

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN THE CROSS-BORDER REGION BULGARIA - ROMANIA (2014-2020)

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Abstract

Regional development and politics are among the priorities within the European Union. As it expands, cross-border cooperation becomes more and more important. Various programs such as INTERREG are being implemented, and project management has started to play an important role in the European integration process. A similar example is the cooperation between the two Balkan countries Bulgaria and Romania.

Key words: Regional development, project management, cross-border territories

JEL Classification: JEL: M12; M19

INTRODUCTION

Peripheral regions (border and cross-border) are bridges for the unification of Europe, they are home to about 30% of the population of the European Union (EU) and they cover more than 40% of the EU population. European policies take this fact into account. Border regions are included in the Treaty of Lisbon, and the financing of the EU's internal and external borders is defined as a European priority (Arenas 2008).

The peripheral regions in Bulgaria, unlike a significant part of them in the EU and especially in the old member states, are territories with a pronounced imbalance in relation to the complex development of the regions in the country, usually with lower indicators for the main spheres of socio-economic development. The peripheral location of these regions has determined their isolation from the dynamic processes of the developed in the central regions of the country, which is a natural legacy of the period of the bipolar division of Europe. The object of the present study is the INTERREG V-A Romania - Bulgaria 2014-2020 cross-border cooperation program.

The subject of the study is the possibilities for improving the results of the project proposal, realized through informal and formal meetings between the local authorities on both sides of the border. The main goal is to analyze the possibilities and achieved results of project management in the border territory between Bulgaria and Romania.

The methods used in the research are historical analysis, regional analysis, factor analysis, regional analysis, cartographic analysis, etc.

The significant experience in European integration, both on the part of the EU and of some member states such as Spain and Portugal, which have similar socio-economic and regional problems, is used.

The term "project" itself is interpreted ambiguously, depending on the pre-selected model and standard. A project is a plan that consists of a set of goals that are interrelated and coordinated. According to the Project Management Institute (PMI), "a project is a temporary effort undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result". It is evident from these concepts that the reason for a project is to achieve specific results or objectives within the limits imposed by a budget, pre-established criteria, and a pre-determined period of time (PMI 2013).

According to Andreev: The project is also sometimes an initiative aimed at the realization of a specific goal, in the form of a one-off and often unique complex activity (Andreev 2006).

The International Foundation for Standardization (ISO) gives the following definition of a project: a project is a unique process consisting of a certain number of coordinated and controlled activities with start and end dates undertaken to achieve a single goal corresponding to specific requirements, including time cost constraints and resources.

Project management is formed as a new culture of management activity and becomes a kind of bridge in business cooperation between countries and different continents with different history of development, traditions, economy, and culture (Alexandrova 2015).

Exhibition

The eligible cross-border area of the Cross-Border Cooperation Program (CBC) Interreg V-A Romania - Bulgaria 2014-2020 covers regions at administrative level NUTS III or regions corresponding to administrative level NUTS III located on the border between Bulgaria and Romania and including the following areas: Vidin, Vratsa, Montana, Plevna, Veliko Tarnovo, Ruse, Silistra, Dobrich (Bulgaria), Constanta, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Culerash (Romania) (Fig. 1).



Figure 1 Territorial scope of the Cross-Border Cooperation program INTERREG V-A Bulgaria-Romania 2014-2020

Source: <http://www.cbcrromaniabulgaria.eu/>

They cover 19.8% of the territory of the two countries (69,285 km² in total), with 57.75% belonging to Romania and 43.25% to Bulgaria. The common border between Bulgaria and

Romania is 610 km long, of which 470 km is the water border along the Danube River and 139 km is the land border in Dobrudja. The total population of the cross-border region amounts to 4.77 million inhabitants, the majority of which 3.16 million inhabitants (66%) live on the territory of Romania and 1.61 million inhabitants (34%) live on the territory of Bulgaria (<https://www.interregbgbg.eu/bg/programme/programme-general-data.html>).

