

ADDED VALUE OF THE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

**THE SERBIAN-BULGARIAN BORDER REGION
PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES
“THE FORGOTTEN BACKYARD OF EUROPE”**

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of modern Europe is in a politically and economically united continent, and thus an attempt to create the prerequisites for inclusion of the peripheral position of certain neglected areas within the European countries in the intense process of sustainable development and integration into the wider European area of complex interstate and inter-regional interconnection.

Regardless of the aggravating circumstances in the process of integration into the European environment (inadequate legislation, the unstable political situation, a number of cross-border problems, lack of standardized information exchange, insufficient transport interconnection, lack of initiative, etc.), Serbian politics holds an opened and clear goal leading to membership in the European Union (EU) and the acceptance of all aspects of the spatial dimension of international regional cooperation.

Unlike other areas of the EU, trans-border and interregional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe is poorly existent.

In contrast, public opinion can positively influence the development of the EU by determining the nature of integration process with the support of various projects.

The attitude of the state, citizens' attitudes, and unresolved national issues may restrain the process of European integration.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BORDER AREA BETWEEN SERBIA AND BULGARIA



The border region on both sides of the border between Serbia and Bulgaria has a beautiful landscape, almost virgin nature and is situated in a very strategic place



Unfavorable development potentials of border area of Serbia, and especially of its eastern and south-eastern part neighbored with Bulgaria arose out from peripheral geographic position in country, which caused its functional isolation, in relation to economic centers and development axis, and resulted with its slower development.



The border region between Serbia and Bulgaria can be considered as a specific geographic area with a certain unity of the natural base, economic and cultural ties of the population, common infrastructure, as well as historical, ethnic and cultural traditions.



This route offers over 200 km shorter connection than any other alternative route between Central Europe and the Middle East.



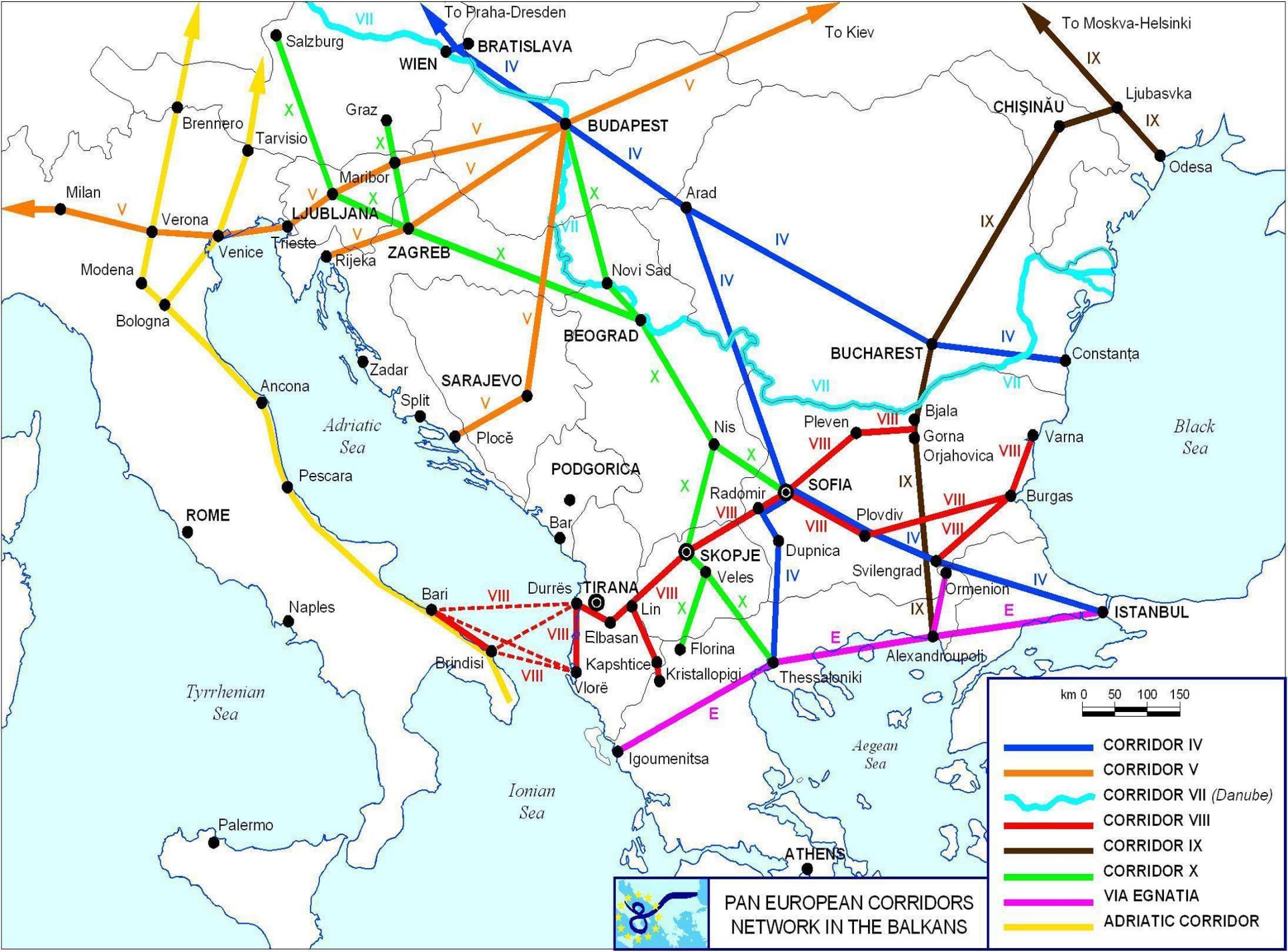
A very important geo-strategic position of one part of the area is reflected in the branch of Corridor Xc (Niš-Sofia-Istanbul), which is separated from the main route of Corridor X, which connects the major European centers with Asia Minor.



