

PREMISES OF TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION IN THE GEOPARKS AREA AT THE EXTERNAL BORDER OF EU. THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE NORTHERN SECTOR OF THE ROMANIAN-UKRAINIAN BORDER¹

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Abstract. The extension of EU space towards the Eastern side of the continent implies identification of solutions and mechanisms for the interconnection of contiguous border systems, in sectors and fields that may represent the basic structure of crossbordering cooperation. Among these, environmental protection through natural parks that have a crossbordering extension may represent a solution for natural, anthropic and structure protection whose spatial manifestation can not be limited by a political decision and practically transposed in a state frontier. Setting a favourable framework for such a crossbordering system implies identification and interconnection with priority of the common legislative, administrative and human resources aspects. The external EU frontier correspondent to the interstatal Romanian-Ukrainian border offers the most favourable premises for delineation and implementation of such natural systems that may be superposed to the orographic units (in the Northern sector) or to those units modelled by Danube Delta and its meadow. Maramureșului Mountains Natural Park may represent a pioneerdom action in this ambit by its connection to Carpatica Biosphere Natural Park in the contiguous Ukrainian space, in the shape of a crossbordering geopark.

Keywords: romanian-ukrainian cross-border cooperation, geoparks, natural parks, external border of EU, borderland system

The territorial and political dynamic of the European space in general and of the EU in particular, at the transition of the two millennia, determined major changes of structural nature, especially in the areas where the external border of the EU was (re)charted. Whereas in the north, west and south of the continent the external border of the EU overlaps almost entirely the limits of the European mainland (except for Norway, Iceland, Gibraltar and Monaco), situation has become more complex in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Romania, a member of EU since 2007, has undergone important changes in this sense, especially as regards the role and the functions of the six sectors of border. Thus, from being state borders, some of them have become either sectors of the internal border of EU (the Romanian-Hungarian and the Romanian-Bulgarian sector), either external border of the EU (Romanian-Serbian, Romanian-Ukrainian, Romanian-Moldavian sector and that of the Black Sea). Of all these, the two sectors bordering Ukraine (as a result of the disappearance of the USSR), the northern one, predominantly land, and the eastern one, the Danube, can be considered as being the most dynamic as regards the frequent changes of their role and functions.

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The topic of this paper takes into discussion the forms of transboundary cooperation within the Romanian-Ukrainian sector regarding issues of preservation of the natural and anthropic heritage under the form of natural parks (geoparks) extended and administered at a transboundary level. Both the northern sector of border and the Danube border are located in natural areas of great importance as regards the necessity to protect the actual elements, among which the Carpathians mountainous area and the lower Danube area (including the Danube Delta) are of maximum importance, not only for the two countries but also at an international level. Thus, we shall try to identify the premises in favour, or not, of such measures, the elements of support derived from the legislative, administrative and political framework and furthermore, the practical solutions applied to an extremely complex area as regards the functionality of transboundary systems.

The legislative framework. Once a former member of the USSR, Ukraine gained its independence in 1991, year in which the diplomatic relations between Romania and this country started. (Romania was one of the first countries to acknowledge Ukraine's independence). Most of the period following 1991, the Romanian-Ukrainian diplomatic relations developed under a normal aspect, the only issues being those deriving from *“the heritage of absurd situations, set and shaped by the USSR, and taken over by Ukraine”* (Al. Ilies, 2003, pp.173). Numerous agreements and bilateral conventions were signed, among which (aspect of the present paper) of great importance being those referring to the *transboundary policy* (July 2003), *technical and scientifically cooperation* (1992), *management of the border-waters* (Galati, 1997; Law 16/1999); *Cooperation within the protected areas of the Danube Delta and the Lower Prut* (Bucharest, 2000, GD no. 1028/2003), *Declaration of the Ministries of the Environment from Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine regarding cooperation in the protection of the environment* (Budapest, 2000) etc (www.mae.ro). To these, we can add other series of conventions and agreements on environment ratified by Romania and having an impact on border areas and transboundary cooperation: *Convention on assessing the impact on environment within transfrontier framework* (ESPOO, 1991, ratified by Law no. 22/2001), *Convention on transfrontier effects of industrial accidents* (Helsinki, 1992, Law 92/2003), *Convention on protection of the world, cultural and natural heritage* (Decree 187/1990), *The Carpathian Convention* (Kiev, 2003; Law 389/2006; source: www.mae.ro). All these documents, to which we can add those with border effect within Romanian area (Law 215/2001 of local public administration, Chapter I “*counties, towns, cities and villages, by their administration, are allowed to associate themselves and participate to programmes and structures of transboundary cooperation*”) create a favourable framework to transboundary cooperation upon local initiative. Basically, as a result of a detailed analysis of what has been accomplished up to year 2007, we can consider that, within the Romanian-Ukrainian transboundary area only a small amount of projects of cooperation has reached a finalization, and most of those that have been done never left the desk drawer. Of a great relevance in this sense, are the achievements and projects financed within the Carpathian Euroregion (supported by the Carpathian Euroregion Fund) and the Upper Prut Euroregion).