The program for CBC INTERREG V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020 implements five priority axes (Table 1):

Table 1. Program priorities for CBC INTERREG V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020

Priorities	Specific Purpose (SC)
Priority axis 1 "Well-connected region"	SC 1.1 "Support for the planning, development and coordination of cross-border transport systems to improve connections with the TEN-T transport network"
	SC 1.2 "Increasing the level of coordination in terms of transport safety"
Priority Axis 2 "Green Region"	SC 2.1 "Improving the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage, resources and cultural heritage"
	SC 2.2 "Strengthening the sustainable management of ecosystems in the transboundary region"
Priority Axis 3 "Safe Region"	SC 3.1 Improving joint risk management in the cross-border region
Priority axis 4 "Qualified and inclusive region"	SC 4.1 "Establishing an integrated cross-border region in terms of employment and labor mobility"
Priority Axis 5 "Efficient Region"	SC 5.1 "Increasing the capacity for cooperation and efficiency of public institutions in the context of the cross-border region"
Priority axis 6 "Technical assistance"	SC 6.1 "Effective and efficient implementation of the program"

Source: own work

In order to achieve the defined objectives, the program envisages the financing of three main types of activities: soft measures, investment activities and integrated activities, allocated to

each of the specific objectives (<https://www.interregrobg.eu/bg/programme/programme-general-data.html>).

The main mechanisms for reflecting the horizontal principles are also indicated: Sustainable development, Equal opportunities and combating discrimination, Equality between men and women.

For the program period 2014 - 2020, the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border cooperation program will be financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in the total amount of 215,745,513.00 euros. The Bulgarian contribution to the formation of the total amount of funds from the ERDF is 42,758,612 euros, which is about 16.54% (Fig. 2).

Thus proposed, this distribution fully corresponds to the proposed categories of interventions and to the intended objectives and outcome indicators (http://www.cbcrromaniabulgaria.eu/index.php?page=programming_period_2014_2020).



Figure 2 Financial distribution of funds from the ERDF according to priorities
Source: own work

Bulgaria and Romania undertake to provide their own co-financing to be used for the implementation of the TGS Program in the period 2014-2020. (http://www.cbcrromaniabulgaria.eu/index.php?page=programming_period_2014_2020).

Structures for program management and implementation

Ministry of Regional Development, Public Administration and European Funds of Romania is the Managing Authority.

The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of Bulgaria is the Bulgarian analogue of the Governing Body.

The accounting board of the Republic of Romania is an audit authority, which will be assisted by a group of auditors, which will include experts from Romania and Bulgaria.

The national partner body of the Governing Body will be represented by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of Bulgaria.

The Monitoring Committee is the main authority in making decisions on the Program, monitoring the implementation of the program goals and results.

The joint secretariat represented by the branches in Ruse and Kularash should assist the program management bodies in fulfilling their duties and help the participants from both countries (<https://www.interregobg.eu/bg/programme/programme-bodies.html>).

The process of preparation of the Program for CBC Romania - Bulgaria (2014-2020) includes a significant circle of representatives of various organizations and institutions at the national, regional and local level, socio-economic partners, representatives of the academic community and the non-governmental sector of Bulgaria and Romania. A joint working group was created, whose main task is to prepare the new program in a completely transparent way, considering the accumulated experience, knowledge and expert opinion. 6 meetings of the working group were held, and the activity included definition of the strategy, content and priorities of the program, selection of governing bodies, determination of the budget and preparation of a preliminary and environmental assessment of the program. The final draft of the program was adopted on 22.07.2014 (http://www.cbromaniabulgaria.eu/index.php?page=programming_period_2014_2020).

Achieving sustainability in cross-border regions is an issue that we believe cannot be solved by EU funding alone. A similar example is the two bordering Iberian countries Spain and Portugal, which are proof that their European integration is perceived as a secondary hypothesis in support of cross-border cooperation. They can be used as an example, considering their transition from dictatorship to democracy, similar socio-economic problems, and their rich experience in European integration.

It is noteworthy that the cross-border cooperation between the two countries is also a result of the active participation of the Iberian politicians on both sides of the border, who through work programs and because of repeated formal and informal meetings set the stage for cooperation (Dimitrova 2022).

According to Cabero, the beginning of institutional cooperation between Spain and Portugal began with the Non-Aggression Pact between the two countries of 1939, later supplemented and known as the Iberian Pact in 1942 drawn up by the two dictators Salazar and Franco (Cabero 2004). Since the early 1960s, Spain has been moving towards membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), reaching the first trade agreement at the end of that decade. In contrast, Portugal shows a stronger interest in preserving its overseas colonies and therefore distances itself from the European project. In the 1970s, relations between the two countries strengthened, and after the end of the dictatorships, their European integration began (Dimitrova 2022).

The two neighboring Balkan countries, Bulgaria and Romania, are following a similar path. They are partners within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), and after the end of the Cold War, together they walked the difficult path to full membership in the EU. Despite the geographical distance, the partner experience is extremely important for Bulgaria and Romania, since a large part of the problems are similar. The obstacles facing the countries of the Western Balkans are similar.

After INTERREG IV (2007-2013), INTERREG V (2014-2020) was implemented. Bulgaria and Romania gained useful experience, and this is clear from the projects implemented during this period.