Geomorphologic characteristics of the terrain, traffic isolation of mountain areas (especially in winter), the historical conditions and tradition have influenced the lower developmental characteristics of border region of Serbia with Bulgaria in relation to the central parts of the country.



Serbia is yet to undergo the completion of the highway on the arm of Xc (Niš - Sofia). This path follows the railway line, which, likewise, waits for reconstruction.



PAN EUROPEAN CORRIDORS NETWORK IN THE BALKANS

km 0 50 100 150

- CORRIDOR IV
- CORRIDOR V
- CORRIDOR VII (Danube)
- CORRIDOR VIII
- CORRIDOR IX
- CORRIDOR X
- VIA EGNATIA
- ADRIATIC CORRIDOR

Despite the existence of five border crossing check points, the border is still regarded as a separating line due to the extent mountainous and hilly character of the terrain and the underdeveloped transport infrastructure.

Important reasons for this situation play as well the long period of isolation during the communist regime, the consequent socio-economic problems, the way the democratic transition has been done, the recent war and embargo in Yugoslavia and the lack of serious interests of the western economic societies to invest into the region.

Most of the people of the border region survive with difficulties.

Some others decide not to pay their bills, but this is not a solution of the problems, as soon or late they are forced to do it.

Those, who cannot do it, decide to migrate to other country region or to leave the country in searching their host country in the World.

People have to work at several places in order to have the necessary income to reach the end of the month.

Otherwise their properties are confiscated. Other people decide to smuggle and to live because of the price difference of the goods from both side of the border. Smuggling is one of the very few real functioning economic sectors in the region, taking advantage of the presence of the border and the contact of two different economies.

The socio-economic situation of the border region has serious demographic problems, due to the ageing of the population.

The population in the Bulgarian part of the border area represents 26.81% of the country's total population or 2.07 million people. 81% of it is concentrated in Sofia city the average population density of the border area is approximately 1.5 times less than the national average density.

The population in the Serbian border area represents 16,53% of the country's total population or 1.24 million people, being approximately 1.3 times less than the national average density. The province of higher concentration is Niš with 35% of the total population.

