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Cooperation between EU cities and regions with their Ukrainian partners

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Cooperation between EU cities and regions with their Ukrainian partners

Abstract

The development of territorial cooperation between European and Ukrainian local and regional authorities is an important step toward Ukraine's membership in the EU. This study presents the benefits of and barriers to the collaboration between European and Ukrainian cities and regions and shows the role of the EU programmes and instruments in supporting territorial cooperation. It suggests solutions that can promote cooperation between cities and regions and describes their potential to strengthen the capacities of self-governments and to support civil society in Ukraine.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEBR	Association of European Border Regions
AER	Assembly of European Regions
ALDA	European Association for Local Democracy
BSB	Black Sea Basin
CBC	Cross-Border Cooperation
CEEC	Central and Eastern European Countries
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CLARE	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
CMA	Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea
CoE	Council of Europe
CoM	Covenant of Mayors
CoR	Committee of the Regions
CPMR	Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions
DCSF	Danube Civil Society Forum
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EC	European Commission
EGTC	European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
EU-UA	European Union-Ukraine

HU-SK-RO-UA	Hungary – Slovakia – Romania – Ukraine
IDI	Individual In-depth Interview
INTPA	International Partnership and Development Policy
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
LRA	Local and Regional Authorities
M4EG	Mayors for Economic Growth
MCTD	Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine
MS	Member States
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGG	Partnership for Good Governance
PL-UA-BY	Poland – Ukraine – Belarus
RO-UA	Romania – Ukraine
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange
TC	Territorial Cooperation
U-LEAD	Ukraine – Local Empowerment, Accountability, and Development Programme
SIGMA	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

- Twinning agreements of cities and regions of Ukraine with their EU counterparts is a manifestation of the Europeanisation of the EU's eastern neighbour, and its ever-growing importance, especially in the context of the Russian invasion.
- Geography shapes territorial cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. The cooperation of cities and regions is better developed with neighbouring countries, and the western regions of Ukraine are more strongly involved than are eastern ones.
- European funds enhance the development of territorial cooperation with Ukraine, although so far primarily in border areas. The EU-funded programmes and initiatives also play an important role in Ukraine's decentralisation processes.
- Ukrainian partners are so far weakly involved in transnational cooperation at the macro-regional level, and Ukraine is not covered by EU interregional programmes.
- The benefits of territorial cooperation between cities and regions in EU-Ukraine relations include intangible effects such as building institutional capacity, knowledge sharing, and community and trust building, as well as – however to a smaller degree – tangible effects related to infrastructure development and improved provision of services to residents.
- The partnerships with European cities and regions have facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression, and could provide a basis for supporting Ukraine's post-war reconstruction.

In 2022, Ukrainian cities had more than 1,000 twinning agreements with foreign partners, while authorities at the regional and district levels had signed nearly 350 such agreements. Territorial cooperation was implemented primarily with local and regional authorities (LRA) from EU countries, and their share in the total number of agreements was over 70%. The dynamics of territorial cooperation with the EU was increasing and related to the geopolitical situation, especially the Russian aggression that began in 2014. The decentralisation reform in Ukraine, as carried out in 2020, reduced the growth of new agreements (which was also compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic) due to the need for new self-governments, especially districts, to solidify. As a result, there is considerable room for new twinning agreements, including at the local level, as more than half of Ukraine's smaller cities have not formalised international cooperation.

The cooperation of Ukrainian cities and regions with European partners is best developed in neighbourly relations, which, in addition to geographical proximity, is influenced, among other things, by cultural proximity. As a result, by far the largest number of agreements that Ukrainian cities and regions have concluded is with Polish partners. In second place, twinning agreements were signed with cities and regions located in other Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), especially with neighbouring countries Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania, but the shares of Lithuania, Czechia, Bulgaria, and Germany were also significant. Agreements with other European Union countries were much less frequent, and among them most were concluded with French and Italian LRAs.

The territorial cooperation of Ukrainian cities and regions was very strongly differentiated regionally. Significantly more twinning agreements were concluded by LRAs located in the western and central parts of the country, particularly in border regions, as well as in the vicinity of the capital region (albeit

with exceptions). In contrast, cities and regions located in the eastern part of the country were much less involved in territorial cooperation, especially at the local level.

The involvement of Ukrainian LRAs in the activities of European organisations comprised of cities and regions in quantitative terms (i.e., the number of Ukrainian members) is relatively low. To a greater extent, Ukrainian cities and regions have participated in Euroregional cooperation, which in general has been relatively well-developed – at least in formal terms – in CEECs. The importance of this is manifested by the establishment of the first EGTC on the external border of the European Union between Hungary and Ukraine.

Cross-border cooperation programmes have been a stable form of supporting territorial cooperation between EU countries and Ukraine dating back to 2004's EU enlargement. About EUR 370 million were allocated for the CBC programmes that covered Ukraine in the 2014-2020 programming period, which allowed the implementation of about 270 projects with Ukrainian partners worth 240 million EUR. The level of allocation for the CBC Programmes with Ukraine has been maintained in the current financial perspective. The LRAs' participation in the implementation of these programmes was significant and growing, especially at the local level. The allocation of funds to beneficiaries in the EU and neighbouring countries was balanced, but European partners act as project leaders more often (65%).

In contrast, the possibility was limited for Ukrainian partners to participate in transnational cooperation programmes, as only four regions of Ukraine were covered by the Danube Transnational Programme, which included a total of 14 countries covered by the macro-regional strategy. As a result, Ukraine had a small share in this programme both in terms of the number of projects (c.a. 10%) and budget (c.a. 1%). In addition, Ukrainian LRAs were not covered by European interregional cooperation programmes such as Interreg Europe, URBACT, INTERACT, or ESPON.

In addition to territorial cooperation programmes, there are also a number of programmes and initiatives within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy supporting decentralisation processes in Ukraine that promote knowledge transfer and cooperation at different administrative levels (e.g. U-LEAD with Europe). Other initiatives within the Eastern Partnership also involve Ukrainian LRAs in territorial cooperation, as with energy transition (Covenant of Mayors-East) and economic development (Mayors for Economic Growth). Territorial cooperation is also indirectly supported by EU horizontal programmes on scientific cooperation, youth and student exchanges, the cultural sector, as well as environmental protection and climate change.

Despite the evaluations of individual programmes, due to the diversity of territorial cooperation, it is difficult to point to cross-sectional and comprehensive studies on the effects of cooperation between EU cities and regions and their Ukrainian partners. Nevertheless, it can be noted that cooperation brings significant intangible benefits in the form of growing mutual trust, know-how transfer, and improving institutional capacity, among other matters. These intangible effects are the prerequisite for more substantial, e.g. investment projects related i.a. to connectivity, environmental protection, and quality of life.

Territorial cooperation between the European Union and Ukraine faces a number of barriers related to infrastructural, legal and institutional, economic, financial, social, and physical issues, the most important of which – besides financial – seem to be those related to the administrative-legal, institutional, and socio-cultural spheres. Also, the implementation of projects financed by European funds is fraught with problems including the mismatch between the size of funds and the needs, along with the lack of adequate know-how on procedures and other administrative and legal barriers.

Assessing the prospects for further development of the EU's territorial cooperation with Ukraine, it should be noted that the Russian aggression against Ukraine launched on February 24, 2022 is, on the

one hand, a major setback due to the ongoing hostilities – but on the other hand, it creates opportunities to renew previous partnership relations, as well as to establish new ones. Indeed, these ties can be useful not only in providing humanitarian aid, as they can also meaningfully contribute to post-war reconstruction. European organisations of European cities and regions, including those participating in the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, can play an important role in this process.

Territorial cooperation between the EU and the Ukraine can release additional potential for strengthening the administrative capacities of Ukrainian LRAs, especially through peer learning processes, best-practice exchange, and benchmarking. The LRAs from the EU can support their Ukrainian counterparts in the further democratisation of society, with the goal of bringing Ukraine closer to EU standards. There is a potential in new partnerships between local and regional governments for supporting civil society in Ukraine via developing the tools of social participation and direct involvement of the community in projects being implemented.

Based on the research, the following policy recommendations can be proposed at the strategic level: (1) it is necessary to support existing and new twinning agreements between cities and regions of EU countries and Ukraine (2) the development of territorial cooperation with Ukrainian local governments operating in the eastern part should be pursued, also with the involvement of LRAs from more EU countries than hitherto (3) it is necessary to strengthen Ukraine's transnational cooperation and enable Ukrainian stakeholders to participate in European interregional cooperation programmes (4) the coordination of ongoing territorial cooperation should be supported, including the search for synergies between trans-border and horizontal EU programmes (5) it is necessary to continue efforts to break down the various barriers to territorial cooperation, especially those of an administrative and legal nature (e.g. twinning and TAIEX), institutional (e.g. transparency and the rule of law), as well as socio-cultural (e.g. youth exchanges, foreign language skills) (6) it is necessary to adequately address the role of local governments and territorial cooperation in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction programmes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Territorial cooperation can be understood as a form of governance that transcends state borders and is carried out by sub-national actors – mainly local and regional authorities (LRA) – but also non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders (Scott 2013; Medeiros 2018). We may distinguish between cross-border (CBC) and inter-territorial cooperation. The former refers to joint activities of sub-national actors from countries that neighbour one another across a common border. Inter-territorial cooperation means the collaboration of sub-national actors that do not directly border one another, including the participation of LRAs in international organisations, associations, and institutions (Sienkiewicz 2021). A specific form of cooperation combining features of these two is transnational cooperation, which takes place within geographical macro-regions linking several or more countries (Sielker, Rauhut 2018).

Territorial cooperation takes place not only within the European Union but also in relations with neighbouring countries, especially those covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy, Ukraine being one of the most important examples. The country's long-standing aspirations for EU membership manifested, inter alia, by the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014 led to the conclusion of an Association Agreement in 2014 and the granting of EU candidate status to Ukraine on 23 June 2022 (Box 1).

Box 1: Background for territorial cooperation between EU and Ukraine

1991: Declaration of independence by Ukraine, August 24

1997: Ukraine's Ratification of the European Charter of Local Self-Government of the Council of Europe

2004-2005: "Orange revolution" in Ukraine

2008: Visa facilitation and EU-Ukraine readmission agreements

2013-2014: "Revolution of dignity" protest against the decision not to sign a political association and free trade agreement with the European Union

2014: Annexation of Crimea and seizure of parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions by Russia and the pro-Kremlin separatists

2014: The conclusion of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement

2014-2015: Start of decentralisation reforms in Ukraine

2017: Regulation on visa liberalisation for Ukrainian citizens

2020: Next stage of decentralisation reforms in Ukraine – approval of community territories and reorganisation of rayons

2022: Russian invasion of Ukraine, February 24

2022: Ukraine granted EU candidate status, June 23

Source: own elaboration based on Horbliuk, Brovko 2022; Khymynets et al. 2021.

Ukraine's European aspirations were linked to the implementation of decentralisation reforms aimed at strengthening local and regional self-governments. These began in 2014 and, among other things, resulted in the introduction in 2015 of the possibility of merging self-governments at the local level (territorial communities), which was unified with the introduction in 2020 of 1,470 community self-

government centres and the defining of their administrative boundaries. In addition, the district level was reformed in 2020 by introducing 126 new self-governing districts instead of 476 districts and 174 separate cities (leaving the administrative division in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea of 14 districts and 11 separate cities unchanged). As a result, in 2022 in Ukraine, in addition to the regional level comprising 24 oblasts, 2 separate cities (Kyiv and Sevastopol), and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, there were 140 at the sub-regional level (119 operate under the control of the Ukrainian authorities) and 1,469 territorial communities at the local level.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine begun on February 24, 2022, preceded by the illegal annexation of Crimea and the seizure of parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014, in addition to the suffering of millions of civilian inhabitants, led to massive war damage valued at USD 339 billion already by June 2022 (World Bank et al. 2022). The European Union, in addition to condemning Russia for its unprovoked and unjustified invasion, is carrying out a number of ad hoc activities in support of Ukraine, as well as preparing for its post-war reconstruction process. European cities and regions can participate in these activities and reconstruction. Existing and new partnership agreements with Ukrainian LRAs can be used for this purpose, as well as the experience of existing territorial cooperation, including through EU-funded programmes.

Thus the aim of this study is to provide an analysis of the past experiences and future potential and opportunities for the cooperation of EU local and regional authorities with their Ukrainian partners. The study consists of four main parts:

- Chapter 2 describes bottom-up twin town/regional partnerships, as well as cooperation, carried out at the European level within the framework of European associations and networks of LRAs, and at the regional level within the framework of cross-border Euroregional cooperation.
- Chapter 3 provides an overview of the current EU instruments and programmes for supporting territorial cooperation with Ukrainian partners. In particular it addresses the different types of Interreg programmes, macro-regional strategies, along with European Neighbourhood Policy and selected other actions and initiatives.
- Chapter 4 presents benefits, encountered obstacles, and selected good practices of territorial cooperation including cross-border cooperation, Euroregions, and twin-cities partnerships based on the literature review and interviews with a few European and Ukrainian stakeholders.
- Chapter 5 is focused on future opportunities and obstacles for the cooperation of European cities and regions with their partners from Ukraine. It takes into account the potential of such cooperation for strengthening the administrative capacities of Ukrainian local and regional authorities and of support for civil society in Ukraine.

The final section of the study presents the main conclusions and a set of policy recommendations for EU policy-makers regarding future programmes/actions that the EU could undertake to support territorial cooperation with Ukraine as well as to increase the capabilities of Ukrainian local/regional authorities.

The study is based on official documents and a review of the scientific literature as well as a limited number of interviews with stakeholders at the European level as well as with Ukrainian partners in territorial cooperation. On the other hand, it uses a broad set of data: a) the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine dataset on international partnership agreements of local and regional authorities supplemented by Wikipedia information of twin-cities agreements and b) data extracted from the online "Keep-EU" database on territorial cooperation (project and beneficiaries),

supplemented by information from official webpages on institutions involved in territorial cooperation. These allow for the elaboration of a number of maps and figures that illustrate geographical directions and variations in the scale of territorial cooperation between EU and Ukraine local and regional partners as well as for a comparison of different territorial units and programmes.

The study concerns the EU as a whole and its Member States and regions as well as all the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. However, only the cooperation of the legal local and regional authorities of Ukraine was included in the research.

2. BOTTOM-UP EU-UA COOPERATION AT THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

KEY FINDINGS

- The development of territorial cooperation between European and Ukrainian partners was linked to Ukraine's EU aspirations and manifested by the dynamics and direction of twinning agreements concluded.
- There are significant geographical variations in cooperation between the Ukrainian LRAs on an east-west axis, with much greater involvement in bottom-up cooperation by authorities located in the western part of the country, in which EU territorial cooperation programmes may also play a role.
- The geographical and cultural determinants of bottom-up territorial cooperation between European and Ukrainian cities and regions are strong, with Poland being the dominant partner for this cooperation and other neighbouring EU countries being among the most important partners.
- Economic-financial potential in combination with transport accessibility is an important determinant of twinning between European and Ukrainian cities.
- The membership of Ukrainian LRAs in the international organisations bringing together cities and regions is relatively low.
- European LRAs are active in terms of providing support to Ukrainian partners in relation to the challenges of decentralisation reforms and Russian aggression towards Ukraine.
- Cross-border cooperation in the form of Euroregions and the only EGTC on the EU's border with a third country on Ukraine's western and southern borders are being developed.

2.1. Twin-cities and regional partnerships cooperation

Territorial cooperation between local and regional authorities in different countries can take many forms. The oldest of these are twinning arrangements that are referred to as twin town/cities in Europe and sister cities in the USA (Clarke 2011). The origins of this cooperation in Europe dates back, according to some sources, to the 19th century and, according to others, to the 1920s (Furmakiewicz 2005). However, it was not until after the Second World War that such initiatives became widespread, linked to post-war reconstruction and the start of Europe's integration process. The subsequent creation and strengthening of regional self-government in individual countries (Keating 2009) made it possible to establish international partnerships at this level of administration as well.

Twinning agreements between cities are generally bottom-up initiatives, ones often resulting from the personal contacts of local government leaders (Furmankiewicz 2005). The development of this form of territorial cooperation is also encouraged by international organisations, including the European Union's institutions and bodies, as well as European organisations/associations of local and regional governments. As a result, this form of territorial cooperation has become very widespread on the European continent. A 2011 study for the ESPON area countries (EU and EEG countries) identified around 16,000 cities involved in twinning at the local level (Płoszaj 2013). Another study from 2006

conducted in 35 countries indicated the existence of 17,000 twinning arrangements involving at least 2 sub-regional governments, among which 296 Ukrainian LRAs were included (CERM 2007). Discrepancies in the estimates of the number of partnership agreements are due to the lack of standardised official data sources. It should also be borne in mind that not all concluded agreements turn into active and/or permanent cooperation, and according to some estimates, only 1/3 of the total agreements may meet such criteria (IDI_2).