The nature of borders. The border between Romania and Ukraine, in its actual form, existed formally under the socialist regime, but under the “*umbrella*” of the USSR. Basically, after the disintegration of the USSR and after the fifteen

member countries won their independence, Romania shares 649,4 km of common border with the new independent state Ukraine, on two sectors, a northern one, longer at 440,1 km and located alongside the land, and an eastern one, the Danube, constituted from a part of the river Danube (170,7 km), the northern branch Chilia and 38,6 km of the inter-state sea sector¹. In numerous classifications of the existing border and transboundary areas in specialized literature, an important criterion under the social, cultural and economic aspect is constituted by the degree of accessibility (M. Klimkiewicz, 2002, pp. 2). In the process of creation, protection and administration of the transboundary natural parks, this can become an important element of favourability/restriction. In both cases, the political factor, from national to local level, plays an important role in creating an administrative territorial and legislative framework in order to ensure a good functionality of such a measure, from bureaucratic point of view.

Among the numerous classifications existing in the specialized literature considering the border typology (R. Kleinschmager, 1993; R. Hartshorne; S.B. Jones, Glasnner etc, in Bodocan V, 1997) and in connection with the subject matter of the analysis, we shall focus and transpose in our study a classification of structural nature, known as morphological, as suggested by S.B. Jones, according to which the linear state border can be drawn having as support a route formed of: physical geographical elements (lines of crests, watersheds, thalweg, relief accidents etc), of anthropo-geographic nature (based on various characteristics and attributes of the human groups from the same area, such as: language, religion, culture, ethnical affiliation etc) and complexes (associated criteria either of physical-geographical nature or cultural; V. Bodocan 1997, Al. Ilieş 1998). Both physical-geographical elements and cultural ones, either individually or by association, lead to the characterization of those that form specific territorial subsystems, situated on both sides of the border and that, by association can constitute natural parks or functional geoparks (transboundary territorial systems) in transboundary system.

The northern sector of the Romanian-Ukrainian border. It can be characterized from geographical aspect as being one of the most complex border sectors that sectorially limits and defines the Romanian political space. As regards the transboundary cooperation characterized by the five steps suggested by C. Ricq (Branea D., 2001), only two of them have been accomplished: *the stage of information exchange* and that of *their centralization*. The third stage, that of *cooperation*, although existing at a euroregional level, is not doubled by a real functionality, but by a declarative and written one, whereas important factors such as local and regional authorities on both sides of the border refuse to take upon themselves the recommendations of the border consulting structures by real implementation of the principle of partnership. In order to carry out an operation focused on transboundary cooperation, it is important to get beyond the last stages, that of *harmonization of relations* (dominantly exploratory and seldom mutual action) and in the end that of a *real integration* identified in a territory via a functional system by taking into account two aspects: political-administrative and social-cultural.

The northern sector of the Romanian-Ukrainian border totalizes 440,1 km whose diversity of the border route is determined by the relief morphology

¹ The inter-state sea sector of border between Romania and Ukraine is not yet defined and accepted by either parties due to the dispute over the Snake Island and the adjacent territorial waters.

(altitudes of over 1800 m in Maramureș Mountains), the morphological features of the riverbeds (Tisa, Suceava, Siret etc), their transversal and longitudinal profiles, landscape variations, demographic and economical aspects etc. M. Foucher in his work „*Front et frontier*” distinguishes between four categories of routes, out of which three are present in the analyzed sector:

a.) *those that coincide with a hydrographic support.* In the sector under analysis, in the case of hydrographic support, based on the position of the hydrographic artery to the linear borderline, there are two types of routes (Al. Ilieș, 2003, p. 34): *transversal* with one section (the Siret) or with more sections (Tisa, Suceava etc) and *longitudinal* – in which case the borderline is charted on a support that coincides with the longitudinal profile of the hydrographic artery waterbed (Tisa - 64,627 km), Suceava (6,22 km, with two sectors) etc (table 1).