The majority of the young population emigrates and the villages become less and less attractive. If there is no serious and fast change, the region will become depopulated and people would not believe anymore in the opportunities and in the values that the democracy could offer, a situation which will compromise the viability of building strong democratic governance.

The border area is characterised by its ethnical diversity, although ethnic Bulgarians and Serbs form the core part of the population.

The observed area belongs to underdeveloped, economically and demographically depressed regions of Serbia.

Unfavorable demographic processes are reflected in the expressed low population growth and emigration of the population

(municipalities with the largest drop in population in Serbia, the average annual 6.4 per 1.000 inhabitants, are situated in this region).

Employment is below average employment in Serbia (index 0,8), and income per capita in this region is one of the lowest in Serbia (in some municipalities, only 15% of national average.

In the economic production the low-stage processing products with declining development role of industrial are prevailing (decrease of employees in industry to 40% in some municipalities in relation to 1991).



Eligible area



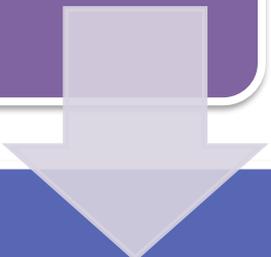
- Territory: 43 933 sq. km.
- Border length: 341 km
- Border checkpoints: 5
- Population: 2 144 054 people
- Eligible regions (NUTS III):

Bulgaria	Serbia
Vidin District	Bor District
Montana District	Zaječar District
Vratsa District	Toplica district
Sofia District	Nišava District
Pernik District	Pirot District
Kyustendil District	Jablanica District
	Pčinja District

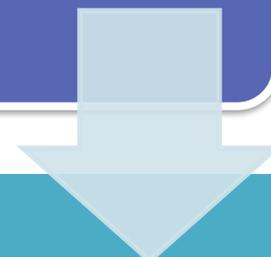


Map of the Bulgarian-Serbian Border Region (IPA 2017)

The area has agricultural and animal husbandry and forest features with natural and tourist values. There are important sources of water, mineral and ore resources.



The area is characterized by poorly developed transport and other technical infrastructure, lack of availability of public services, particularly in the mountainous part of the area (RPP Timok, Official Gazette 51/11).



Poor quality roads and underdeveloped infrastructure, as well as neglected valorization of available resources (natural and manmade) in total contribute to the low level of social standards of the population in this region (Tošić, Miletić, 2002).

EUROREGIONAL COOPERATION



Despite the existence of five border check points between Bulgaria and Serbia, the border is still regarded as a separating line because of the long period of isolation during the communism and the consequent socio-economic problems.

Another reason for this isolation, already mention at the beginning, is purely geographical, mainly due to the mountainous and hilly character of the terrain and the underdeveloped transport infrastructure.

Euroregions are voluntary interest association, formed at the regional and local levels, covering the border areas of neighboring states in order to foster cross-border cooperation to promote economic, social and cultural needs and demands of environmental protection.

With this type of cooperation Serbia and Bulgaria are included in the regional associations.