Two main sources of information were used to study the cooperation of local and regional governments of the European Union countries and Ukrainian partners, and they were integrated for the purpose of this analysis (Annex 1): (a) the register of Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine (MCTD), (b) the list of international cooperation of Ukrainian cities from Wikipedia that was created on the basis of the check which places in Ukraine have standing links to local communities in other countries known as "town twinning" (usually in Europe) or "sister cities" (usually in the rest of the world).

2.1.1. Scale and intensity of cooperation

Twinning agreements in Ukraine were concluded at both the local level (mainly the city level) and the regional (oblasts) and sub-regional/district (rayons) levels. The number of twinning agreements between Ukrainian cities and foreign partners was approximately three times higher than those concluded at the regional and sub-regional levels. This was due to the fact that such agreements could potentially be concluded by 461 Ukrainian cities, compared to the 24 oblasts and 140 rayons that operate in Ukraine after the administrative reform of 2020. Based on the available data it can be concluded that approximately one-third of Ukrainian cities had foreign partnership agreements in place. In addition, according to the MCTD register, at least 24 settlements with village status and 10 amalgamated territorial communes have also established international contacts.

Almost all Ukrainian cities with more than 250,000 inhabitants participated in territorial cooperation (Table 1), though formalised international contacts were also established by around half of the medium-sized cities (50-100,000 inhabitants) and around 40% of small cities (over 20,000 inhabitants). On the other hand, only 15% of smaller urban centres were involved in this form of cooperation, which was due to a number of barriers related not only to the availability of finances and staff, but often also to the peripheral location making it difficult to establish international contacts. In addition, larger cities, due to their economic and financial potential, tended to conclude more twinning agreements than smaller urban centres. On average, cities with a population of 100,000 or more maintained contact with around 10 foreign partners, while smaller cities had only five partners. On the other hand, in per capita terms, cooperation was more intensive in small urban centres with 1 agreement for every 5,000 inhabitants, while in medium and large cities there was 1 agreement for about 10,000 inhabitants, and in metropolises and the remaining largest cities 1 agreement per 50,000 inhabitants. To some extent, this may have been due to the peculiarities of smaller towns, some of which were important tourist destinations, which fact favoured their international contacts.

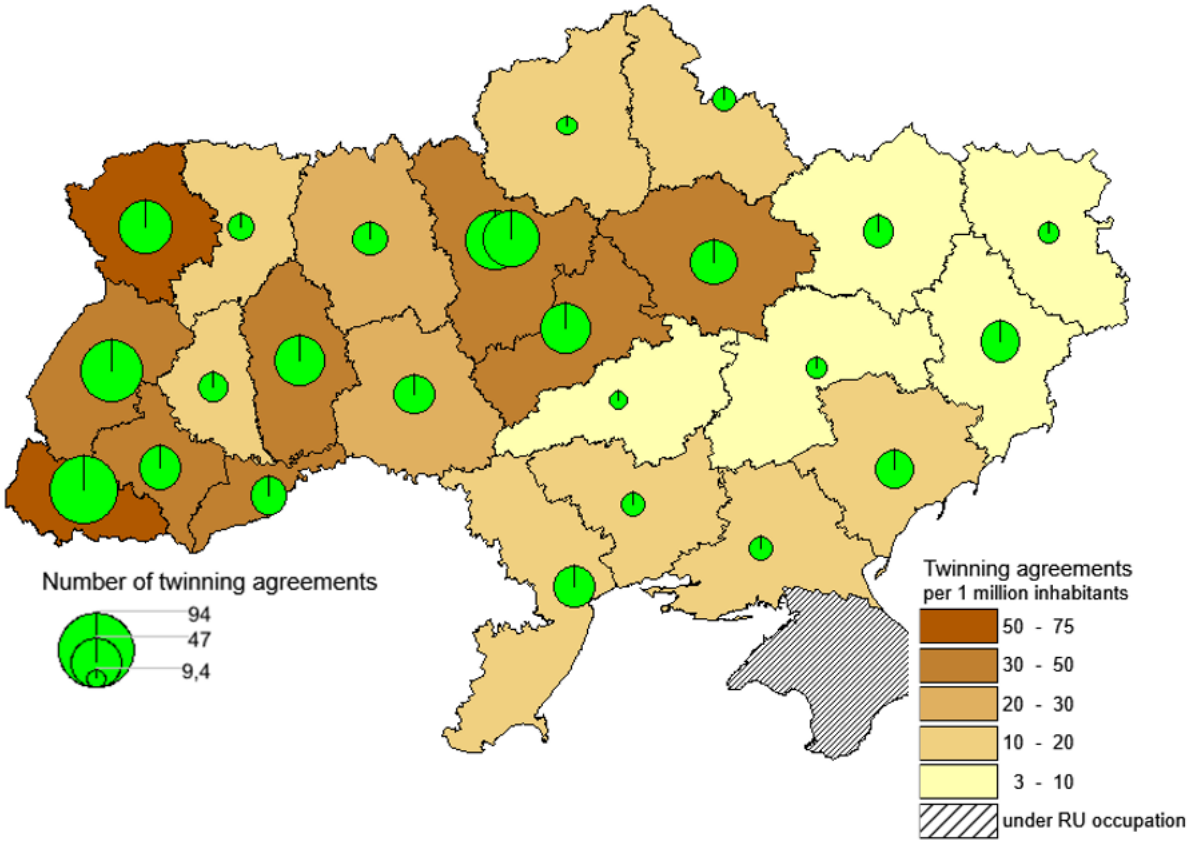
Table 1: Ukrainian cities with twinning arrangements in 2022

City size (thousand inhabitants)	Number of cities – total	Number of cities with agree-ments	% of total	Number of agree-ments	Share %	Number of inhabitants (thousands) per agree-ment	Average number of partners
Metropolis (700 and more)	7	7	100.0	161	15.1	54.1	23.0
Very large city (250-700)	18	15	83.3	100	9.4	50.1	6.7
Large city (100-250)	20	17	85.0	212	19.9	13.9	12.5
Medium city (50-100)	56	26	46.4	163	15.3	10.5	6.3
Small city (20-50)	113	43	38.1	216	20.2	6.2	5.0
Town (less than 20)	244	47	19.3	170	15.9	3.3	3.6

Source: own elaboration.

City twinning was clearly more developed in the regions of western and central Ukraine (Map 1). This was particularly the case in the five UA regions bordering EU countries, i.e. Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania (with the exception of the Odesa Oblast, where the number of agreements in relation to the number of inhabitants was lower). Foreign contacts of cities located in the adjacent regions i.e. constituting the second border strip (Rivne and Ternopil oblasts) were less intensive, but e.g. Khmelnytskyi oblast was an exception to this rule. Territorial cooperation, on the other hand, was well developed in Kyiv and the cities of Kyiv oblast, as well as in the neighbouring Cherkasy and Poltava regions, but not Chernihiv oblast. In this group of regions, the intensity of territorial cooperation may have been somewhat influenced by the location of Ukraine's largest airport: in Kyiv. In contrast, foreign territorial cooperation was generally weaker in the regions of southern and eastern Ukraine. The relatively strongest – especially in relation to population – cooperation was developed in the Odesa, as well as Zaporozhye and Kherson regions.

Map 1: Territorial cooperation of Ukrainian cities, breakdown by regions, 2022

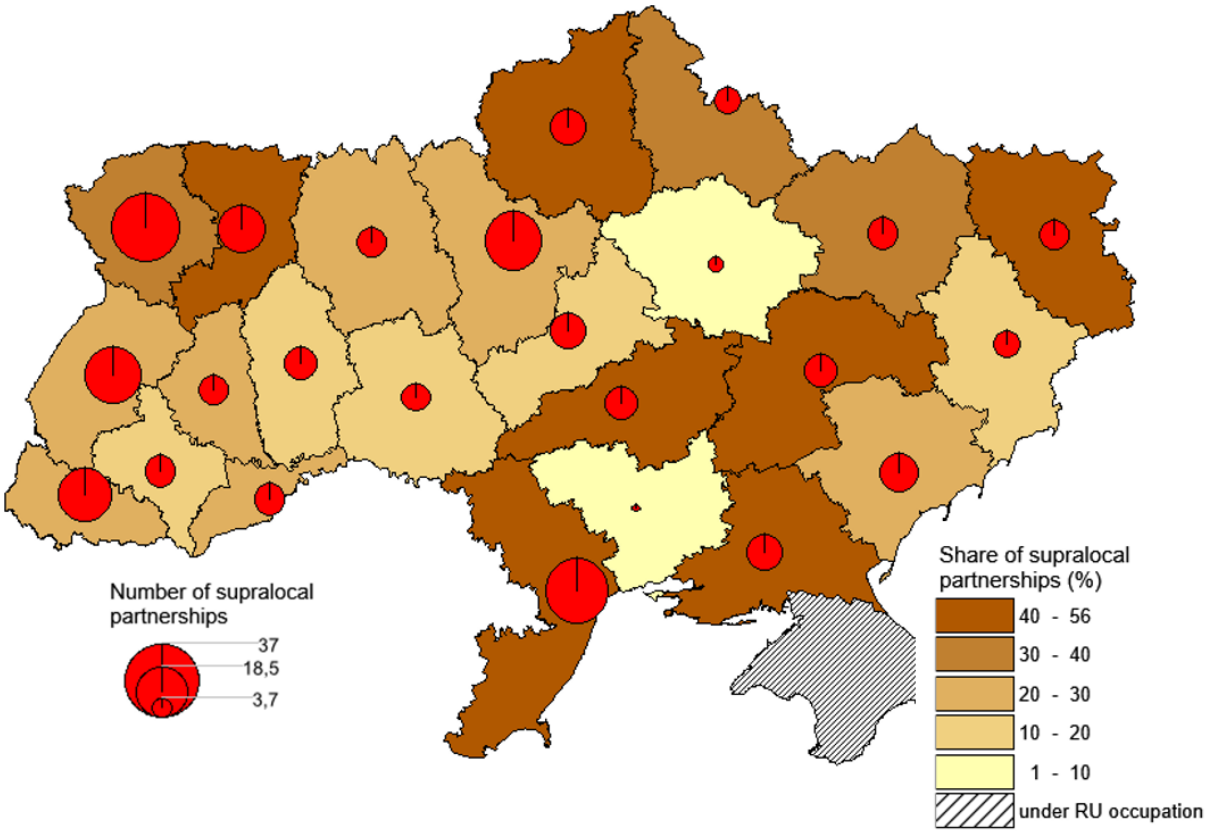


Source: own elaboration.

The Ukrainian authorities had 265 foreign partnership agreements concluded at the regional level and 73 at the sub-regional level in 2022. The prevalence of the regional level over the sub-regional level is due, among other things, to the significant reduction in the number of rayons under the 2020 administrative reform from 490 to 140, which resulted in the expiry of existing agreements. At the same time, it is to be expected that the territorial cooperation activity of the newly created/reformed self-government units will increase over time.

The scale of territorial cooperation of supra-local level authorities, measured by the number of partnership agreements concluded, was comparable in some Ukrainian regions to aggregate cooperation at the local level (Map 2). This was especially visible in regions located in the south-eastern part of the country. In particular, numerous twinning agreements were concluded by the authorities of the Odesa region, and on the local level also the Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovohrad, and Luhansk regions. The less developed territorial cooperation at the local level in the Rivne and Chernihiv regions also made the importance of regional and sub-regional authorities in international contacts significant. In absolute numbers, however, particularly many agreements at the supra-local level were concluded by the authorities of the three regions bordering Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary, i.e. Volyn, Lviv, and Zakarpattia, as well as the authorities of the capital city-region. In contrast, very few agreements with foreign partners were signed in the Mykolaiv and Poltava regions.

Map 2: Territorial cooperation of Ukrainian regions and sub-regions, 2022

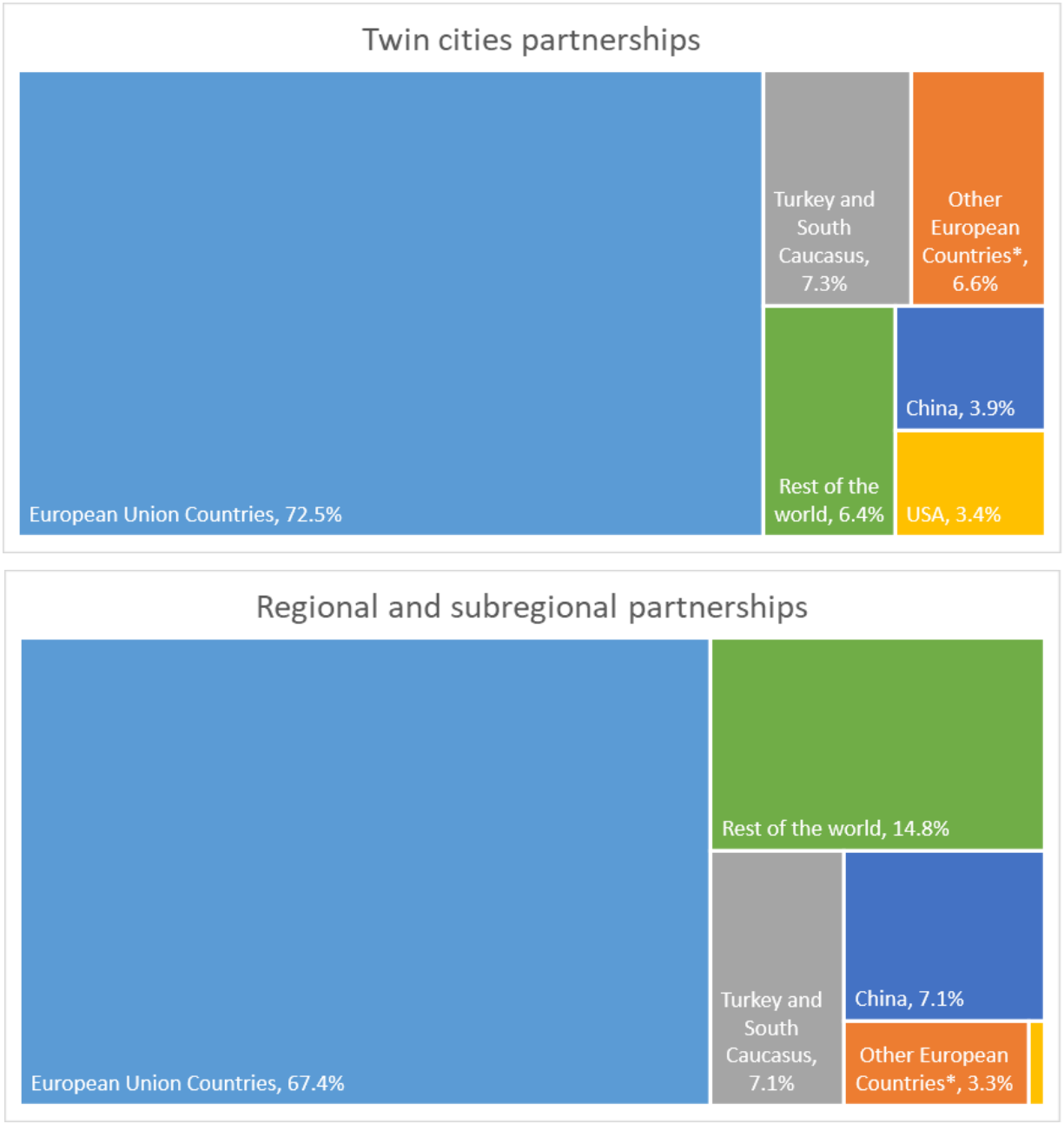


Source: own elaboration.