Specifically, 8 projects have been implemented under Priority Axis 1, and their total funding is worth EUR 96,450,935 million. Of these, 81,983,295 million euros are provided by the ERDF, and the national co-financing is 14,467,640 million euros.

Implemented projects under Priority axis 1 "Well-connected region" (2014-2020):

1. Project "Network for electric bicycles" - ROBG-1.
2. Connection to the Trans-European network through better connectivity of the tertiary nodes Turnu Magurele and Levski for sustainable development of the region - ROBG-127.
3. Bridges of time - An integrated approach to improve the sustainable use of the cross-border cultural heritage Nikopol-Turnu Magurele - ROBG-128.
4. Project "Study of the possibilities for reducing the use of the TEN-T network in the cross-border region Romania-Bulgaria by optimizing freight and passenger transport and developing a joint mechanism to support intermodal connections" - ROBG-2.
5. Development of the Danube River for a better connection of the Ruse-Giurgevo Euroregion with pan-European transport corridor No. 7 - ROBG-130.
6. Improved tertiary nodes Turnu Magurele – Nikopol for sustainable development of the region, for better connectivity to the TEN-T infrastructure - ROBG-132.
7. Increasing accessibility to TEN-T in the border area Negru - Voda - General Toshevo - ROBG-133.
8. Improving the connection of the Mangalia and Balchik tertiary nodes to the TEN-T infrastructure - ROBG-510.

Through the management and implementation of projects under Priority Axis 1, planning, development and coordination of cross-border transport systems is carried out to improve connections with the TEN-T transport network. The level of coordination regarding transport safety is increasing (<https://interregviarobg.eu/bg/interreg-projects/ROBG-127>). A network for electric bicycles has been created, the quays in Ruse and Gyurghevo have been rehabilitated, the navigation conditions along the Lower Danube have been improved, the street infrastructure has been modernized in Turnu Magurele, Negru Voda, Mangalia, Nikopol, General Toshevo, Kavarna, Balchik (<https://interregviarobg.eu/bg/interreg-projects/ROBG-133>).

A total of 49,301 people is served by modernized infrastructure leading to the TEN-T. 9 projects have been implemented under Priority Axis 2, and their total funding is worth EUR 63,454,562 million. Of these, 53,936,378 million euros are provided by the ERDF, and national co-financing is 9,518,184 million euros.

Implemented projects under Priority Axis 2 "Green Region" (2014-2020):

1. Education through "green school" as promotion of sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage and resources - ROBG-3.

2. What is the purpose? - ROBG-11.
3. The road of clay - ROBG-4.
4. 6 reasons to visit the cross-border region Mehedintsi - Vidin - ROBG-5;
5. Danube-a River with a rich history DARWLOH - ROBG-6;
6. Danube - I can hear you, I will not forget you, I can see you and I will remember you; I can rediscover you and I can understand you - ROBG-7;
7. Cross-border economy favorable for cultural and natural heritage in Romania and Bulgaria - ROBG-8.
8. Interactive visualization of the ancient Roman cultural heritage in the cross-border region between Bulgaria and Romania - ROBG-9.
9. Innovative and joint management of Natura 2000 sites in the Danube border region - ROBG-10.

By managing and implementing projects under Priority Axis 2, the protection and sustainable use of the natural and cultural heritage is improved and the possibility of sustainable management of ecosystems on both sides of the border is strengthened. A "Green School" has been established in Montana and a new tourist information center in Craiova (<http://greenschooleducation.eu/>). The condition of the Natura 2000 protected areas and wetlands along the Danube River from Vidin to Oryahovo has been studied (<https://interregviarobg.eu/bg/interreg-projects/ROBG-11>). A new tourist route "Clay Road" has been developed. The cultural, historical, and natural heritage was promoted in order to support cross-border investments in Natura 2000 sites (<https://interregviarobg.eu/bg/interreg-projects/ROBG-10>) and as an incentive for the creation and integration of tourist products and services. This also led to a significant increase in tourist visits to the border region.

6 projects have been implemented under Priority Axis 3, and their total funding is worth EUR 48,225,467 million. Of these, 40,991,647 million euros are provided by the ERDF, and the national co-financing is 7,233,820 million euros.

Implemented projects under Priority Axis 3 "Safe Region" (2014-2020):

1. Possibilities and interoperability for a joint Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border first intervention of a chemical-biological-radiological-nuclear-high-efficiency explosion" - ROBG-121.
2. Secure School Network - ROBG-20.
3. Public opposition in disaster situations - ROBG-21.
4. Development and adoption of a joint institutionalized partnership to manage the risk of excessive population of insects that affect public health and safety within the cross-border region Romania-Bulgaria - ROBG-22.
5. RISK for large-scale infrastructures - ROBG-23.
6. Project "Safety for our children" ROBG-461.