European Commission

DG Regional Policy

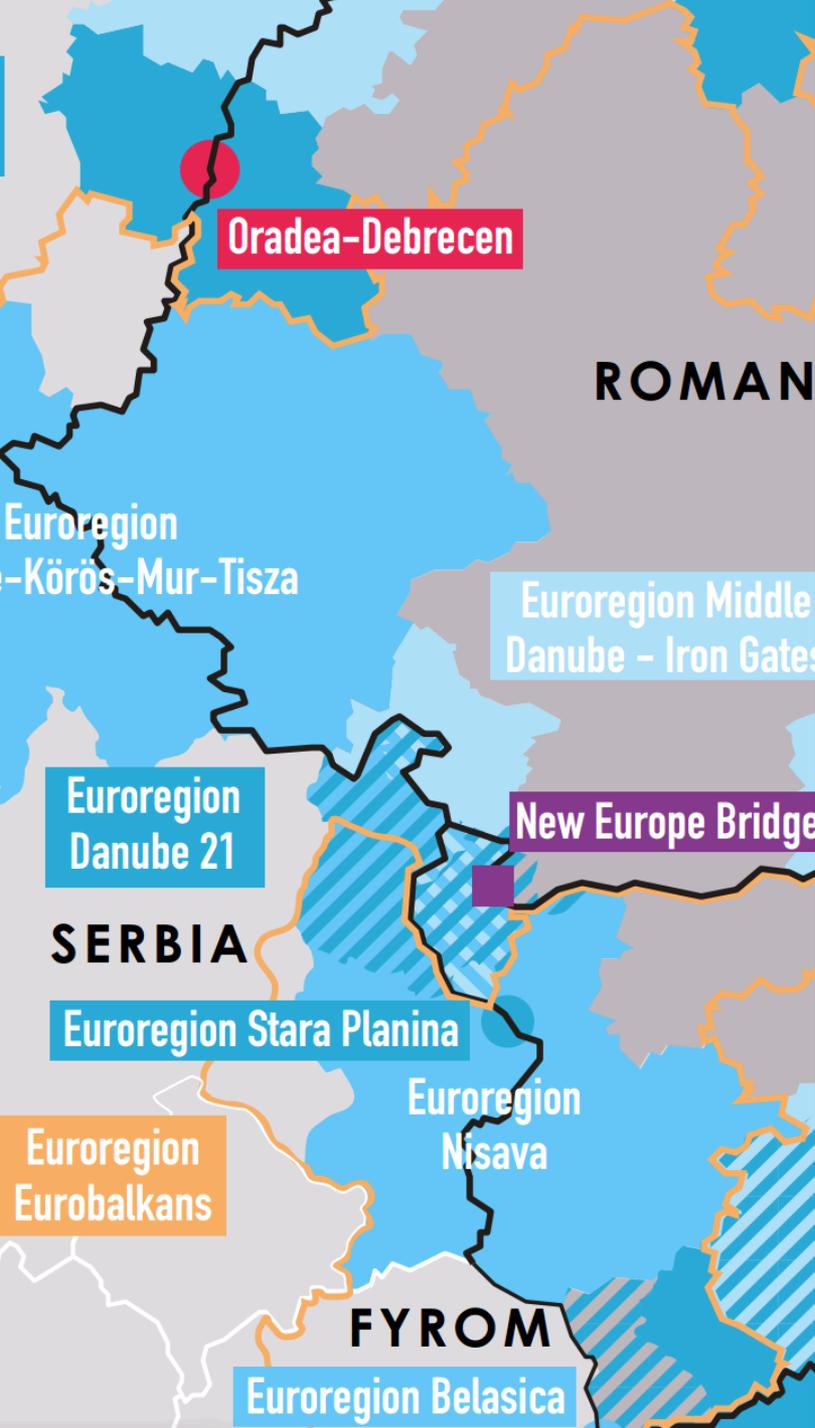
IPA Crossborder Cooperation programmes with EU Member States participation



- Adriatic
- Bulgaria - The Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia
- Bulgaria - Serbia
- Bulgaria - Turkey
- Cyprus - Turkey
- Greece - Albania
- Greece - The Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia
- Greece - Turkey
- Hungary - Croatia
- Hungary - Serbia
- Romania - Serbia
- Slovenia - Croatia

© EuroGeographics Association for the administrative boundaries (NUTS regions)
 Other administrative boundaries: Global Administrative Unit Layers (GAUL), FAO





Euroregion "Danube 21"
founded in 2001.