The hydrographic arteries showing the support of the northern sector route of the Romanian-Ukrainian linear state border

Source: Gr. Stamate, *Frontiera de Stat a României*, 1997; www.politiadefrontiera.ro; processing of the topographic maps, Al Ilieș; 2003, pp.35

Table 1

No	Sector	River	Longer (km)	No. sections	
				Total	Partly
1	Romanian-Ukrainean	Tur	0,516		1
2		Without name	0,516		1
3		Șirlău	0,195		1
4		Covasvar	0,861		1
5		Cahul	2,123		1
6		Egher	5,619		1
7		Bătarci	0,854		1
8		Batâr	0,731		1
9		Miceu	2,387		1
10		Tisa	64,627	2	
11		Norița	2,865		2
12		Baranova	0,762		1
13		Sărata	3,063		1
14		Semenciuc	2,578		1
15		Colebioara	1,751		1
16		Suceava	6,220		4
17		Without name	1,491		1
18		Bilca Mică	7,980		1
19		Prut	39,400	1	

In the matter of demarcation of some sectorial natural parks (superposed to some hydrographic basins) the elements shown in table 1 are determinative to no less than nineteen hydrographic basins (of various classes) totally or partially located within the Romanian-Ukrainian transboundary area that could constitute, based on scientific reasons, at least theoretically, the same number of territorial structures of the kind. It is, obviously, important to specify the existence of three major basins (Tisa, Siret and Prut) among which there are other sixteen basins of an inferior class, subordinated to those major three and that are in direct contact with the border as a support. To all these there is to be found other numerous hydrographic arteries positioned within the two border sectors, that do not come in direct contact with the border (see figure). The natural functionality of a hydrographic system can only be modified to a certain level, by mapping out a border within its area. Furthermore, in this case, where

a state border or an administrative limit transversally sections a hydrographic basin, two or more territorial-political subsystems are formed within the same natural system in a „subordinating” position of one to another based on their positioning in its inferior or superior part (see figure). In the matter of hydrographic basins/arteries sectioned longitudinally on the main axis, the influences and the „subordinating” relations are determined by the number and the flows of the lower rank emissaries’ tributary to the respective artery. A relevant example would be the situation appeared in 2000 (loss of goods, figure 4), as a result of an overflow of the river Tisa in the Romanian border area due to heavy rainfalls in the river sector (Black Tisa and White Tisa), located entirely in the Ukrainian area. From a functional point of view, a transboundary natural park may include in its area both categories, the elements on which it can be constituted being determinative as well as the involvement of the administrative and institutional structures on both sides of the border based on the principle of real partnership.



Fig. 1. The Romanian-Ukrainian border in the Maramureș Mountains
(foto M. Ilieș, 2001)



Fig. 2. The Romanian-Ukrainian border at The Tisa River
(Teceu Mic village, Maramureș)



Fig. 3 “The historical bridge” over Tisa, built at the transition of the two millennia to bind the Romanian border area to the Ukrainian one in the historical space of Maramureș on route Sighetu-Marmației – Slatina/Solotvino
(photo Al. Ilieș, 2002)

b.) those that are based on orographic elements (watersheds etc). The Romanian-Ukrainian sector is extremely diverse in this sense, being characterized by a large morphological diversity determined by the following natural units (the name corresponds to that existing in Romania): the Someșului Plain, the Oaș Mountains, the Maramureș Depression, the Maramureș Mountains, Obcinele Bucovinei, the Sucevei Plateau and the Moldovei Plain. As well as in the case of hydrographic basins, all these natural units can superpose within their limits, totally and partially, natural parks protected and administered in transboundary system.



a



b

Fig. 4. a and b. The damages resulted from overflows on the broad gauge railway on the route between Câmpulung la Tisa (Romania) and Teresva (Ukraine) (photo Al. Ilieș, 2002)

c.) those that follow or not discontinuities of demographic-structural nature (ethnic, confessional etc). In this case also, the ethnic component can be determinative in constituting structures of transboundary cooperation, if one takes into account that there are 220.000 Romanians part of the Ukrainian border administrative-territorial units whereas there are approximately 50.000 Ukrainians in the similar Romanian units.



