluctance to grant further tools of legal-institutional and administrative cooperation to the sub-state level, especially in states with strong regionalist movements and tense border relations. Experience shows that many EGTCs operate in multiethnic and multicultural contexts without creating significant tensions in border relations. Of course, this could be a 'by-product' of cohesion policy, but practice on the ground shows that

> *"[t]he legal instrument of an EGTC has often been chosen as a tool for reconciliation, and in general for successful regional development in sensitive border areas, allowing a better implementation of common cross-border Euro-regional strategies for economic development as well as – often as a consequence and hand-in-hand with prosperity – for enhancing a common Euro-regional citizenship" (ECMI Report, 2016: 22).*

Thus, mainstreaming objectives that take into consideration the multiethnic and multicultural realities of border regions, based on almost 15 years' EGTC experience, must not create alarmism, but can back the EU agenda of extending tools and aims of cross-border cooperation. Of course, these objectives must go hand in hand with the principles of social, economic and territorial cohesion and must prevent border politics being trapped in national identity politics (Scott, 2020).

Giving objectives that explicitly consider the multicultural context of border regions, a firm stand in EU cohesion policy can, secondly, foster key European values of trust and cooperation and make a tangible contribution to strengthen social cohesion to counterbalance discourses of adverse otherness. The rise of right-wing populist movements in Europe over the past two decades (Wodak, KhosraviNik & Mral, 2013) has led to shifts in public discourses. In such shifted discourses, otherness tends to be no longer perceived as "creative otherness" (Löfgren, 2008), where differences are constructive, but rather as adverse otherness with mistrust and prejudices against the ones that are perceived different. Counterbalancing these shifts must be a key goal of the principle of social cohesion; and the multiethnic and multicultural elements of cross-border cooperation can be a substantial expression of this principle. Claims for such a potential development can be witnessed in two ongoing European Citizens Initiatives focused on national minorities. The Minority SafePack Initative[6] proposes to include the protection of national minorities and the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity in the objectives of EU's regional development funds. The European Citizens' Initiative for National Regions[7] claims to grant special attention to regions with specific national, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic characteristics within EU regional policy. Whereas the promoters of the Minority SafePack Initiative have already collected the necessary signatures and submitted their legal proposals to the EU Commission, the authors of the European Citizens' Initiative for National Regions are still in the process of collecting the one million signatures that are necessary.

Third, over the past decade the EU has witnessed difficult times, as it had to cope with challenges such as the financial crisis, migration flows, and the Covid-19 pandemic, with tense relations between the European states and tough negotiations on policies

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6   For further details see http://www.minority-safepack.eu/.
7   For further details see https://www.signiteurope.com/.

to cope with these challenges. Due to a lack of willingness to compromise and hardened lines of conflict among the European states, a frequent mechanism to cope with the crisis has been to re-enhance state borders as security borders rather than acting as a community. The consequence is a backlash for relational networks and a push for fixed spaces as security devices. European minded political leaders should recall Europe's key mandates of peace and cohesion through cooperation. For decades of successful European integration, this mechanism has predominantly worked through economic and political cooperation at the state-level. Now that European integration needs a further boost, it could be the time to devote even more strategic attention to the micro-level in Europe's border regions by strengthening its mandate for cooperation and cohesion in Europe.

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