2.1.2. Geographical orientation of cooperation

The most important direction of the territorial cooperation of Ukrainian LRAs was toward EU countries (Figure 1). At the local level, 75% of all agreements were concluded with EU partners, and at the supralocal level the share of partners from EU countries was 70%. At the former level, a further 6.5% of agreements were concluded with other European countries, primarily the UK and the Western Balkan countries. The cooperation of Ukrainian cities and regions with the LRAs of Turkey and the countries of the Southern Caucasus was of similar significance (around 7%). Within this group, the most intensive cooperation was with Georgia and Turkey. In regional terms, China was of similar importance to this group of countries. The importance of cooperation with Chinese partners was weaker at the local level but, for example, comparable to the number of agreements made with US cities (around 3.5%). Other countries of the world were less important for Ukrainian government cooperation at the local level. On the other hand, at the supra-local level, their share was already around 15%, and the relatively best developed contacts of Ukrainian regions and areas were with Latin American countries and countries established after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

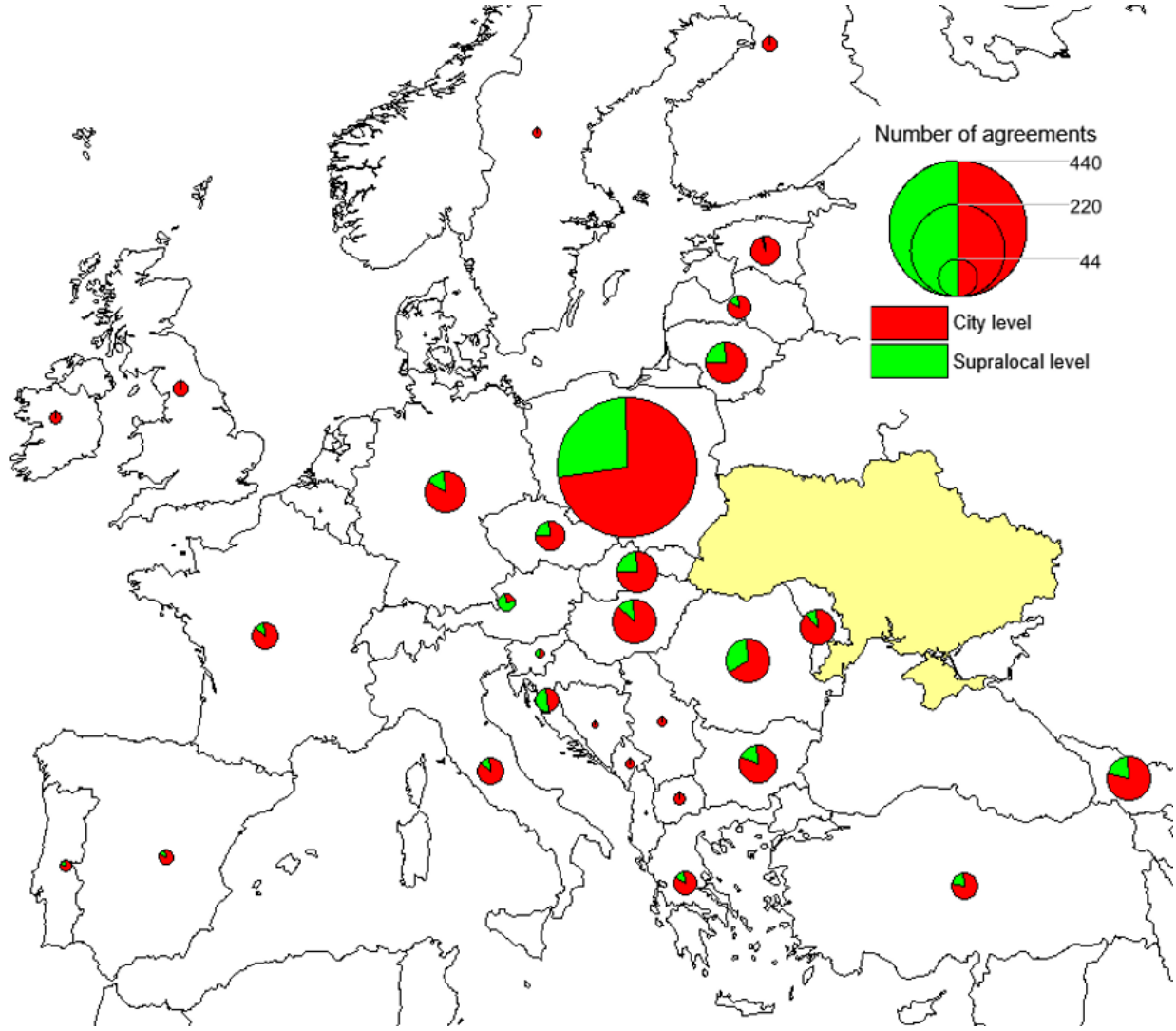
Figure 1: Geographical orientation of cooperation between Ukrainian cities and regions with foreign partners, 2020



Source: own elaboration.

Agreements with Ukrainian partners were concluded mainly by cities and regions from countries that were in close proximity to Ukraine (Map 3). Most partnership agreements with Ukrainian LRAs were concluded by Polish local governments. Their share at both the local and supra-local level was around half of the total number of agreements. Such a scale of relations between Polish and Ukrainian LRAs indicates that it may have been influenced – apart from geographical proximity – by other factors related to cultural similarity, a low language barrier, similar development challenges, as well as historical ties (IDI_4, IDI_5). The importance of these factors – in addition to other immediate neighbouring countries such as Romania, Hungary, and Moldova – could also have an impact on the development of territorial cooperation with Lithuania and Georgia.

Map 3: Territorial cooperation of Ukrainian LRAs with European partners in 2022



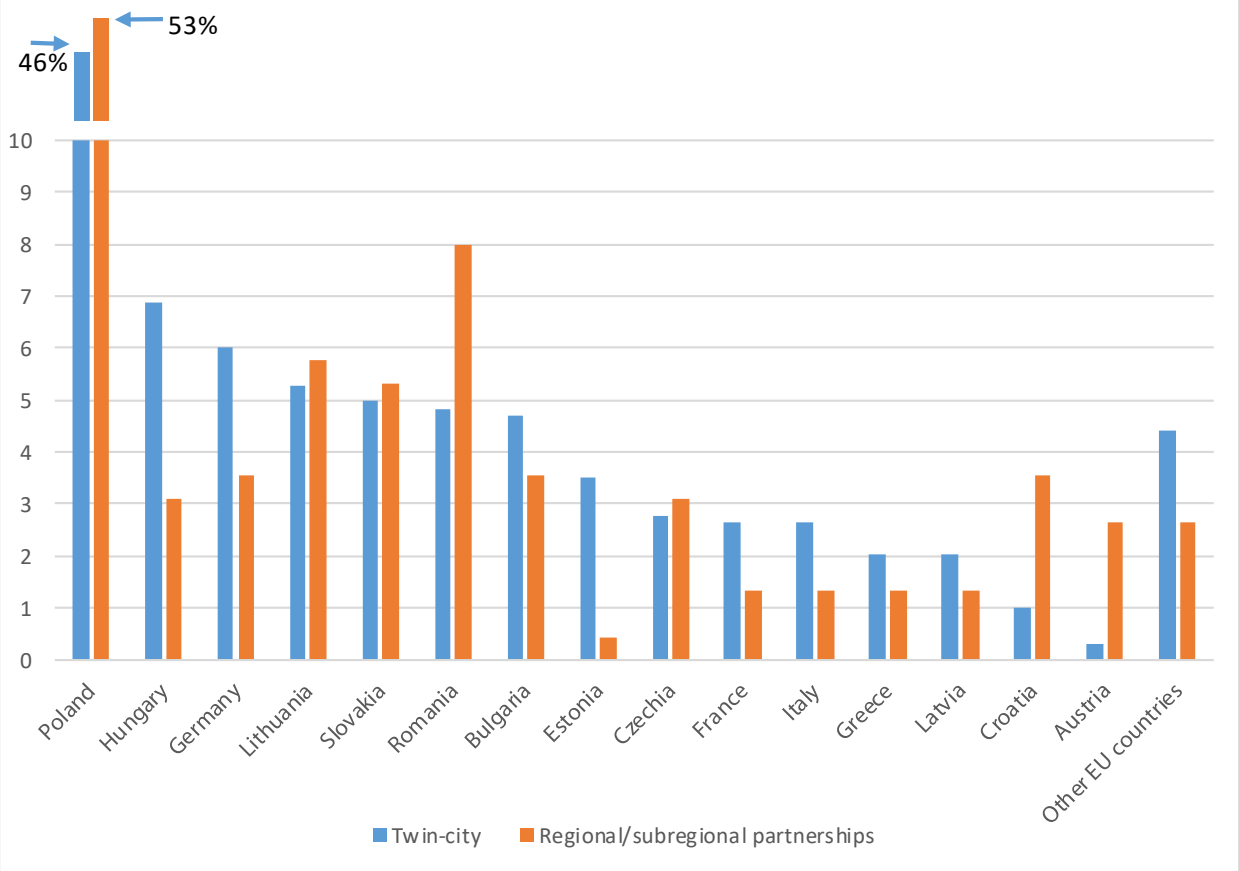
Source: own elaboration.

Among EU countries, Poland was the most important territorial cooperation partner for both Ukrainian cities and regions and sub-regions, with a share close to approximately 50% in both cases (Figure 2). The development of Polish-Ukrainian cooperation has been due to a number of reasons, among which the two most important groups already mentioned above can be identified, i.e. geographical proximity/neighbourhood, including the related possibility of benefiting from European programmes supporting cross-border cooperation, and cultural and linguistic similarity, as well as historical ties.

The other main EU partners of Ukrainian cities were of similar importance as measured by the number of agreements signed. At the local level, Hungary came second (7%), not least because of its strongly developed contacts with the Zakarpattia Oblast inhabited by a significant Hungarian minority. In addition to Hungary, the other two EU countries neighbouring Ukraine – Slovakia (5%) and Romania (5%) – each had around 30 partnership agreements. The latter stood out in terms of agreements signed with Ukrainian authorities at the regional level (8% overall). In this case, as in the above, cross-border cooperation programmes may also have played an important role. On the other hand, among countries that were not neighbours of Ukraine, Germany (6%) and Lithuania (5%) had the most agreements. The latter, as well as the other Baltic states, i.e. Estonia (3%) and Latvia (2%), may have based their cooperation *inter alia* on the 'heritage' of their onetime existence within the former Soviet Union. A

similar situation could apply to other countries of the Eastern Bloc (which also includes East Germany), i.e. the Czech Republic (5%) and Bulgaria (5%). Among Western European countries, French (3%) and Italian (2%) local governments had the most agreements with Ukrainian cities. Greece and Croatia were also of some importance in terms of the number of partnerships – the latter especially at the supra-local level. This was also the case in Austria, where cooperation was mainly at the regional level. The representative of the Assembly of European Regions also pointed to the growing importance of cooperation between Scandinavian countries and Ukrainian partners (IDI_4).

Figure 2: Regional and local partnerships between UA and EU countries (% of total), 2022

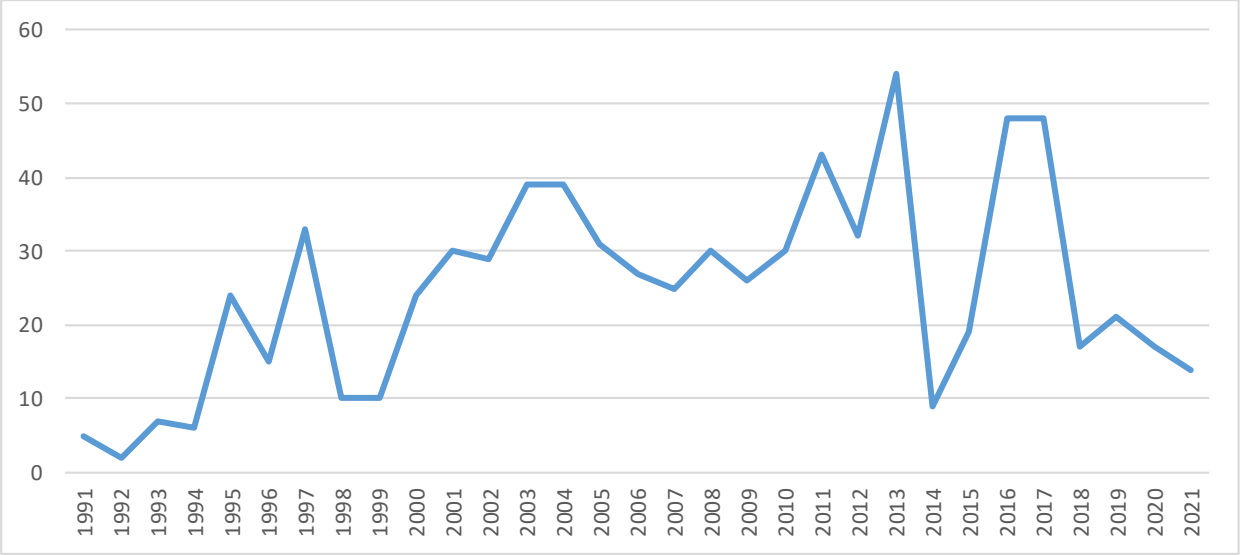


Source: own elaboration.

2.1.3. Evolution of cooperation in time

The number of partnership agreements concluded by Ukrainian LRAs over the past 30 years has shown steady growth, and this has been a pan-European trend. The activity of Ukrainian LRAs in this field depended to some extent on the international situation (Figure 3). The periods of the 'Russian' economic crises in 1998-1999, as well as the period of the global financial crisis in 2008, were also not conducive to the conclusion of new agreements. Similarly, the Russian aggression of 2014 led to a short-term decline in the number of new partnerships. In contrast, the period that followed was characterised by the high interest of Ukrainian cities and regions in establishing foreign contacts, and European programmes may have played a role here. However, the administrative reforms carried out in 2020 led to a declining interest in concluding new agreements. On the one hand, this may have been due to the need to consolidate the new Ukrainian administrative structures and, on the other hand, it may have been due to the impediments associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 3: Dates of conclusion of the partnership agreements by the Ukrainian LRAs and foreign partners



Source: own calculations based on MCTD register.

The Russian invasion of 2022 not only did not lead to declining interest in establishing foreign partnership agreements, but actually increased it. According to TransparentCities (2021), in the first half of the year, 14 Ukrainian cities (out of 50 analysed, ones covering all regional capitals and the other largest cities) concluded 23 new twinning agreements. Kiev and Chernivtsi concluded the most of new agreements with 3 each. The main partners were cities from EU countries. The Ukrainian LRAs concluded most of the new agreements with French (4), German (3) and Polish (3) local authorities. Outside the EU countries, three agreements were concluded with US cities. In addition, work was underway to prepare a further 7 agreements with foreign partners.

2.2. International organisations/networks of cities and regions

There are a number of organisations in the European space that bring together LRAs to promote their development and cooperation, and to represent their interests at the European level (Box 2). The idea of these organisations dates back to the early postwar years, the first example of which was The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) established in 1951. Its members are national organisations of local authorities at different levels. Some of these organisations represent different levels of government, such as CLARE, whose members are elected to the Chamber of Regions or the Chamber of Local Authorities. Other organisations, on the other hand, primarily represent either cities, such as Eurocities, or regions, such as AER (although it also allows local government representatives to be members), including specific types of regions such as coastal (CPRM) or border regions (AEBR).

The members of the latter organisation are primarily Euroregions, which are recognised as its most-developed form of CBC cooperation, characterised by considerable intensity, stability, and involvement of many actors, particularly local ones, who jointly pursue a developmental strategy for the cross-border region (Medeiros 2011). The idea of creating Euroregions was complementary to initiatives taken at the pan-European level for cooperation between local authorities in line with the idea of decentralisation as formalised in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985) and initially – mainly in the 1970s – covered the borderlands of Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, and the countries of Scandinavia. The purpose of the Euroregions is to promote economic and tourist exchanges, improve transport accessibility, develop social contacts and cultural activities and, above all, solve cross-border problems together.

Box 2: Selected European organisations of LRAs focused on territorial development and partnerships in Europe

The **Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)** brings together almost 100 members from the European Union and its neighbouring countries: cross-border and border regions, unions of municipalities, and counties. The association was founded in 1971 with the aim of strengthening the integration of citizens across national boundaries. The AEBR aims at highlighting the role and representing the shared interest of border regions in the political landscape, also by participating in wider European platforms. Its main goal is to enhance the cooperation between regions throughout Europe by facilitating the exchanges of experiences and good practices. Through this focus, the AEBR seeks to promote European cohesion, subsidiarity, and partnership.

The **Assembly of European Regions (AER)** is an independent network of regions, gathering around 130 members from 35 countries and 15 interregional organizations. The AER is present not only in the EU, but also in Europe writ large: among its members there are regions from i.a. Turkey, Ukraine, Georgia, and Russia (suspended since 2015). The AER was formed in 1985 under the name Council of European Regions. Since then, it promotes the role of regions in European and national decision-making processes. The AER stands for the recognition of the regions as an important level of governance within Europe, the extension of the principle of subsidiarity to regional and local levels, and the inclusion of regional cohesion in the EU's objectives.

The **Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)** unites 60 associations of local and regional governments from 40 European countries It was created in 1951 with the aim of promoting the construction of a united Europe founded on local self-government, respect for the principle of subsidiarity and the participation of citizens. CEMR operates as a lobby for the interest of local governments, but also as a platform of exchange of best practices, information and knowledge between the associations of local governments from member countries. The work of CEMR is organized around two main pillars: influencing European policy and legislation in all areas having an impact on municipalities and regions; providing a forum for debate between local and regional governments via their national representative associations.

The **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLARE)** is an institution of the Council of Europe. It operates among over 130,000 municipalities and regions in Council of Europe's 46 member states. CLARE was established in 1953, acting initially as a committee of the Consultative Assembly. It started to operate under its current name in 1994. CLARE promotes local and regional democracy and works to foster consultation and political dialogue between national governments and local and regional authorities. CLARE assesses the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, through systematic monitoring and observations. It also observes local and regional elections. The reports prepared by CLARE and the recommendations they contain are forwarded to the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, which can give them the appropriate follow up whenever needed.