Figure 4. c. Teceu Mic village (Maramureș).
Level of Water after the floods 2001, at the School Building.

The paper „*Frontiera de stat a României*” written by Grigore Stamate can be considered of an extreme relevance as regards its contents, describing and interpreting all the sectors that are part of the Romanian state border.

The administrative framework. If the setting out of some natural parks or geoparks is made, as a rule, based on natural limits that include in their territory (totally or partially) natural units, the territorial-administrative structures have an important role in their administration, being implicated in territorial participation, that can either be totally or partially. In accordance with figure 5 one can notice in the analysed sector the disfunctionalities resulting from the impossibility to compatibles the Ukrainian administrative-territorial structures (regions, districts, cities, urban and rural areas (and the component villages) and the Romanian ones (villages, towns, municipalities, counties and regions of development). This compatibilization is important especially as regards the establishment of functional frameworks, manageable administratively and is also important in the management of financial resources. The main characteristics whose balance is difficult to achieve are the surface and the number of inhabitants. In this sense, “....if population can be considered a variable element, the element of surface is characterized by constancy, therefore resulting an asymmetric transboundary system, with a part more extended to the Ukrainian sector...” (Al. Ilieș, 2003, p.; figure 5). The Romanian border counties, as regards the surface, are located between the Ukrainian regions and districts. Furthermore, if we consider a transboundary territorial system where the Ukrainian regions can compatibilize with Romanian regions of development, the system would also by asymmetric, but with more area and population to the Romanian side.

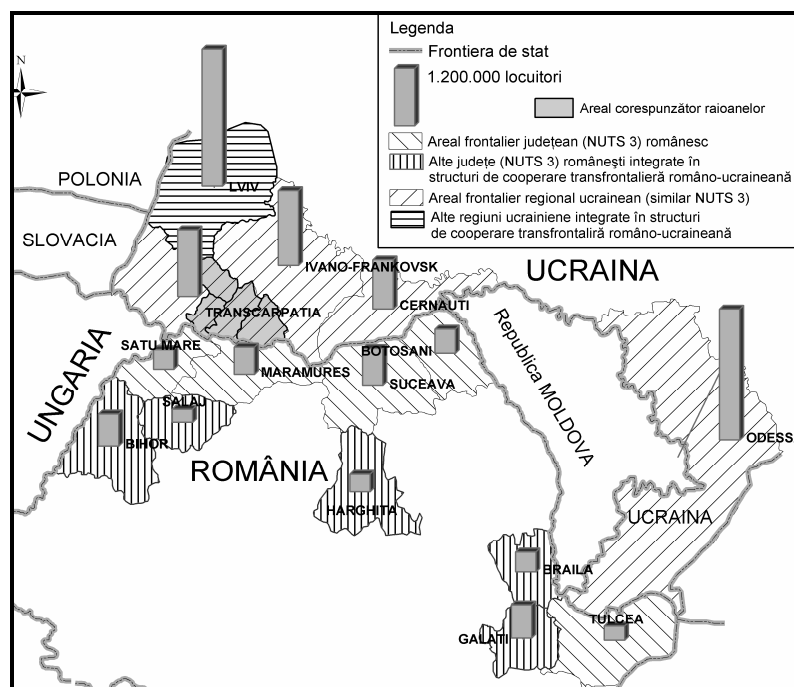


Fig. 5 Romanian and Ukrainian administrative-territorial units of NUTS 3 type (counties and regions) integrated in structures of transboundary cooperation between Romania and Ukraine and their demographic potential up to 2002
Al. Ilieș, 2003, pp 105.

Territorial-administrative units from Ukrainian borderland contiguous with Romania

Source: 1989 USSR and 1991 Ukrainian Census

Table 2

No	region	Surface (km ²)	Population			Density in 2001 (loc/km ²)	Capital / Residence	No inhabitants (2001)
			1989	2001	2001 in comparatio n with 1989 (%)			
1	Transcarpatia/ Zakarpathia	12.800	1.252.300	1.258.300	104,7	98,3	Ujgorod	117.317
2	Ivano - Frankovsk	13.900	1.423.500	1.409.800	99,9	101,4	Ivano-Frankivsk	218.000
3	Cernăuți	8.100	938.000	922.800	98,4	113,9	Cernăuți	241.000
4	Odesa	33.300	2.642.600	2.469.000	93,5	74,1	Odesa	1.029.000
	TOTAL	68.100	6.256.400	6.059.900	96,9	89,0		