By managing and implementing projects under Priority Axis 3, joint risk management in the cross-border region has been improved (<https://interregviarobg.eu/bg/interreg->

projects/ROBG-21). Joint preventive partnerships have been implemented in flood protection measures, forest fire protection, as well as joint early warning and emergency response. As a result, over 4,770,000 people can benefit from risk management actions (<https://interregviarobg.eu/bg/interreg-projects/ROBG-461>).

9 projects have been implemented under Priority Axis 4, and their total funding is worth EUR 17,767,278 million. Of these, 15,102,186 million euros are provided by the ERDF, and the national co-financing is 2,665,092 million euros.

Implemented projects under Priority Axis 4 "Qualified and inclusive region" (2014-2020):

1. UCLM - Union for a Common Labor Market: an integrated approach to labor mobility within the cross-border region between Romania and Bulgaria - ROBG-131.
2. VISA - Cross-border labor mobility agency - ROBG-147.
3. Building a sustainable model and partner network to support employment and labor mobility - ROBG-140.
4. Cross-border virtual incubator to promote employment for organic farming, processing of biological products and related services - ROBG-141.
5. Development of an integrated and inclusive labor market at the cross-border level - ROBG-142.
6. Work Facilitation - Increasing the potential of unemployed women to find work in the cross-border region - ROBG-143.
7. Cross-border mixture for sustainable employment-centers in the fields of information technologies, tourism and agriculture - ROBG-144.
8. Romanian-Bulgarian Organic Entrepreneurial Network - ROBG-145.
9. Mechanism for cross-border cooperation in the field of social assistance at the multi-regional level Romania - Bulgaria - ROBG-150.

By managing and implementing projects under Priority Axis 4, an integrated cross-border region was created in terms of employment and workforce mobility. A significant number of initiatives have been implemented to activate workforce mobility in the cross-border region (<https://interregviarobg.eu/bg/interreg-projects/ROBG-140>).

The participants were introduced to the educational and training schemes to support cross-border youth employment, as well as the opportunities for higher and professional education in the cross-border area (www.sem-centres.eu). In this way, 234,607 people on both sides of the border gain access to joint employment initiatives.

2 projects have been implemented under Priority Axis 5, and their total funding is worth EUR 12,690,913 million. Of these, 10,787,276 million euros are provided by the ERDF, and the national co-financing is 1,903,637 million euros.

Implemented projects under Priority Axis 5 "Efficient Region" (2014-2020):

1. Program for cross-border improvement of regional administrations of Gyurghevo district and Ruse district - ROBG-136.

2. Boundless health through sports and cooperation - united in the fight against disease - ROBG-139.

By managing and implementing projects under Priority Axis 5, the capacity for cooperation and greater efficiency of public institutions within the cross-border region has increased. This enabled the preparation of an Integrated Strategy for Sustainable Energy Efficiency at the level of the Ruse - Gyurghevo region, in the field of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency (<https://interregviarobg.eu/bg/interreg-projects/ROBG-136>). Cross-border cooperation of public institutions in the field of healthcare was also strengthened (<https://interregviarobg.eu/bg/interreg-projects/ROBG-139>).

Priority axis 6 "Technical assistance" is financed to the value of EUR 19,914,970 million. Of these, 12,944,731 million euros are provided by the ERDF, and the national co-financing is 6,970,239 million euros. Its implementation was aimed at the effective and efficient implementation of the entire cross-border cooperation program.

Conclusion

The achieved results testify to the successful management and implementation of projects under INTERREG V-A Romania - Bulgaria 2014-2020. According to Bouzova, "in business, good means increasing the public or company good" (Bouzova 2022). In cross-border cooperation, the main priority can be the achievement of common good on both sides of the border. The good practices and successful initiatives implemented in the EU can also support the cross-border regions of the Balkan Peninsula. For Bulgaria and Romania, the concrete results of this cooperation are:

- Achieving long-term and more sustainable development of the peripheral cross-border regions in Bulgaria and Romania by means of an in-depth analysis of the current state of the border territories.
- Identification of the demographic and economic problems of the border territories.
- Solving problems related to infrastructure, ecology, preservation of cultural and historical heritage, employment, etc.
- Development of management policies with a focus on cross-border territories, considering the resources specific to the specific territories.
- Development of joint administrative services to support cross-border development, etc.

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