The **Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)** associates around 150 regions from 24 countries, from the European Union and beyond (e.g. Morocco, Georgia). The CPMR was created in 1973. Since then, it has operated as a think tank and a lobby for regions. The CPMR promotes the increased role of regions in terms of European governance. Among its areas of activity there are maritime policies, blue growth, accessibility, social, economic and territorial cohesion, energy and climate change, neighbourhood, and development. The CPMR is sub-divided into six geographical commissions, corresponding to Europe's maritime basins, including

Eurocities is a network of more than 200 cities in 38 European countries. It is open for cities with a population of 250,000 or more. Cities within EU can become full members, whereas other cities become associate members. The network was established in 1986 as an initiative of the mayors of six large cities (Barcelona, Birmingham, Frankfurt, Lyon, Milan, and Rotterdam). Eurocities work on all policy areas that are of concern to local governments, such as sustainable development, environment, climate, energy, inclusive public spaces, and digitalization. Eurocities supports peer learning, knowledge sharing, and best practice exchange between European cities.

Source: own elaboration based on official webpages and interviews.

2.2.1. Selected activities focused on building EU regions and cities partnerships with Ukraine

European city and regional organisations undertake various types of activities for the integration and development of cooperation between their members, as well as the strengthening of sub-national levels of local and regional administration. In the pre-2022 period, the activities of international organisations bringing together cities and regions for the benefit of Ukraine were aimed i.a. at supporting the decentralisation of the country and training leaders in territorial cooperation. The examples are presented in the Box 3.

Box 3. Pre-2022 activities of selected European international organisations activities focused on territorial cooperation with Ukraine

CLARE has pursued its cooperation with Ukrainian partners within the project Strengthening democracy and building trust at the local level in Ukraine. This project was implemented as a part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021. It aimed at improving the quality of local democracy in Ukraine by strengthening institutional frameworks and by supporting local authorities in this country. The project provides a framework for regular consultation and dialogue between local authorities, their national associations, and central government in Ukraine. As part of the CLARE activities, events such as field visits, meetings with stakeholders, exchanges of views and best practices, or monitoring visits to Ukraine were held. Over 220 mayors and 300 local councillors from Ukraine have benefited from the CLARE activities in the field. Partnerships with national associations of local and regional authorities have also been reinforced.

To promote the development of cross-border cooperation and Euro regions' activities in Ukraine, in 2013, the **AEBR** founded the Information Center in the Research and Library Building of Kharkiv National University of Economics, in Kharkiv region. The aim of the establishment of this centre was to create and organise the Assembly of Ukrainian Border Regions and Euroregions, and to establish the Cross-Border Dialogue Ukraine-EU. One of its strategic directions is to develop civil diplomacy in the field of cross-border cooperation development (e.g. rural development, culture, public health, youth policies). Moreover, the AEBR was involved in the School for Civic Diplomacy of Eastern Ukraine project. This initiative aimed at building a partner network of civic diplomacy in Ukraine in the field of cross-border cooperation. It promoted a capacity within regions for local and regional cooperation, through peer-learning and the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

The long-term cooperation of the European and Ukrainian maritime regions has been developed through the **CPMR's** Balkan and Black Sea Commission (BBSC). Among the members of CPMR there was the Odesa (2004-2020) and Kherson regional state administrations (since 2020). Currently, CPMR is attempting to re-establish contact with both regions in addition to Mykolaiv oblast also in the Black Sea area. In the Black Sea area (including Ukraine), the CPMR is involved in several projects with a maritime focus, e.g. CulTourE4Yout (supporting youth entrepreneurship in cultural tourism with a maritime dimension) and BRIDGE-BS (developing tools necessary to predict and understand the impact of climate-driven multi-stressors on the services stemming from Black Sea ecosystems).

Source: own elaboration based on official webpages and interviews.

The latest phase of Russian aggression against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, has prompted international organisations to take a number of measures to support Ukrainian cities and regions. The channels of assistance are often linked to previous partnership agreements connecting members of these organisations to Ukrainian cities and regions. Examples of these activities, elaborated on the basis of official webpages of relevant organisations, include:

- The Assembly of European Regions (AER) issued a Statement regarding the territorial integrity and support of Ukraine ahead of the Russian invasion. The Assembly has been actively supporting humanitarian aid initiatives managed by its member regions from several countries (e.g., Austria, Belgium, France, Sweden, etc.). The AER aims at facilitating the exchange of know-how between EU and Ukrainian regions (e.g. it organized an online conference during which the perspectives in terms of collaboration were provided for Ukrainian regions). As for internal arrangements,, the AER suspended the membership fee for Ukrainian members and banned cooperation with Russian authorities. The AER has recently approved the applications of the regions of Lviv, Chernivtsi, and Zaporizhzhia to become full members of AER. Additional associate members have also been approved: Odesa Rayon and the Association of self-governments "Euroregion Carpathians – Ukraine", which has considerably strengthened the presence of the AER in Ukraine.
- Eurocities launched the "Sustainable rebuilding of Ukrainian cities" project based on the survey indicating that 83% of its member cities have a partnership with Ukrainian municipalities. The aim of this project is to build local capacity and assist Ukrainian cities in preparing for the sustainable reconstruction of urban areas, in line with the climate-neutrality objectives enshrined in the European Green Deal. Based on the existing twinning partnership, at least ten cities from the European Union will be matched with their Ukrainian counterparts. The programme will be based on the exchange of experiences and building relationships guided by the specific reconstruction needs. It will contribute to the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding – a political agreement to support the sustainable rebuilding of Ukrainian cities, signed by mayors of European cities, and backed by Eurocities and the Ukraine's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in August 2022.
- The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) established a Members Task Force on Ukraine. Its main goal is to exchange ideas on how to address the impact of the war in European territories. The Task Force deals with issues such as: support to Ukrainian municipalities, hosting refugees fleeing Ukraine, EU sanctions and the consequences for procurement and cooperation with Russian municipalities, and the actions of national associations of local and regional governments. Members of the CEMR can support local governments by signing the CEMR's statement condemning Russia's military operation.

Moreover, they can establish partnerships with their Ukrainian counterparts who submitted a plea for help to the CEMR. The CEMR advises its members on how to help Ukrainian municipalities meet their urgent needs and how to encourage the citizens to donate funds for humanitarian aid.

All of these organisations were also involved in the initiative "The European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine", which was launched by the Committee of Regions (CoR) to coordinate their joint efforts directed towards fostering the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine. According to the information published on the official website of CoR, the Alliance was created in order to:

- coordinate joint efforts with European Union cities and regions ready to deploy resources to support an effective and sustainable reconstruction of Ukraine;
- facilitate the contacts and cooperation of its core partners with the EU institutions and within the "Ukraine reconstruction platform", as well as between EU and Ukrainian local and regional authorities and associations;
- provide information and feedback to the EU institutions and the "Ukraine reconstruction platform", and foster political dialogue with the local and regional level accompanying the reconstruction efforts;
- facilitate the provision of expertise in capacity-building, good governance, and technical assistance to cities and regions in Ukraine.

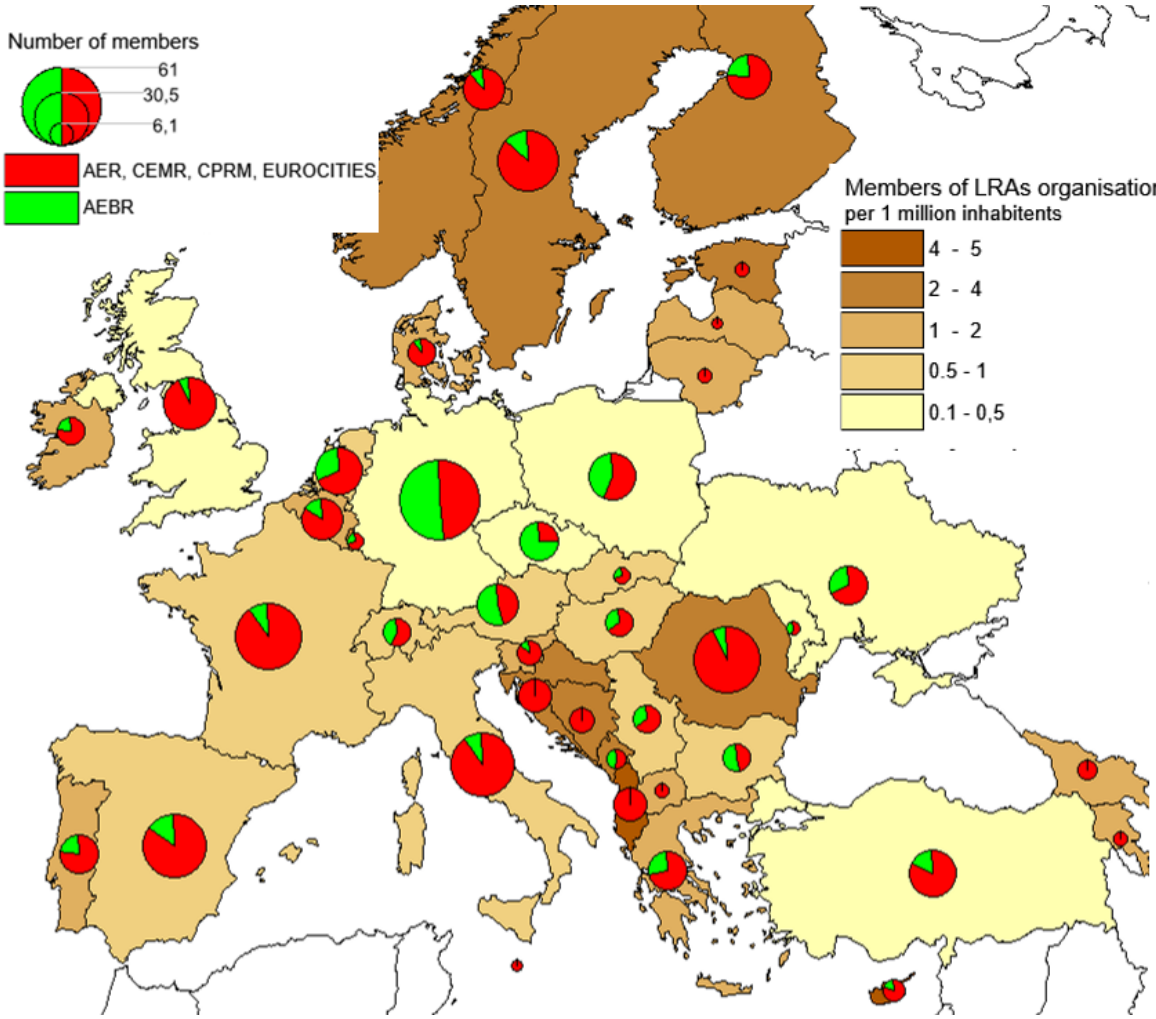
2.2.2. Membership of Ukrainian partners in European LRA organisations

In 2022, the Ukrainian LRAs were members of three organisations of European cities and regions, i.e. the AER, Eurocities, and the CEMR. In the first two organisations, membership status was mainly held by large cities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, Lviv, and Kryvyi Rih, while smaller cities were represented by Pavlohrad. The latter, on the other hand, had two Ukrainian associations of local governments: the Association of Ukrainian Cities and the Ukrainian Association of District and Regional Councils. In addition, 16 Ukrainian delegates participated in the work undertaken within CLARE. In contrast, none of the Ukrainian regions belonged to the CPMR.

The involvement of the LRAs of individual European countries in the activities of the above-mentioned European associations of cities and regions was quite diverse (Map 4). The relatively greatest interest – compared to the size of the population – in this form of cooperation was evident in the Nordic countries, as well as the Western Balkan countries and Romania. There are also relatively many French, Spanish, Italian, and Benelux LRAs involved in these organisations. Against this background, the degree of involvement of Ukrainian cities and regions in relation to the country's population potential can be assessed as relatively low. However, it was not significantly different from the involvement of LRAs in Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic in these activities.

An analysis of the interest in cross-border cooperation in the form of the creation of institutions with a cross-border character, including above all Euroregions (most of them affiliated within the AEBR), showed a greater interest in this form of cooperation in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Map 4). Germany was among the leaders in this respect, but the importance of this form of cooperation in the borderlands of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Austria was also significant. In Ukraine, in addition to the LRA's involvement in cooperation on the western border with partners from Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova, Euroregions on its eastern border were also established. However, the activities of the latter were suspended with the onset of Russian aggression in 2014.

Map 4: Members of European LRA organisations by country, 2022



Source: own elaboration based on official webpages of analyzed organizations.

2.2.3. Euroregions and EGTCs on Ukraine's border with EU countries

On the western and southern borders of Ukraine, there are several Euroregional initiatives institutionalising cross-border cooperation with partners from European Union countries. The territorial scope of their activities varies, but there is a predominance of initiatives at the regional and macroregional level. Among the largest multilateral organisations is the Carpathian Euroregion, established in 1993, which forms a platform for cooperation between LRAs located in the border regions of five countries: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine. In addition, there are also two others Euroregions on the border between Poland and Ukraine: Bug, created in 1995, which also includes Belarusian partners, and Roztocze, established in 2020, which is the most recent sub-regional initiative linking local authorities in the Lublin Voivodeship and the Lviv Oblast. On the Romanian-Ukrainian border, on the other hand, the Lower Danube Euroregion (1998) was set up with the participation of administrative units of the three neighbouring states: Odesa region (Ukraine), Galati, Tulcea and Braila counties (Romania), Cantemir and Cahul counties (Republic of Moldova). Also the Upper Prut Euroregion was established in 2000, which included at first Chernivtsi region (Ukraine), Botosani and Suceava counties (Romania), Balti and Yedinets counties (Republic of Moldova. Later, it was joined by Ivano-Frankivsk region (Ukraine) and Faleshti, Glodeni, Ocnitsa, Ryshkani and Bricheni counties (Republic of Moldova). The federal land of Carinthia (Austria) also became a European Associate Partner of the Upper Prut Euroregion.

Furthermore, the first-ever EGTC linking partners from EU countries with a non-Member State was set up on the border with Hungary. The founders of the Tisza EGTC are Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county and the city of Kisvárda from Hungary and the Council of Zakarpattya oblast from Ukraine (Box 4).

Box 4: The Tisza European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation at EU-UA border

The Tisza European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation established in 2015 on the Hungarian-Ukrainian border by the cooperation of Kisvárda, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg council, and the Zakarpats'ka region. The EGTC covers an area of 18,704.4 km^2 and has a total population of 1.8 million people. The general objective of the EGTC is to promote cross-border cooperation between the members of the Grouping in order to strengthen economic, social, and territorial cohesion. The specific objective of the EGTC is to implement cross-border cooperation in the following development areas: transport and communications infrastructure, energy, tourism, education, culture, sports, protection, and the development of the Tisza and its tributaries, logistics, support for SMEs, environmental and nature conservation, agriculture, health, addressing the problems of the population along the borders. Over the past three years, more than 80 projects have been implemented in the social and economic spheres of the region, most of them in cooperation with Hungary.

Source: https://www.uzhnu.edu.ua/en/news/Tisza-EGTC-international-conference-in-Uzhhorod.htm (Accessed: 2 February 2023)

EGTC-like initiative may arise on the Polish-Ukrainian border due to changes in the statutes of the Carpathian Euroregion allowing Ukrainian partners to be accepted as full members of an association registered in Poland (IDI_1).

3. EU PROGRAMMES AND INSTRUMENTS FOR EU-UA TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

KEY FINDINGS

- The four EU-UA CBC Programmes have remained a stable instrument for financing cooperation since 2004, although they have experienced difficulties delaying the start of projects at the beginning of each programme perspective.
- The EU-UA CBC is balanced in terms of the distribution of project beneficiaries from the EU and Ukraine, but is imbalanced in the favour of the EU partners regarding project leaders.
- Regarding the number of 2014-2020 CBC projects with Ukraine, the biggest part is attributed to the promotion of local culture and the preservation of historical and natural heritage – but in terms of financial allocation, projects focused on safety and security challenges prevail.
- The share of government bodies (mainly local) in EU-UA CBC projects increased between the programming periods, but the majority of partners still constitute the other beneficiaries.
- Ukrainian partners participate relatively little in EU-funded transnational cooperation programmes due to the constraints of their peripheral location within the Danube macro-region and the difficulties in developing cooperation in the Black Sea Basin.
- On the Ukrainian side, NGOs and public institutions other than local and regional authorities are most involved in transnational cooperation.
- Ukrainian administration is benefitting from peer-to-peer support in the framework Twinning and TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange), but predominantly at the central government level.
- There are a number of programmes and initiatives within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy – such as U-LEAD with Europe – which support decentralisation processes in Ukraine and which use mechanisms of knowledge transfer and cooperation at different administrative levels.
- Initiatives undertaken in the framework of the Eastern Partnership involve Ukrainian local self-governments in international cooperation in areas such as energy transition (Covenant of Mayors-East) and economic development (M4EG).
- Territorial cooperation between the EU and Ukraine is also supported indirectly through EU horizontal programmes on scientific cooperation, youth and student exchanges, the cultural sector, as well as the environment and climate change.