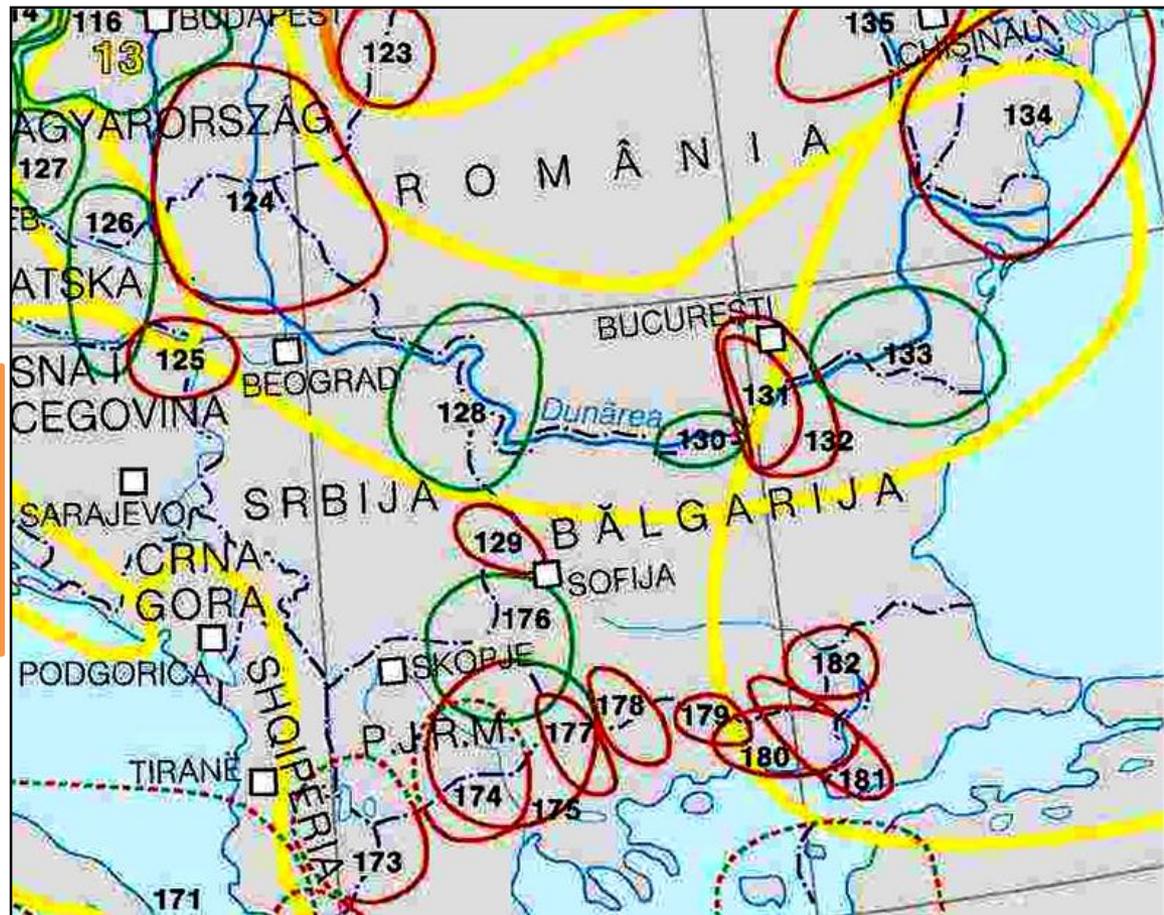
Euroregion "Eurobalkans - Niš-Sofia-Skopje"
founded in 2002.

Euroregion "Morava-Pčinja-Struma"
founded in 2003.

Euroregion "Nišava"
founded in 2005.