In the same context, the degree of border penetrability plays an important role in the development of transboundary cooperation, respectively the number of border checkpoints and the restrictions regarding the actual border crossing policy between Romania and Ukraine. By including the Romanian-Ukrainian border sector in the external border of the EU, the freedom to cross borders is limited and restricted to a great extent, inclusively for the population resident in border areas. The way in which visa policy has alternated is relevant:

visa-free crossing (1990-2004), visa (2004-to the present) and its high price (over 150 USD for one entrance in 2007). Table 3 shows the actual border checkpoints in the analyzed sector (figure 3b), mentioning that part of them, especially those from Maramureş sector, are characterized by a low degree of functionality determined by repeated periods of closing/opening.

Romania. State border checkpoints. Types and characteristics as of 2003

Source: Romanian border police, 2003

Table 3

No	Localities	Administrative Units (NUTS III)	Type of crossing way
1	SIRET - Stârcea	Suceava – Cernăuți	-road
2	Vișșani - Bahrinivka		-railway
3	Climăuți – Bila Krinita		- road
4	VICOVU DE SUS - KRASNIOLSK		- road
5	Ulma - Rusca		- road
6	Izvoarele Sucevei - Șipot		- road
7	Valea Vișșului - Dilove	Maramureș - Transcarpatia	- railway
8	SIGHETU MARMĂTIEI – SLATINA/SOLOTVINO		- road
9	Câmpulung la Tisa - Teresva		- railway
10	Tarna Mare- Tarna Mică/Khyzha	Satu Mare - Transcarpatia	- road
11	Halmeu - Diakovo		- road - railway

Measures with transboundary impact on the creation of geoparks. As mentioned before, although seventeen years have passed since the fall of communism (when transboundary cooperation functioned under different terms and it was a decision imposed and under the strict observation of authorities), the projects started and finalized in the area of natural and anthropic heritage protection under the form of geoparks are still in a pioneerdom stage. Considering the conditions generated by its role as external border of the EU and NATO, hence the bureaucratic difficulties in the management of some transboundary structures, there are two steps in the Romanian-Ukrainian sector:

1. A first step is to implement the projects so as to a national level (separately in Romania and Ukraine)
2. The second step is to interconnect two or more border structures constituted on similar principles and intentions.

The most favourable situation would be that in which a transboundary project starts based on a common transboundary plan, but former attempts in this area have proven that, in the Romanian-Ukrainian sector, it is still impossible to eliminate the stage of “mirroring” projects before initiating a common transboundary plan.

The situation of the National Park in the Maramureș Mountains (NPMM), constituted in border area and determined by the limits of the homonymic mountainous natural unit is relevant in this sense. Officially, this came into being in 2004 as a result of HG 2151 regarding the constitution of protected area policy for new areas. The purpose of creating such a park was “to maintain the harmonious interaction between man and nature by protecting the diversity of habitats and landscape, by promoting the preservation of traditional usage of land, to encourage and consolidate the activities, the customs and the traditional culture of the locals. It also gives the public the chance for

entertainment and tourism and the scientific activities are encouraged” (Info bulletin no. 1, 2005).

The route of the Romanian-Ukrainian border that follows to a great extent the line of the high peaks in this mountainous unit is also, at present, the northern limit of the Park, aspect which confirms that real transboundary cooperation characterized by functionality is only at its pioneerdom stage. A state border should be the limit of a park especially if its purpose is to protect natural areas and preserve natural landscapes, anthropic or mixed, because the ground rules for the functionality of natural systems are different from those governing the administrative-political structures. Still, as mentioned before, under such circumstances, creating the NPMM is only the first step of a project that takes into account the creation of an extended transboundary park of the Maramureș Mountains (figure 6).