European Union programmes and instruments are an important source of funding for territorial cooperation both within the EU and with neighbouring countries, including Ukraine. In particular, the European Territorial Cooperation, known as Interreg, represents one of the main goals of the EU Cohesion Policy. The Interreg Community Initiative started operating in 1990, and after 1994 gained an external dimension of cooperation with non-EU countries. For the programming period 2021-2027, the

Regulation[1] previews four Interreg VI strands, with an over 10 billion EUR budget (2.8% of total Cohesion Policy budget 2014-20) (Lierop 2020):

- A: Cross Border Cooperation within the EU and at the EU's external borders (6.5 billion EUR), including 14 Interreg NEXT programmes, implemented with neighbouring countries of the EU;
- B: Transnational Cooperation, covering wider geographic areas, including programmes linked to Macro-regional Strategies;
- C: Interregional Cooperation, promoting the exchange of experiences, innovative approaches and capacity building between regions, including Programmes: Interreg Europe, Interact, URBACT, ESPON;
- D: Outermost Regions Programmes, as a new strand focused on EU Member States territories located in areas of the globe that are remote from Europe.

Apart from the new D strand, a novelty in the 2021-27 programming perspective is that of the embedding of the previous European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross Border Cooperation (ENI CBC) Programmes into the framework of the Interreg A Programmes (land border and short sea crossing), along with transferring sea basin programmes into the strand B.

The performed analyses of the Interreg Programmes that finance the EU-UA territorial cooperation will concern the A and B strands as Ukraine was not eligible for Strand C and D. The Ukrainian partners were entitled to take a part in four CBC programmes and in one transnational programme in the programming perspective 2014-2020.[2]

The European Neighbourhood Policy, which had a budget of 15.4 billion EUR under the ENI 2014-2020, co-finances cross-border cooperation programmes in which Ukraine also participates. In addition, it offers a number of instruments and programmes that support decentralisation reforms in Ukraine as well as the development of cooperation between European and Ukrainian partners at the regional and local level. The new Neighbourhood, International and Development Cooperation Instrument – "Global Europe" – provides the framework for EU international cooperation for the period 2021-2027 and has a budget of EUR 79.5 billion EUR. International cooperation with Ukraine is implemented, inter alia, within the framework of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) established in 2008. Part of its initiatives promotes twinning between EU and Ukrainian cities and regions.

3.1. European Union cross-border cooperation with Ukraine

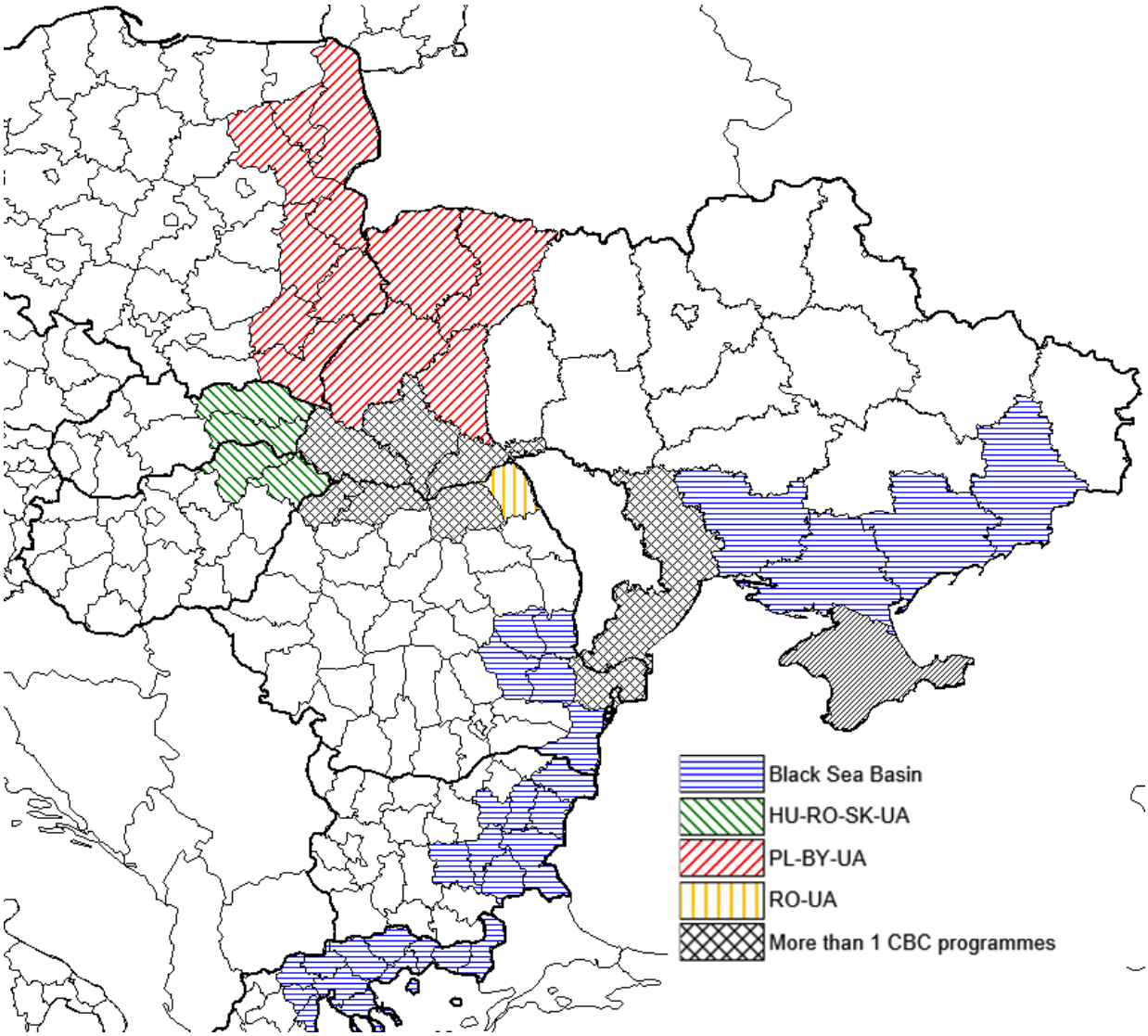
EU-funded cross-border cooperation has a well-defined spatial range called an eligible area. In the period 2014-2020, Ukraine participated in four cross-border cooperation programmes, which in total covered 12 Ukrainian regions[3] and on the part of EU Member States, 12 Polish sub-regions, 2 Slovak sub-regions, 2 Hungarian sub-regions, 10 Romanian sub-regions, and in the case of the BSB, two Greek (12 subregions) and two Bulgarian (8 subregions) NUTS2 regions each (Map 5). Regions from countries such as Belarus (PL-BY-UA) and Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Turkey (Black Sea Basin) also participated in these programmes.

[1] Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments, PE/49/2021/INIT, *OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 94–158,* http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1059/oj (Accessed: 5 January 2023).

[2] If not stipulated otherwise, the base for Interreg projects information is the keep.eu database (Interact) that aggregates the data regarding projects and beneficiaries of EU cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation programmes: among the Member States, and between Member States and neighbouring or pre-accession countries. The database covers the 2000-2006, 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods.

[3] Illegally annexed by Russia, Crimea and Sevastopol were not eligible.

Map 5: EU and Ukrainian regions eligible for ENI CBC programmes, 2014-2020



Source: own elaboration.
Note: Non-EU countries eligible area is not presented.

3.1.1. Allocation of EU funds

Cross-border cooperation programmes are one of the sources of funding for territorial cooperation between the European Union and Ukraine. The funding has been set up under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) 2007-2013, the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) 2014-2020 and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) 2021-2027, which, in combination with the European Regional Development Fund (Member States) and national/beneficiary co-funding [4], finance projects in which LRAs on the European and Ukrainian sides of the border can be beneficiaries. As the CBC Programmes have a strong local focus, the local partners are also involved in the stage of establishing the priorities of that intervention (e.g. as members of Joint Programming Committees) (EC 2018a).

[4] Along with the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) contribution when was appropriate (BSB Programme).

The EU funding granted a total allocation of EUR 1.1 billion to the new Interreg NEXT cooperation programmes 2021-2027 between the EU and neighbouring countries along the EU's external borders[5]. In this framework, four CBC Programmes between EU and Ukrainian entities will be continued. The funds allocated to them amount to approximately 370 million EUR, which is about one-third of the funds allocated to this type of cooperation with the EU's neighbouring countries. The largest of the EU-UA CBC Programmes is the Poland-Ukraine Programme with a EU funding contribution in excess of 187 million EUR (Interreg NEXT PL-UA), which is about 3 times larger than each of the other two land border cooperation programmes – with Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia (allocation of about 66 million EUR, Interreg HU-SK-RO-UA) and bilateral with Romania (EU funding – about 54 million EUR, Interreg RO-UA).

As Russia and Belarus have been suspended from CBC Programmes since March 2022, following the Russian military aggression on Ukraine[6] (ECA 2022), the opportunity has arisen to increase the budget for cooperation with Ukraine (the indicative level of financing of the NEXT PL-UA Programme is not diminished after becoming bilateral). That also caused some changes in the 2014-2020 PL-BY-UA Programme, resulting in the withdrawal of financing from Belarusian partners of the projects and the initiation of additional projects with Ukraine (IDI_6). Furthermore, The Black Sea Basin Programme in the years 2021-2027 will be conducted within the Interreg B (transnational) framework with significantly increased EU funding amounting to 65 million EUR.

3.1.2. Projects and beneficiaries

During the 2007-2020 period, there were over 620 cross-border projects funded by the EU between Ukraine and EU Member States (Figure 4).[7] In the financial perspective of 2007-2013, Ukrainian partners took part in 349 cross-border projects. The largest number of projects with Ukrainian partners was implemented in the HU-SK-RO-UA programme (137), and the smallest in the Black Sea Basin (BSB) programme (37), in which the share of projects with Ukrainian partners was the smallest at around 62%. In the next financial perspective, the number of projects with Ukrainian partners dropped to 274[8], with the highest number of projects within the PL-BY-UA programme (103). Again, the smallest number of projects with Ukrainian partners was implemented in the BSB programme (28), and their share fell below 50%. Furthermore, within the different financial perspectives, the implementation of projects was very uneven and usually significantly delayed at the beginning with a culmination at the end of a given perspective (Annex 2), which creates an unfavourable dynamic in terms of temporal accessibility of financial support (with "dead" periods) (Duleba 2019). Additional delays and changes in the projects' scope occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[9]

[5] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/eu-cohesion-policy-over-%E2%82%AC530-million-territorial-cooperation-including-ukraine_en (Accessed : 2 January 2023).

[6] https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/next_en, (Accessed: 5 January 2023).

[7] As the Next Programmes 2021-2027 were at the early stage of implementation (just after acceptance procedures) at the time of the Study drafting, the information concerning them is limited to the data included in the Programme documents. The basis for the analysis of the actual projects is formed by the 2014-2020 ENI CBC data (a part of the projects still being in realisation phase till the end of 2023), and where appropriate 2007-2013 ENPI CBC.

[8] They represented similar share of all ENI CBC projects to the one in the previous perspective.

[9] As a reaction, projects deadlines were postponed and e.g. fast-track procedures for project modification (PL-BY-UA Programme) were foreseen (TESIM 2020).

Figure 4: Projects with Ukrainian partners in EU-UA CBC Programmes, 2007-2020

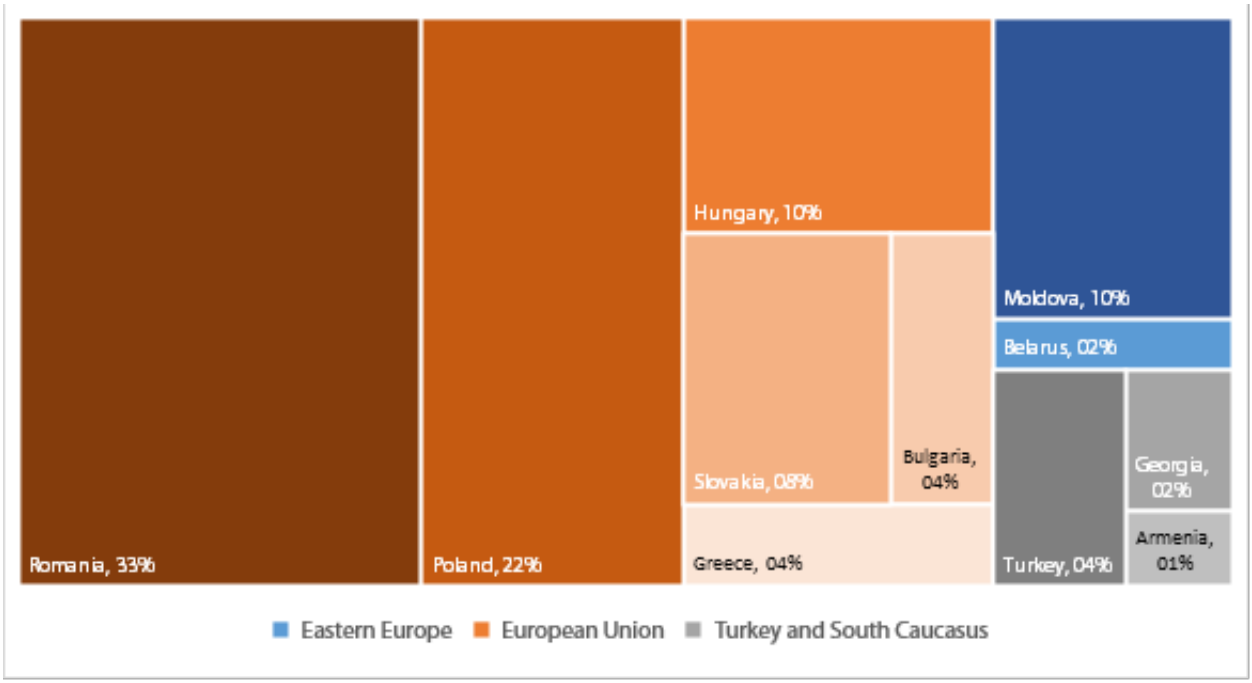
Source: own elaboration based on keep.eu database.
Note: 2014-2020 only Romania-Ukraine.

The overall EU funding for projects with Ukrainian partners within the framework of ENI CBC 2014-2020 amounted to over 237 million EUR. The budget share of Ukrainian beneficiaries in the programmes constituted around 10% in BSB, about 25% in PL-BY-UA to over 40% in RO-UA and HU-SK-RO-UA[10]. EU partners in each of the four programmes with Ukraine executed together slightly above half of the total budgets, likewise with their budget share in 15 ENI CBC Programmes counted all together and in line with the balance of the financing sources (ENI and ERDF). This finding is consistent with the conclusions concerning the balanced distribution of project participants and a budget split in the three ENI CBC Programmes analysed in the European Court of Auditors Special Report (ECA 2022). However, taking into consideration the roles acted by the partners in the project, the situation is imbalanced in the favour of the EU entities, as they constituted 65% of project leaders. The partners originating from Ukraine (30% of project leaders, while in the 2007-2013 perspective – 25%), as from other neighbouring countries, could be still in the process of acquiring the competencies related to EU project management, challenged by ensuring compliance with the national regulatory framework.

As it was pointed out in the interview (IDI_6) and in the previous research concerning other CBC regions (Nijander-Dudzińska, Wojakowski 2017), distance from the border influences the engagement in cooperation – i.e. geographical proximity to the border increases CBC intensity.

[10] The data presents Ukrainian partners' eligible budgets as collected in keep.eu database. Some projects' data are missing in the keep.eu database.

Figure 5: Partners of Ukrainian beneficiaries in CBC projects by country, 2007-2020



Source: own elaboration based on keep.eu database.

The projects implemented in the years 2007-2020 within the ENPI and ENI CBC programmes with Ukraine had over 2200 beneficiaries[11] i.e. approximately 1,400 individual organisations.[12] The EU Member States have a 47% share in the total number of project partners, while Ukraine has about 41%. The highest share in projects with Ukrainian partners is held by beneficiaries from Romania, followed by Polish ones, less so still for Hungarian and Slovakian ones, and quite small in the case of Bulgarian and Greek entities (As it was pointed out in the interview (IDI_6) and in the previous research concerning other CBC regions (Nijander-Dudzińska, Wojakowski 2017), distance from the border influences the engagement in cooperation – i.e. geographical proximity to the border increases CBC intensity.