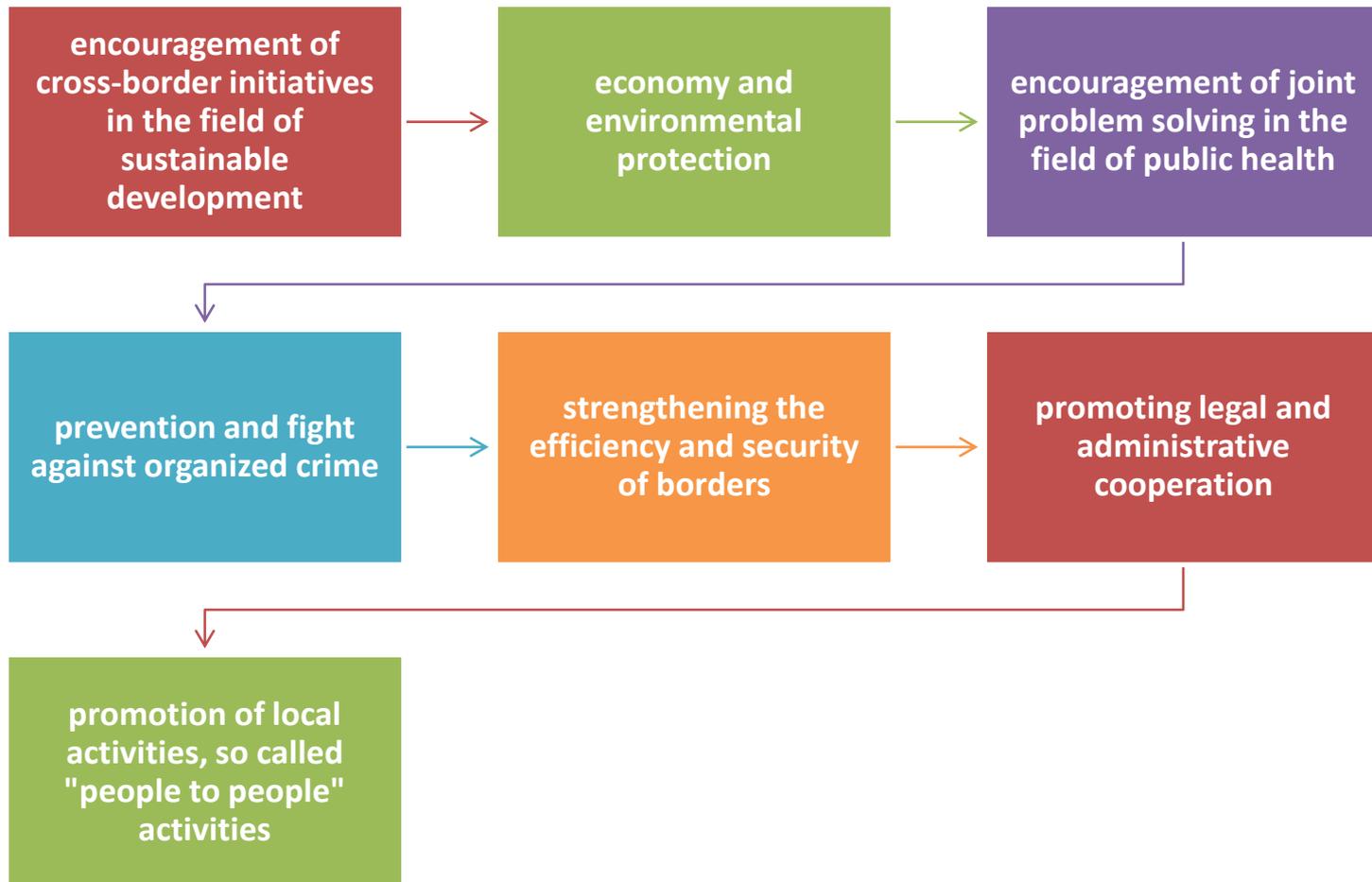
Euroregion "Stara Planina"
founded in 2006.

- (128) Dunav XXI (RO/BG/RS)
- (129) Euroregion Nishava (BG/RS)
- (137) Stara Planina (BG/RS)
- (176) Morava-Pčinja-Struma (BG/RS/FYROM)
- EuroBalkans (Niš,Sofija,Skoplje)





- The cross-border cooperation programs have several important aspects for the municipalities that participate in them: promotion of good neighborly relations, familiarization with the procedures for usage of pre-accession EU funds and resolving issues and problems of common interest to the border regions.
- Specific objectives were related to:



POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE COOPERATION



In future a certain challenge will be to separate the transfer of responsibilities from central government to local authority institutions, even to the NGOs, in planning and implementing programs of cross-border cooperation.

The programming should strive to achieve better interconnection between cross-border and regional development policies and programs.