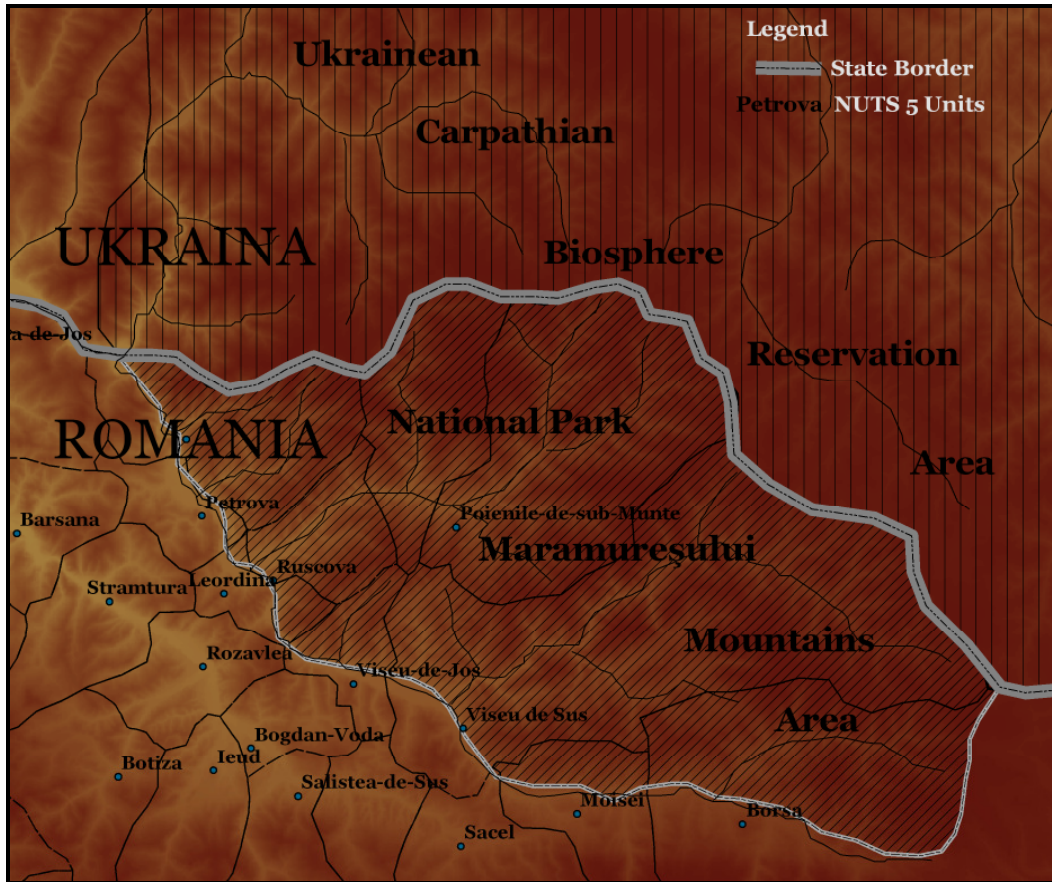


Fig. 6 Natural Park of Maramureș Mountains (Romania) and carpathian Biosphere Reservation (Ukraine) possible Crossborder Natural Park

The administrative framework is insured by “*forty-nine institutions, authorities and local communities that own by any title areas inside the Park*” (B.I., nr 4/2007). Figure 6 is representative for the way in which the territorial-administrative structures are implicated and the border positioning favourable to a transboundary initiative.

The Carpathians Biosphere Reservation, located in the Ukrainian mountainous area, is part of the same category as NPMM as regards the suggested aim and objectives. In order to reach the second stage, that of creating a transboundary park, it is important to continue the measures taken as of February 2007 when the first meeting between the representatives of the two structures took place.

Conclusions. The superposing of state border with hydrographic arteries, watersheds etc highlights the fact that in most of these situations the political decision did not always coincide with the reasoning derived from the perfection of mechanisms that determine the functionality of natural systems. Furthermore, not even one administrative-political system, at least up to now, based on ongoing experiments, understood the necessity to „decode” the mechanisms that ensure the functionality of determinant natural systems, of the degrees of subordination and interaction of those situated on both sides of the border, so that they can create in their turn anthropic systems (administrative-territorial) with a high level of functionality and with the possibility of rapid and efficient intervention when it comes to manage emergency situations (hazards) or to capitalize in common elements of heritage (parks/geoparks). Of course, the political conjuncture, the interests of some state structures during certain historical periods, the debates and the treaties signed by them did not have determinative elements as those mentioned above, but for the case of elaborating offensive and defensive military strategies. At present, following the extension of the EU, the development of partnerships between EU and European non-EU countries, the continuous change of the role of the EU borders, the promotion and capitalization of several transboundary natural structures, manageable based on real partnerships can become realities even in the contact zones of various and contiguous territorial-political systems. The Romanian-Ukrainian border, in its northern sector, represents, unfortunately, an example of lack of cooperation, of tightness of the border systems, of deepening the discrepancies between the peripheral areas and their own center on one hand and depending on contiguity on the other hand.

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