Figure 5). In the 2014-2020 perspective, the share of EU partners increased (from 45% to nearly 50%), while other neighbouring countries diminished (from about 10% to 2%). The latter is a consequence of creating separate Programmes for Romania–Ukraine and Romania–Moldova CBC.[13] The last group of countries engaged in EU-UA CBC cooperation, with around a 4% share of total beneficiaries (including Ukrainian ones) was formed by Turkey and South Caucasus countries (Georgia and Armenia).

Among the participants of EU-UA CBC projects, there were institutions from the local and regional level, with some degree of participation by central authorities. For the purposes of this analysis, the participants that were represented by an executive or legislative governing body of a local/regional territorial unit, the appropriate central government's administration, or an association of territorial units – these were classed as "governments". The rest of the authorities, including various public institutions (for example, the Border Guard, Fire Service, agencies of development, communal

[11] Counted as the total sum of beneficiaries in the partnership projects – one organisation might be counted several times if it was participating in several projects.

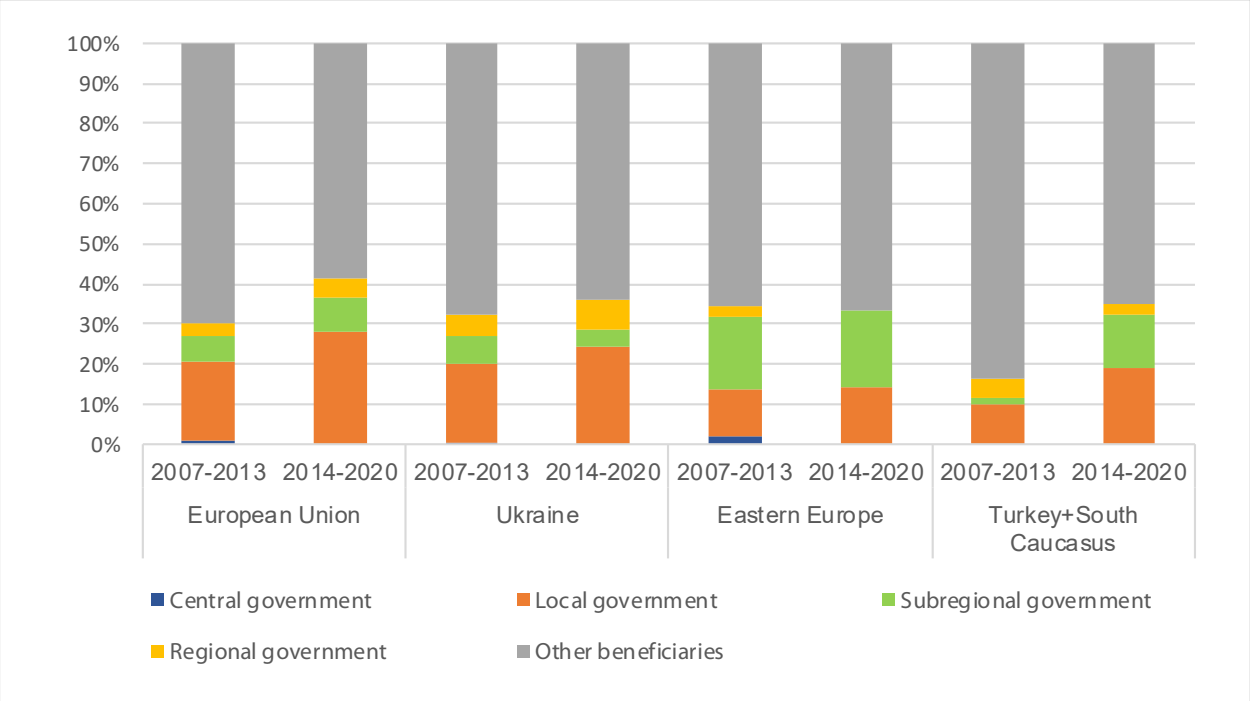
[12] One organisation might be a beneficiary of several projects. The exact number is difficult to estimate because of the different variants of organisations' names in the keep.eu database. The number was counted after reviewing the database and replacing and joining records of fitting partners' names.

[13] The CBC between East Partnership countries only (without EU Member States) is financed under another framework – Eastern Partnership Territorial Cooperation (EaPTC). Ukraine was involved in two EaPTC Cooperation Programmes: Belarus-Ukraine and Moldova-Ukraine.

enterprises, medical, cultural, and academic units), as well as some non-governmental organisations and enterprises, were classed as "other beneficiaries".

The "governments" represented about 34% of the total CBC project-beneficiaries in the years 2007-2020.[14] The highest share in the "governments" category (nearly 63%) belonged to local governments (like cities or communes), followed by subregional authorities (nearly 22%) and regional ones (over 14%). The central administration was involved only during the 2007-2013 period and in a minor part of projects. It could be noted that some part in the CBC projects was also taken by Euroregions, EGTCs, and associations of local authorities/municipalities.[15]

Figure 6: Beneficiaries of CBC projects with Ukraine by type, 2007-2020



Source: own elaboration based on keep.eu database.

In general, the share of the "governments" category in the overall number of beneficiaries in EU Member States was slightly lower (30%) than in Ukraine (32%) in the perspective 2007-2013 and higher (41%) than in Ukraine (36%) in the perspective 2014-2020 (Figure 6). The share of local governments has increased significantly in the 2014-2020 perspective in all groups of countries. Supralocal governments have also increased their share in the case of the entities from the EU and Turkey and the South Caucasus. As regards Ukraine, there was a decrease in the involvement of district-level authorities, which should be of a transitional nature related to the administrative reform in 2020. Accordingly, a relative decrease in the participation of other beneficiaries in the implementation of CBC projects was observed, as well as an increase in the average value of projects implemented.

3.1.3. Thematic scope of projects

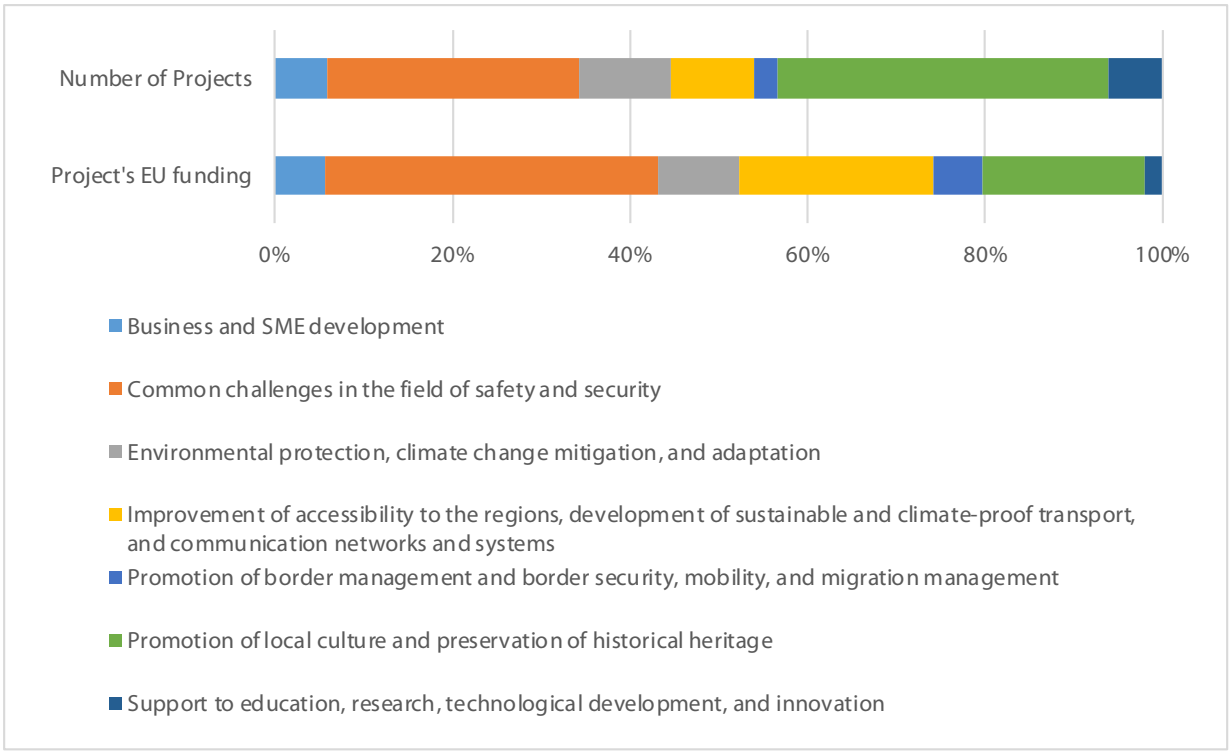
In the 2014-2020 programming period, a list of 11 thematic objectives was established for ENI CBC Programmes and each Programme was entitled to choose not more than four objectives. Promoting

[14] Counted every partnership in a project (partners participating in several projects, counted several times. The numbers for unique organisations taking part in CBC may be slightly different, but consistent with the trend direction.

[15] They represented about 6% of total "governments". In statistics presented before and in the graphs, Euroregions and EGTCs were included into the category of "regional government" while the associations of local authorities were counted in the "local government" category.

"people-to-people" cooperation is treated as an overarching modality (including support for local and regional authorities and civil society) (EC & EEAS 2014). Regarding the number of projects with Ukrainian partners, the biggest part was attributed to the achievement of the objective concerning the promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage (37%) (in the PL-BY-UA programme – nearly 70% of projects), and the second biggest to tackling shared safety and security challenges (28%) (the biggest share in RO-UA programme) (Figure 7). The latest objective prevails when the projects' budgets are analysed, gathering more expensive initiatives than the first one. Significant resources were also allocated to improving the accessibility of border regions. In contrast, the objectives of environmental protection, SME development, education and innovation, and border management were much less represented both in terms of the number of projects and the value of their budgets.

Figure 7: Thematic scope of EU-UA CBC cooperation – all programmes, 2014-2020



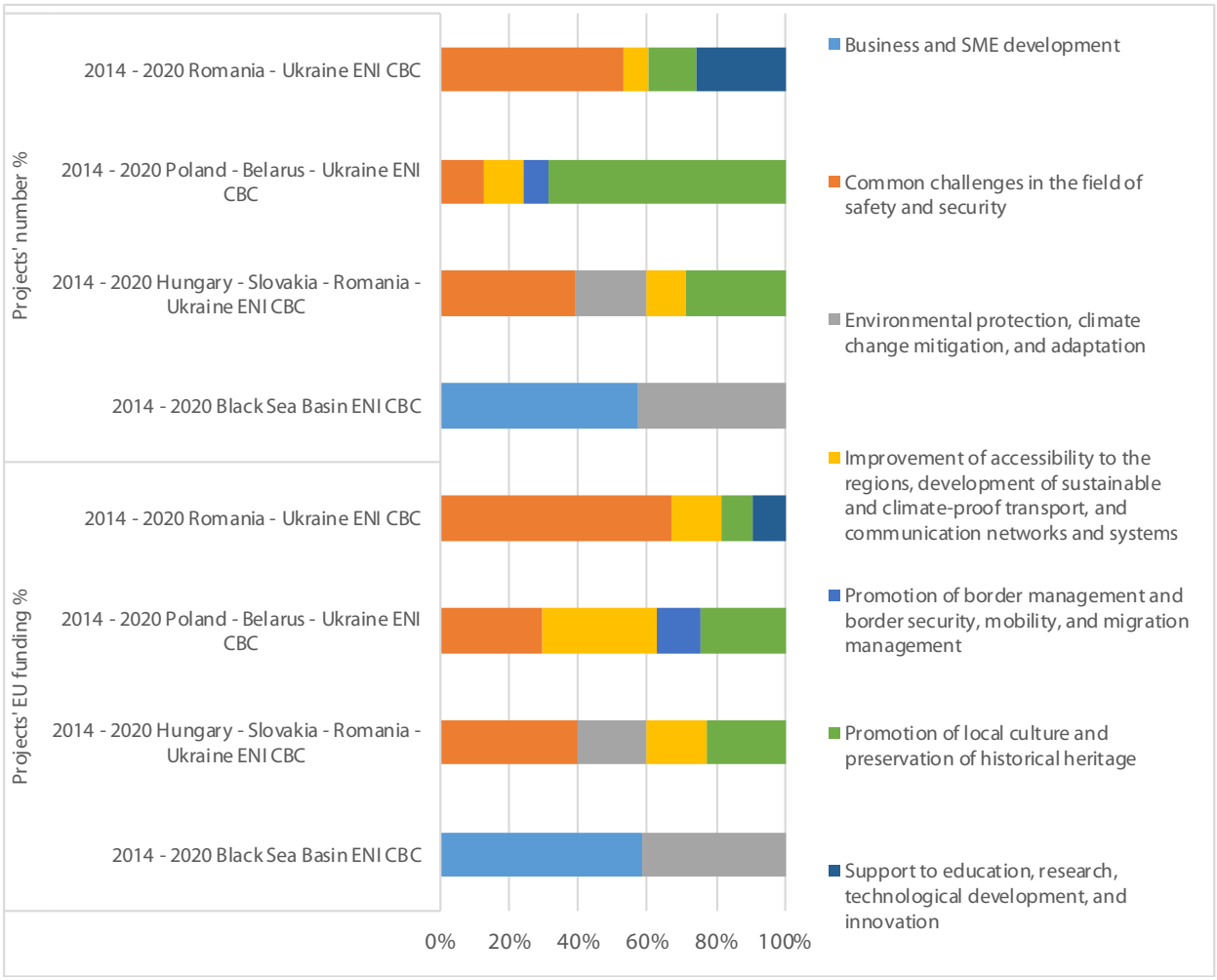
Source: own elaboration based on keep.eu database.
Note: only the projects with the participation of Ukraine are presented.

In general, the projects with Ukraine in the framework of land border Programmes were spending the most of their budgets on combating safety and security challenges (that might be of importance during the Covid-19 pandemic) – over 41% of the total 2014-2020 contribution to those three Programmes, the biggest part in the projects with Romanian entities. The participating countries engaged the financial resources also in the development of sustainable transport and communication networks – 24% of their total EU contribution, the biggest share in cooperation with Poland. The third place in financial terms belonged to the objective that attracted the biggest number of projects: promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage, again the biggest part of the budget of this objective in projects with Polish entities (due to the biggest budget of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Programme). TESIM (2022) pointed out that the PL-BY-UA Programme's specificity, in comparison to all ENI CBC Programmes, lies in the large number of people-to-people projects (mostly in culture and education domains) and in the lack of projects addressing directly economic development.

The EU-UA cooperation projects contributed to the implementation of differing Thematic Objectives under particular CBC Programmes (Figure 8):

- The largest share of EU-UA budgets in the PL-BY-UA Programme was allocated to the improvement of accessibility to regions, along with an important contribution to safety and security issues and to culture and historical heritage. The PL-BY-UA Programme was the only one to allocate to border management, though relatively this entailed the least funds.
- In the HU-SK-RO-UA Programme, the biggest share of the budget as well as the biggest number of the EU-UA projects, concerned the safety and security challenges. This was followed by the promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage, with a significant share of EU financing being invested also in the areas of environment & climate and sustainable transport & communication networks.
- Most of the EU financing in the EU-UA projects in the RO-UA Programme were spent on challenges in the field of safety and security (nearly 67% of budgets and 53% of projects). In this ENI CBC Programme only the EU-UA projects contributed to the objective of support to education, research and innovation.
- The BSB Programme's thematic scope was different from the land border Programmes, as it was concentrated on business and SME development, along with environmental protection and climate change issues.

Figure 8: Thematic objectives of EU-UA CBC cooperation projects, breakdown by programme, 2014-2020



Source: own elaboration based on keep.eu database.
Note: only the projects with the participation of Ukraine are presented.

In the previous reviews of the ENI CBC Programmes a postulate was tabled about the need for better coordination and a more earnest seeking of synergies with other ENP instruments, as well as EU political framework and strategies. Simultaneously, the programmes are recognised as a valuable instrument, involving a high level of co-ownership, with strong political commitment among MS and partner countries, bringing a distinctive contribution to local/regional development policies (EC 2018a; EC 2018b). As regards the projects' participants, the experience gained in CBC Programmes results not only in undertaking new projects of that type (with increasing responsibilities), but also in developing relations, dialogue, and sustainable partnerships.