With better planning and programming it is necessary to achieve synergy between cross-border program and macro-regional strategies, particularly the Danube Strategy.

In addition, it is essential to develop the concept of strategic projects, i.e. those large investments that have a clear cross-border impact.

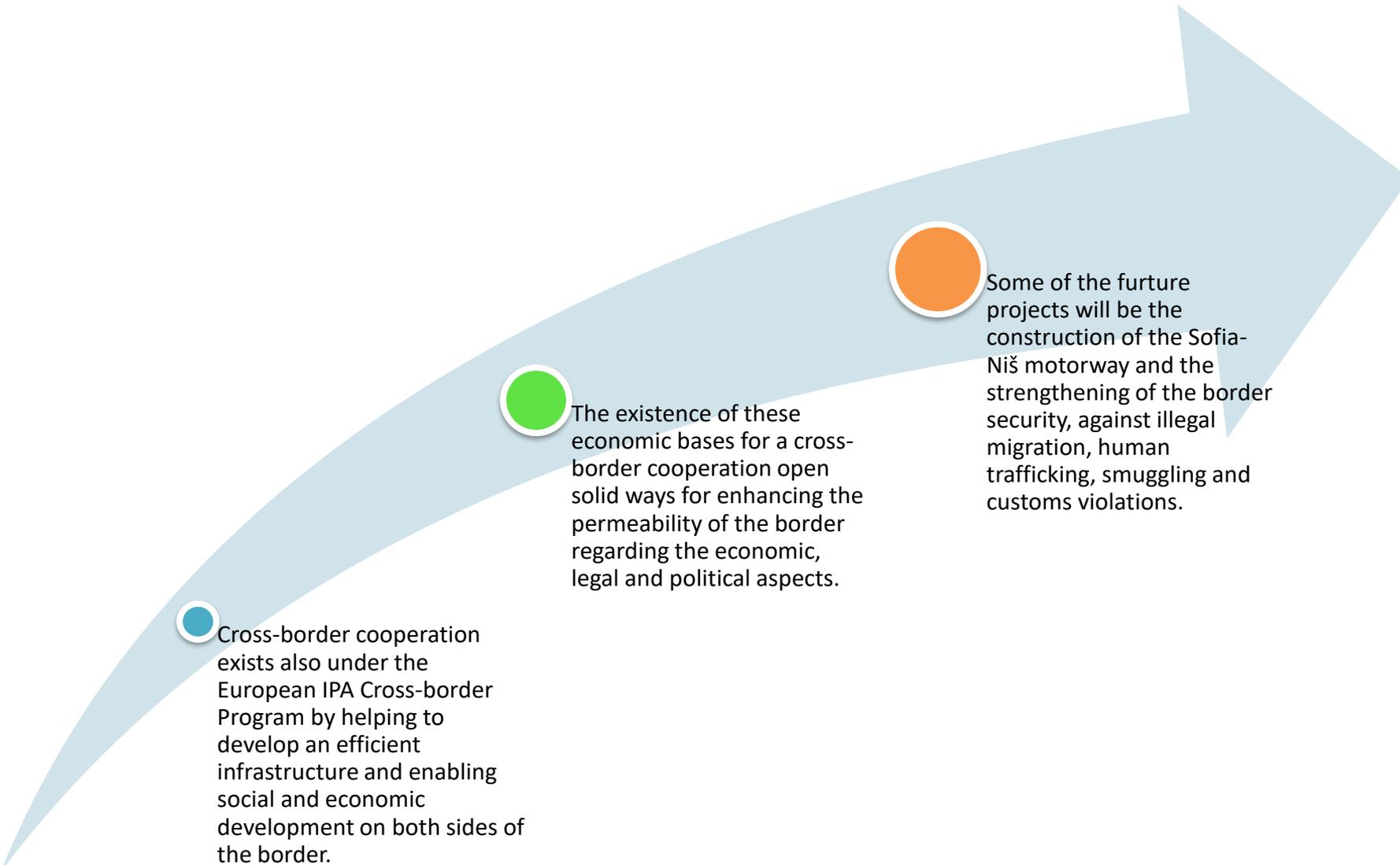
It is proposed to consider the possibility for the current IPA component of cross-border cooperation to be included in the component of regional development in the future.

The general objectives of the process of further cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria are related to the creation of sustainable spatial-economic and socially coherent development based on interregional cooperation with unique cross border planning of usage of land.

In addition, the priorities of cooperation are solving common problems and sustainable development of tourism and agriculture, as well as environment protection (Stara Planina, Vlasina and Krajište).

It would be achieved by valorization of border regions potentials with identifying problems with the aim of their joint emulation.

Priorities of cross-border cooperation between the two countries are related to the construction of infrastructure, modernization of road and railway line on the branch of Corridor X, but also other transport objectives (establishment of air traffic between Sofia and Belgrade, the construction of a road that connects Corridor X with Corridor IV - through Paraćin-Zaječar route, construction and modernization of road traffic that will connect Corridor X with Corridor VIII, modernization of border crossings; PPRS, 2010).



Cross-border cooperation exists also under the European IPA Cross-border Program by helping to develop an efficient infrastructure and enabling social and economic development on both sides of the border.

The existence of these economic bases for a cross-border cooperation open solid ways for enhancing the permeability of the border regarding the economic, legal and political aspects.

Some of the future projects will be the construction of the Sofia-Niš motorway and the strengthening of the border security, against illegal migration, human trafficking, smuggling and customs violations.

INSTRUMENTS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THESE OBJECTIVES



Formation of expert groups that presented potentials of both border regions to foreign investors

Forming a basis of common geographic information systems

Promotion of appropriate organizational, regulatory and personnel prerequisites of regional and local level

Encouragement of alternative funding

Introduction of international standards and quality production in line with the EU

Raising public awareness of the importance of a cooperative process

Participation of Diaspora etc.

CONCLUSION



Transnational and cross-border cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria began to intensify under influence of the European Union in the late 20th century.

Until 2006, the cooperation was realized through the Neighborhood Program, and in 2007-2020 through the European IPA fund.

Euroregional cooperation in the trans-border area between the two countries, despite a clearly defined goal, did not achieve a significant success.

Cooperation between local authorities and town twinning make an extra form of cooperation through programs covering different areas.

Common problems in the border area between the two countries are related to a greater distance from rich and major European markets, intensive depopulation (except for the Sofia area), asymmetry in providing information in the two countries, different legal system, the unequal status of the EU, lack of coordination between local and central administration, underdevelopment and lack of interest in local authorities, etc.

The advantages offered by the cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria are related to overcoming the problem of isolation of border areas, reducing differences in living standards, facilitating sustainable development, environmental protection, harmonization of legislation etc.

The objectives are to improve the transportation infrastructure (highway construction and modernization of the Bulgarian border and railway), modernization of border crossings, encouraging economic cooperation and cooperation on the protection of natural resources. In addition, cooperation provides a solid contribution to regional stability, which is necessary for this part of the Balkans.

Strategic Priorities are related to: on-time performance of previously signed programs, urgent defining the institutional competence of regional and local government by establishing appropriate services (especially in the case of Serbia), immediate enforcement of action regarding the development of ICT, and hence with international standards and trends for more effective performance of the process of cooperation.

The objectives will be directed to respect of principle of territorial cohesion and balanced regional development, as well as greater involvement of local authorities in implementing the program, in particular cross-border cooperation.

The border region between Bulgaria and Serbia possesses important economic potential.

It is located in a strategic positions and plays the role of a bridge between the Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, that makes it suitable for the successful development of the economy and the cross-border cooperation.

Apart it has an almost vergine nature that makes it attractive for the development of the tourism in that part of Europe.

The future cross-border cooperation, supported by national and European funds, as well as the active cooperation of young generations from both sides of the border, are building the basis of the missing infrastructure, the intercultural exchange and education, which are very necessary for the future economic and social development of the zone.



**Good neighbors
work together
to create
a better future!**

**Thank you
for your attention!**

Vladica Tošić

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