3.2. Transnational cooperation between EU Members States and Ukraine

Transnational cooperation programmes involve regions from several countries of the EU and in some cases also neighbouring countries. The participation of the latter is possible thanks to the combination of funding from the Cohesion Policy, and the European Neighbourhood Policy. The aim of the programmes is to promote better cooperation and regional development focused on joint approaches and actions in order to solve shared problems and address common challenges at the macro-regional scale (Dühr et al. 2007). In the 2014-2020 programming period, 15 transnational co-operation programmes covering larger areas of co-operation (such as the Baltic Sea, Alpine, Danube, and Mediterranean regions) were implemented with an ERDF contribution of EUR 2.12 billion.[16]

In addition to EU funded programmes, and in order to tap into transborder potentials and solve common problems of the neighbouring countries and regions, four macro-regional strategies have been formulated at the EU level: for the Baltic Sea region (2009), the Danube region (2010), the Adriatic and Ionian region (2014), and the Alpine region (2015) (Sielker, Rauhut 2018). Of these four strategies, two are limited to EU Member States and regions, while another two, i.e. Danube and Adriatic/Ionian also cover neighbouring countries either in their entirety – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania (Adriatic/Ionian only), Moldova (Danube only) – or selected regions, as in the case of Ukraine (Danube). An important role of these strategies is the coordination of actions under territorial cooperation programmes, including those funded by the European Union. For the Interreg Danube Transnational programme (one of the main sources of funding for the macro-regional strategy) with Ukrainian partners, approximately EUR 215 million is foreseen for the period 2021-2027,[17] maintaining the level of allocation from the previous period.[18] As mentioned above, the NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme will be implemented within Interreg B strand in the 2021-20127 perspective.

3.2.1. Cooperation within Macroregional Danube Strategy and INTERREG B Danube

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) covers 14 countries, including Ukrainian partners from four regions: Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, and Odesa. The Strategy area overlaps with the eligible area of the Interreg Danube programme (Map 6).

The EUSDR introduced a specific instrument for networking territorial cooperation partners i.e. The Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) founded in 2011. This constitutes a platform for civil society cooperation, opinion and capacity building, as well as networking including national, regional, and international NGOs, representatives from churches, minorities, academia, and representatives from EU institutions. It functions as the interface for structured consultations between civil society and public

[16] Commission Implementing Decision of 16 June 2014 setting up the list of areas eligible for funding from the European Regional Development Fund under cross-border and Transnational components of the European territorial cooperation goal for the period 2014 to 2020, Annex III.

[17] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_7370 (Accessed: 5 January 2023).

[18] https://keep.eu/programmes/63/2014-2020-Danube/ (Accessed: 5 January 2023).

and private authorities on the regional, national, and EU level as well as to international and intergovernmental organisations active in the region.[19]

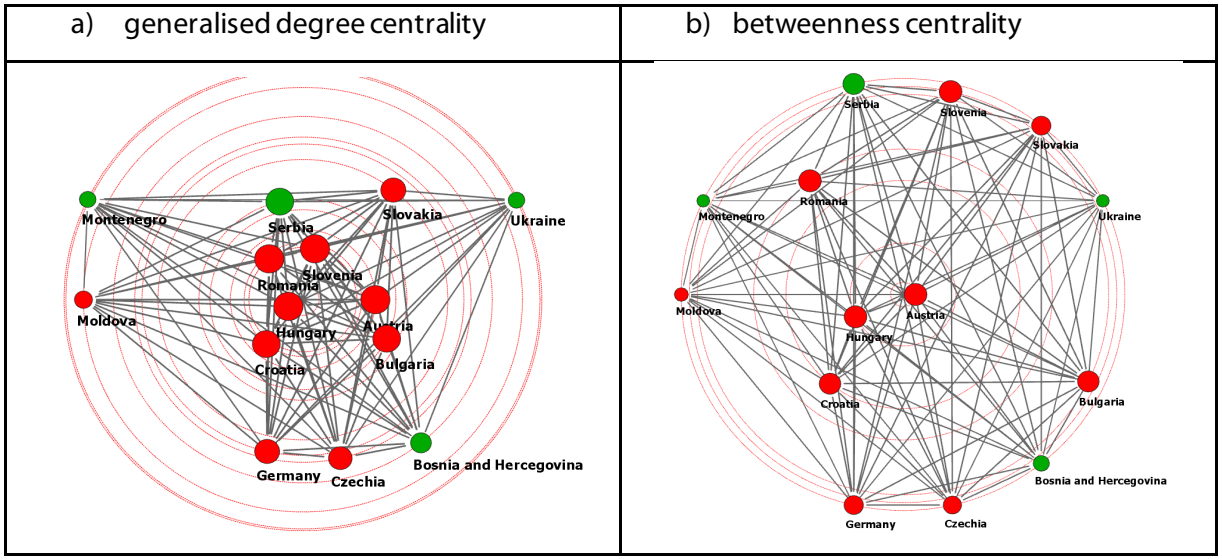
Map 6: EUSDR and Danube Transnational Programme Macro-Region eligible area

Source: https://danube-region.eu/about/ (Accessed: 5 January 2023).

The analysis of projects implemented in the Danube macro-region in the period 2014-2020 has shown that the degree of involvement of partners from each country varies (Figure 9). Based on the number and structure of partner relationships, which was used to calculate the generalised degree of centrality (power centrality) indicator, the involvement of individual countries in this cooperation network can be assessed. The most central position in the network was occupied by Hungary, which could be related to its core geographical location within the macro-region. A number of further countries such as Austria, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia, and, to a slightly lesser extent, Bulgaria were also the main nodes of transnational cooperation in the area. By contrast, in terms of mediating contacts (betweenness centrality), Austria was the most important, followed slightly by Hungary, with Croatia and Romania also playing a role. Of the non-EU countries, Serbia was significant as a hub for transnational cooperation, becoming involved in macro-regional projects more frequently than EU Member States such as Germany, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. In contrast, partners from Ukraine, alongside Montenegro and Moldova, were the least involved in projects implemented within the macro-region. The low participation of Ukrainian beneficiaries may have been due, inter alia, to their relatively peripheral location in relation to the main axis of cooperation, i.e. the Danube River, which is Ukraine's border river for a relatively short distance before it flows into the Black Sea.

[19] https://dcsf.danubestrategy.eu/ (Accessed: 5 January 2023).

Figure 9: Cooperation networks within Danube macroregion – network centralities



Source: own elaboration (Social Network Visualizer) based on keep-eu database.

Beneficiaries from Ukraine participated in 17 projects of the Interreg Danube programme of the 155 total projects implemented during the 2014-2020 programming period. The value of these projects was relatively small compared to the programme budget, amounting to EUR 2.1 million, or about 1% of the total allocation. In addition to Ukrainian partners, beneficiaries from Romania were most often involved in their implementation, as well as Bulgaria, Austria, Slovenia, and Hungary. Organisations from Serbia and Croatia were also relatively frequently involved in these projects, and slightly less frequently from Slovakia and Hungary. On the other hand, participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova were relatively rarely partners in these projects, and institutions from Montenegro and the Czech Republic were involved the least often.

The main burden of transnational cooperation within Interreg Danube lay with Ukrainian public institutions and NGOs (17). In contrast, Ukrainian regional and local authorities were directly involved in only 3 projects. Overall, the greatest involvement in transnational projects was shown by beneficiaries from the Zakarpattia (9) and Odesa (5) regions, with no Ukrainian partners from Chernivtsi region and a fairly significant involvement of Kyiv-based institutions (5).

3.2.2. Other initiatives at the macro-regional scale with the potential involvement of Ukraine LRA

Another initiative implemented within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which is intended to foster bottom-up co-operation in the macro-regional dimension including Ukraine, is the Black Sea Synergy. The aim of the synergy is to develop cooperation within the Black Sea region itself and between the region and the EU and thus implement the regional dimension to the ENP.[20] So far, however, this endeavour has not yielded significant results, due to the objective difficulties of cooperation in the Black Sea Basin.[21] As a result, the Black Sea cross-border cooperation programme outlined in the chapter above is of greater importance within this area.

[20] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_07_486 (Accessed: 5 January 2023).
[21] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd_2019_100_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v3_p1_1013788-1.pdf (Accessed: 5 January 2023).

Regional cooperation around the sea basin in the field of Blue economy is supported by the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea (CMA) that was adopted in 2019 by Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine. Its implementation is supported by the EU through the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism, offering support to the regional and national authorities in developing projects.[22] The scientific pillar of CMA constitutes the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea, enhancing four domains: BS Knowledge Bridge, BS Blue Economy, Key Infrastructure & Policy Enablers, and Empowered Citizens & Enhanced Blue Workforce (BSMETU 2019).[23] The local and regional governments (and their associations) as well as other local authorities (like universities, agencies, NGOs) from MS and UA have the opportunity to participate in joint projects regarding the Black Sea.[24]

In addition to the transnational strategies and programmes supported by the European Union, there are other bottom-up efforts to develop territorial cooperation in a transnational dimension involving Ukraine. One of these is the cooperation initiative within the framework of the Carpathian Macro-region Strategy developed along the lines of the Alpine Strategy, which was launched in 2016 by Poland and is supported by the European Committee of Regions (Jourde, Lierop 2019). The first stage within Macro-regional Strategy for the Carpathian region involved preparing a diagnosis for the macroregion, which took into account the social, economic, and spatial aspects of development. In 2018, a draft Macro-regional Strategy was drawn up in cooperation and consultation with other countries of the region (Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary) that signed the Carpathian Declaration. Further activities included the study on potential pilot actions in the Carpathian Macro-region conducted in 2022 that recommended the use of the following tools in order to strengthen transnational cooperation a) macro-regional spatial development strategy b) youth cooperation and exchanges, and c) building the capacity of local and regional governments needed for the bottom-up implementation of joint projects and programmes (Smętkowski et al. 2022).

3.3. European Neighbourhood Policy Instruments and other initiatives to support EU-UA territorial cooperation

Twinning and TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange) are the instruments of peer-to-peer cooperation between EU Member States (MS) and the countries covered by the enlargement, neighbourhood, and international partnership and development policy (INTPA). These instruments can be used by Ukraine in the same way as other countries covered by the ENI and the IPA. In addition to these instruments, programmes aimed directly at administrative reforms in Ukraine are also being implemented, in particular on decentralisation and regional policy (Box 5) under the U-LEAD with the Europe programme or the SIGMA joint programme with the OECD, which also covers other countries. Several initiatives and programmes within the framework of the Eastern Partnership (Gahler 2021) are also available for Ukrainian local governments, some of which include components for territorial cooperation. In addition, cooperation between regional and local development stakeholders is possible i.a. through EU horizontal programmes on scientific cooperation, youth and student exchanges, the cultural sector, as well as environmental protection and climate change.

[22] https://blackseablueeconomy.eu/about/our-mission (Accessed: 23 January 2023).
[23] http://connect2blacksea.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Black_Sea_SRIA_Final.pdf (Accessed: 23 January 2023).
[24] Projects' database: https://blackseablueeconomy.eu/projects/maritime-datahub (Accessed: 23 January 2023).

Box 5: Regional policy actors in Ukraine

The subjects of state regional policy in Ukraine are the President of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the authorities of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, central and local executive authorities, and local government bodies and their officials. Associations of local self-government units and their voluntary associations, regional development agencies, public associations, and legal and natural persons participate in the formation and implementation of state regional policy.

At the central level, parliamentary committees, ministries and state agencies are responsible for regional development policies. The main institutions include: the Specialised Parliamentary Commission for the Organisation of State Authorities, Local Government, Regional Development and Urbanism; the Ministry of Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine; the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine and the Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine.

Separately, the activities of the following institutions in regional policy-making should be highlighted: the Association of Regional Development Agencies; the Center for Adaptation of the Civil Service to European Union Standards; and the State Agency for Infrastructure Projects of Ukraine.

Source: own elaboration.

3.3.1. Twinning

The beginnings of Twinning date to 1998, with an extension to ENP countries in 2004 (Panchuk, Bossuyt 2018). In 2021 the largest part of the projects was implemented in the Neighbourhood East region (37%) (EC 2022). The scope of the support provided under policy-driven Twinning activities includes the development and review of legislative solutions (promoting approximation of the EU standards, acquis communautaire), institutional development, as well as various forms of training. After defining the necessary support for a Policy Administration Reform project in a beneficiary country, the MS partner/s – of the relevant level and expertise areas – are selected and join the project team (with the project lasting about 2-3 years[25]). The potential Ukrainian participants of the Twinning projects are the institutions shaping and implementing state policy (ministries, central executive and state collegial authorities, and – before the Russian illegal annexation – the authorities of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea).[26]

According to the data published by the Center for Adaptation of the Civil Service to the Standards of the European Union (2023), till March 2022 there were 56 completed Ukrainian twinning projects, 4 at the implementation stage and 16 at the stage of preparation of the Twinning Fiche (total 76 projects). Their MS partners were recruited in the first place from France (19 projects), Germany (17), Lithuania (13), and Poland (13).[27] The sectors most covered were justice and home affairs, and transport (both with 13 projects each). The review carried out of the Twinning projects' lists confirmed that the cooperating institutions were situated at the central level of administration.

According to the European Commission Evaluation of the Twinning instrument in the period 2010-2017 (EC 2019), the uptake of Twinning initiatives is declining – this, in spite of the appreciated positive contribution of Twinning to reform processes, institutional building, and added value over other

[25] The Twinning Light projects offer shorter implementation periods of up to six months (EC 2019).
[26] https://center.gov.ua/en/press-center/articles/item/3606-twinning-institutional-building-instrument (Accessed: 23 January 2023).
[27] In recent years the increasing share of the new EU MS leading the projects is observed – in the four currently implemented projects the Lead MS are: Latvia, Czech Republic, Poland and Lithuania.

instruments as related to the exchange of the specific public sector's expertise. The lower interest of MS in the instrument is connected i.a. to budgetary constraints on staffing levels and less secure environments in some beneficiary countries. The increasing role of the EU MS specialist agencies (e.g. Germany's GIZ, Expertise France) in managing Twinning projects is observed.

Ukraine was in the lead of East Neighbourhood countries in terms of the implemented projects (Panchuk, Bossuyt 2018), but in recent years other countries have noted more ongoing projects (EC 2022). Among the weaknesses of Twinning projects, the Ukrainian side notes a long preparation time and the rigidity of instruments, as well as unfavourable financial conditions for the beneficiary country and a low level of political commitment. The list of threats contains institutional instability, the limited autonomy of public servants, the low level of transparency of the Ukrainian public sector, and insecurity due to the war situation (Panchuk, Bossuyt 2018).

3.3.2. TAIEX

TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange) offers peer-to-peer support from public experts for a short duration (1-5 days), aiming at the approximation of EU legislation and sharing best practices. The instrument was established in 1996 to help the candidate countries to cope with their alignment with the EU internal market. It was extended to support the Turkish Cypriot Community and Neighbourhood Policy, including Ukraine in 2006 (EC 2022). Since then, several new forms of TAIEX cooperation were established within the process of adapting to needs. [28]

Its advantage lies in the quick reaction time to the demand for assistance issued from the beneficiary state. The support takes the form of: workshops with a large number of participants, expert missions of EU MS practitioners to the beneficiary administration, and study visits of beneficiary officials to the EU MS.

Among the target groups are civil servants working in central and local executive authorities or associations of local authorities, members and civil servants of legislative and local self-government authorities.[29] According to the data published by the Center for Adaptation of the Civil Service to the Standards of the European Union (2022), from 2006 to 30/11/2022, 20,781 Ukrainian representatives participated in 901 events (724 initiated by Ukraine and 177 by the European Commission).

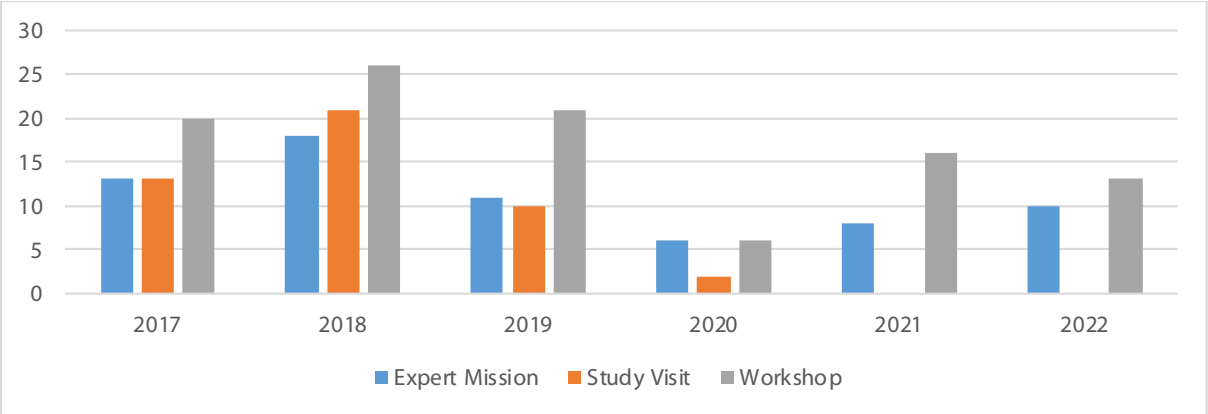
The distribution of different forms of TAIEX support to Ukraine during the last six years (based on European Commission data), covering the activities where Ukraine was the sole or one of the Beneficiary Countries shows that the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have had some impact on the intensity of cooperation (study visits) (Figure 10). As a result, from April 2020, TAIEX became a fully virtual instrument in response to mobility restrictions (EC 2022).

Among the bilateral activities (Ukraine reported as the sole Beneficiary), in the years 2017-2022, 95 took place in Ukraine (expert missions and workshops) and 38 in the form of Video Tele Conferences of EU Institutions. The rest of the bilateral activities were organised in the form of a study visit to the countries presented below (Figure 11).

[28] TAIEX forms aiming at supporting MS (TAIEX-REGIO, TAIEX-Technical Support Instrument, TAIEX-Environmental Review) and other territories (TAIEX-Partnership Instrument, TAIEX-INTPA) (EC, 2022). Direct support to the local authorities was provided by the specific Local Administration Facility from 2011 to 2015 (suspended). Since 2018 TAIEX Strategic support to Local Authorities in Western Balkan Countries has been implemented (EC 2020).

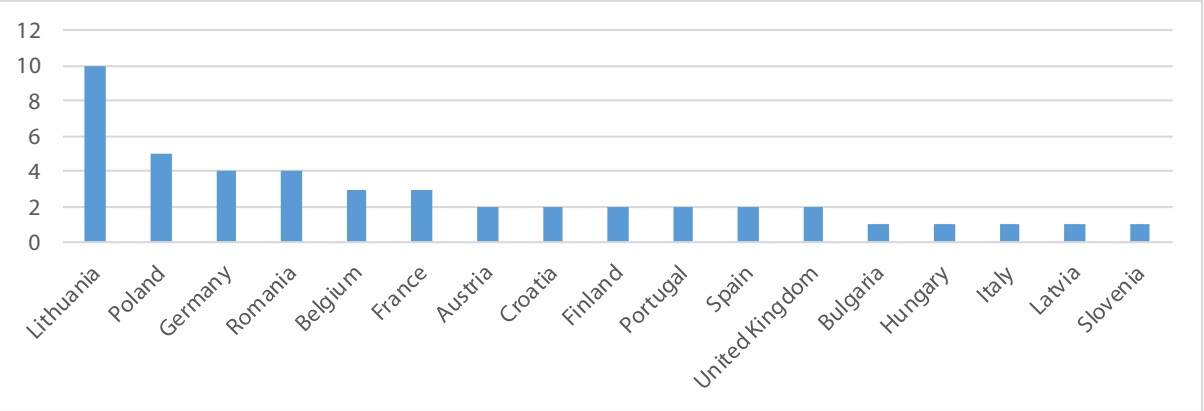
[29] https://center.gov.ua/en/press-center/articles/item/4047-ta iex-institutional-building-instrument (Accessed: 23 January 2023).

Figure 10: Forms of TAIEX activities in which Ukrainian partners participated, 2017-2022



Source: own elaboration, based on TAIEX search events database.

Figure 11: Number of Ukrainian Study Visits (Ukraine as the sole Beneficiary), 2017-2022



Source: own elaboration, based on TAIEX Search events database.

The thematic scope of TAIEX activities in Ukraine between 2006-2022 concerned mainly the area "Stronger society and inclusive economy" (391 events), followed by "Rule of law, migration, and security" (219 events), "Green and digital transitions, connectivity" (181 events) and "Farm to Fork" (104 events) (CACSSEU 2023).

TAIEX boasts very good ratings from supported Beneficiary Countries – 95% of TAIEX participants (from all countries) in 2021 rated TAIEX experts as excellent or good (EC 2022). The conducted external evaluations confirmed its effectiveness in building institutional capacity. The evaluation of the period 2007-2015, which concerned the IPA countries, found TAIEX assistance highly relevant and its contributions to the reforms undergoing in Beneficiary States – "almost exclusively positive" (EC 2016). The 2015-2020 evaluation indicated a low administrative burden and a quick process of approval of events (EC 2022).

3.3.3. Other EU programmes and initiatives

U-LEAD with Europe

The Ukraine – Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development Programme (U-LEAD with Europe) is a partnership of the Ukrainian government and the European Union and its member states Germany, Sweden, Poland, Denmark, Estonia, and Slovenia. This multi-donor action was established in 2016 and will last until 2023. The programme is implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. So far, 186 million EUR were invested by donors. Within

the framework of the programme, the Ukrainian Government, represented by the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development and the Ministry of Digital Transformation, receives support in the coordination and implementation of decentralisation and regional policy reforms. The overall objective of the action is to contribute to the further advancement of multilevel governance in Ukraine, which is transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the population.

U-LEAD with Europe puts a strong emphasis on the capacity development of elected officials and public servants in municipalities in Ukraine. To this aim, the Programme carries out targeted training for officials at the national, regional, and local levels (e.g. "First Steps" programme for newly created municipalities, "Steps for Leaders", and "Steps for Specialists" offering in-depth expertise to officials). U-LEAD with Europe gives support to platforms for horizontal exchanges, networking, and learning between practitioners, including facilitation of contacts to EU local administrations and actors. Since 2016, it has conducted over 11,000 events in various formats (e.g. seminars, workshops, peer-to-peer exchanges, and study tours) (U-LEAD 2022). Among the thematic priorities of U-LEAD with Europe, there is also sector reform support (decentralisation in the areas of healthcare, education, and social services) and digital transformation support (use of digital opportunities, e-governance, and e-learning). Moreover, U-LEAD with Europe, together with the Swiss-Ukrainian DECIDE project – assisted the MCTD of Ukraine in preparing the guideline to assist the territorial communities of Ukraine in expanding cooperation with foreign municipalities (IDI_8).

Box 6: Bridges of Trust project within U-LEAD

The Bridges of Trust project, funded by the U-LEAD with Europe Programme, was implemented by the CEMR and PLATFORMA from March 2021 to November 2022. The project aimed at facilitating partnerships between Ukrainian and EU non-metropolitan municipalities, with a maximum of 50,000 and a minimum of 400 inhabitants. Ten municipalities from five EU member states (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and Slovakia) were selected to initiate and share best practices with Ukrainian partners. Online bilateral meetings between partners allowed for identifying common interests as well as planning joint activities such as traineeships and study visits to exchange knowledge and skills. The partners received financial and organisational support, as well as expert inputs on the topics such as local finances, climate, energy, environment, mobility, gender equality, social affairs, and digitalisation. After the start of the Russian aggression, some European municipalities, upon the request of their Ukrainian partners, delivered humanitarian aid and assistance.

Source: own elaboration based on official webpages.

Moreover, U-LEAD facilitates the use of knowledge from EU member states in promoting the regional and local development of Ukraine. It provides support to municipalities in the preparation of local and regional development projects. Since 2016, 309 municipalities have received support in the elaboration of local development strategies (U-LEAD 2022). U-LEAD cooperates with associations of regions and cities to facilitate municipal partnerships between the EU member states and Ukraine. For example, through cooperation with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, ten new partnerships between the Ukrainian and European municipalities were established (Box 6).

SIGMA

Another initiative which aims at strengthening the foundations for improved public governance in Ukraine and other EU neighbouring and candidate countries is Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA). It is a joint initiative of the OECD and EU, operating since 1992.

SIGMA currently operates in 18 countries and has an annual budget of around 9 million EUR. Its key objective is to support socio-economic development through building the capacities of the public sector, enhancing horizontal governance, and improving the design and implementation of public administration reforms. SIGMA reviews and gives feedback on legal frameworks and reform strategies, and provides advice and recommendations on the design and prioritisation of reforms. It creates opportunities to share good practice and methodologies for implementation of the reforms.

Selected other initiatives within Eastern Partnership

Ukraine, together with other countries of the Eastern Partnership, can collaborate with the European Union LRAs within the framework of the EU4Energy Initiative. This action is designed to support the implementation of sustainable energy policies and to foster co-operative energy sector development at the regional level. The first phase of the Programme ran from 2016 to 2020 and had a budget of 21 million Euros. The second phase began in 2021 and will run until 2025.

Under the EU4Energy framework, the Covenant of Mayors East is being developed. The CoM East project was launched in 2011 as a part of a global initiative under the same name. It aims at providing local authorities in the Eastern Partnership countries with a framework for their energy and climate action. Among its core activities there are: operating the Country Helpdesks; networking and cooperating with various institutions from public and private sectors; capacity building. In Ukraine, there are 268 signatories of CoM East.

To strengthen governance in the Eastern Partnership region, the Partnership for Good Governance (PGG) was established. The programme has two successive phases: PGG I (2015-2018) and PGG II (2019-2022). It aims at strengthening the capacity of the benefiting countries to implement domestic reforms that will align their national legislations with European standards, through reviews of legislation, sharing information and experiences, and carrying out country-specific and regional projects.

In the field of private sector development and entrepreneurship, territorial cooperation can be developed within the Mayors for Economic Growth (M4EG) Facility. This joint initiative of the EU and United Nations Development Programme has provided support for mayors and their teams in the Eastern Partnership Region since 2017. The current phase encompasses the years 2021-2024 and has an estimated budget of 14.25 million dollars. M4EG aims at strengthening the technical skills and capacities of LRAs to implement economic strategies in line with the principles of good governance and sound financial management. It supports LRAs in developing a new generation of local economic development plans through training and knowledge exchange activities.

Selected Horizontal EU programmes available for Ukrainian partners

The territorial cooperation between the municipalities in the European Union and Ukraine can also be financed through a number of other horizontal EU programmes that take place within individual thematic areas.

Scientific research may be funded within the Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development, named Horizon**.** The previous programme, Horizon 2020, ran from 2014 to 2020 and provided an estimated 80 billion EUR in funding. The most recent one, Horizon Europe, has a budget of 95.5 billion EUR to be distributed over 7 years (2021-2027). In October 2021, Horizon Europe expanded its partnerships beyond the member states of the EU and included Ukraine as an associate member.

Cooperation in the field of education, training, youth, and sport can be developed within the framework of the Erasmus programme, established originally in 1987. The 2021-2027 the Erasmus+ programme has an estimated budget of 26.2 billion EUR, which is nearly double the funding compared

to its predecessor (2014-2020). Ukraine can take part in certain actions of the Erasmus+, subject to specific criteria or conditions.

Support for the culture and audiovisual sectors can be received within the framework of the Creative Europe Programme. For the 2021-2027 edition, this instrument has a budget of 2.44 billion EUR, compared to 1.47 billion EUR in the previous edition (2014-2020). It is aimed at reinforcing cultural diversity and responding to the needs and challenges of the cultural and creative sectors. In September 2022, a special call for Ukrainian artists was published. Projects can engage Ukrainian and EU stakeholders on the level of municipalities, e.g. in post-war cultural heritage recovery.

The environment and climate action can be supported by the LIFE Programme. This EU's funding instrument began in 1992. The most recent phase encompasses the years 2021-2027 and has a budget of 5.45 billion EUR. It is divided into 4 sub-programmes: nature and biodiversity; circular economy and quality of life; climate change mitigation and adaptation; clean energy transition. Ukraine was the first non-EU country to join the programme in June 2022.

4. BENEFITS AND BARRIERS OF EU-UA TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

KEY FINDINGS

- Measuring the effects of territorial cooperation is challenging. Comprehensive research on the benefits of EU-Ukraine LRAs cooperation is lacking.
- Intangible effects of territorial cooperation between EU and Ukrainian regions and cities prevail and are manifested by growing mutual trust, know-how transfer, and improving institutional capacity. These intangible effects are the prerequisite for more substantial investment projects.
- The outputs and impacts of the tangible benefits of territorial cooperation are still to come on a larger scale as a result of limited funds for the implementation of large infrastructural projects
- The effects of cooperation highly depend on the collaborating parties. The different experiences in the EU (New and Old MSs), the shared past, and the character and strength of LRAs' previous contacts matter.
- Territorial cooperation between Ukraine and bordering European countries is characterised by various barriers embraced into seven categories: infrastructural, legal and institutional, economic, financial, socio-cultural, and geographical.
- Several factors hinder the EU-funded projects' implementation. The most severe are lack of knowledge of EU programmes and their limitations, scarcity of funds, and procedural and legal obstacles.

4.1. Types and spheres of benefits of EU-UA territorial cooperation

The reviewed literature remarkably captures the aims and assumptions of territorial cooperation and provides numerous examples of successful transborder projects. However, the assessment of the actual benefits of cooperation is scattered and unsystematic, and the territorial effects of transborder cooperation are difficult to measure (Haarich et al. 2019; Wassenberg, Reitel 2020). Furthermore, comprehensive studies regarding the EU and Ukrainian territorial cooperation are scarce and far less developed than those relating to the EU space (Chilla, Lambracht 2022; Decoville, Durand 2021; Pupier 2020).[30]

We may distinguish two interrelated types of benefits of territorial cooperation among regions and cities: tangible, which has material representation or presence in a physical space, and intangible – hard-to-value effects of cooperation related to networking, relations, and trust (Gorzelak, Zawalińska 2004). Intangible benefits include better knowledge of the neighbour's language, understanding of cultural heritage and history, transfer of experiences, and joint effort to create institutional structures. These matters prepare the ground for deepening transborder cooperation in infrastructure and economy, which is associated with creating functional regions. We provide a short description of the

[30] Some knowledge of the benefits of territorial cooperation between the EU and Ukraine was obtained through interviews. These results provide the framework for further questions and should be validated by a larger sample size.

intangible and tangible benefits of EU-UA territorial cooperation, citing examples of good practices based on the literature review and stakeholder interviews.

4.1.1. Intangible benefits of territorial cooperation

Know-how transfer, planning, and coordination

The fundamental intangible benefit of territorial cooperation is improving the transfer of information, experience, and knowledge. This takes place on each level of mutual and multilateral contacts, from individual to institutional and administrative levels. Significant benefits stem from preparing joint development strategies and planning and coordinating activities. Diagnosis of the functional border area, setting agreed vision, priorities and goals, and involvement of regional and local actors prepare a framework for successful cooperation to build the competitiveness of neighbouring regions (Korop, Miszczuk 2018). These processes evoke experience-sharing, boost dialogue, and deepen reflection on future directions of territorial cooperation (Sienkiewicz 2021).

It is worth noting that the character of expected benefits depends on the collaborating parties. The cooperation with CEEC regions and cities offers Ukraine their country-specific added value related to the recent transition experience, cultural and linguistic proximity, and shared communist past. On the other hand, the joint projects with regions and cities of older MSs deliver more sector-specific comparative advantages based on institutional experience in specific policy sectors, the similarity of sectoral governance, prior knowledge, and the density of sectoral networks with the beneficiary institutions in Ukraine (Bossuyt, Panchuk 2017).

Box 7: The Strategy for the development of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation (SK-UA)

The "Strategy for the development of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation till 2020" exemplifies a systematic approach towards cross-border cooperation. The Strategy resulted from the project "Slovak-Ukrainian Cultural Centre – establishment and strengthening of the Presov self-governing region and Transcarpathia region", supported by the EU and ENPI Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine CBC Programme 2007-2013. The Strategy formed the basis for further developing cross-border cooperation within Transcarpathia and between Prešov and Košice Slovakian self-governing regions. The Strategy postulates the cross-border area functioning as one learning ecosystem. The strategic goal is to contribute to sustainable development and improve the quality of life of cross-border region inhabitants. The strategic objectives are: to increase innovation and competitiveness; to improve external and internal accessibility for the flow of people, goods, and services; to strengthen the social and cultural integrity; to enhance the protection of the environment, natural beauty, values, and cultural heritage; Europeanisation of the cross-border region.

Source: own elaboration based on Korop, Miszczuk 2018; Plenta 2017; Tovkanets, Tovkanets 2019.

Building local and regional institutional capacity

Significant progress has been achieved in the institutional dimension of cooperation between the EU and Ukraine policy-makers and the broader engagement of civil society in the decision-making process. The colossal change made by decentralisation reforms and establishing local self-government in Ukraine is, to a great extent, the outcome of good practice transferred through territorial cooperation based on the cooperation experience. Launching anti-corruption reforms in Ukraine in 2014 also exemplifies the benefits of UE-UA cooperation on the territorial level in the capacity-building sphere. However, the insufficient efforts of Ukraine's authorities toward overcoming systemic corruption might

undermine the ultimate outcomes of governmental system reforms and diminish the Europeanisation effects (Bielecka 2019; Zheltovskyy 2021). The related obstacles and opportunities for future cooperation are described in section 4.1.2 and Chapter 5.

Territorial cooperation creates opportunities to improve the performance of local governments. Therefore, local governments must be able to strengthen their potential. An interviewee explained: *each of these local governments has its strength and potential, especially in cities. [...]. Cooperation, a common brand, triggers, activates, and identifies the potential that already exists* (IDI_1). This is particularly important for smaller and peripheral cities and their regions, which the interviewee confirms: *Peripheral, less affluent regions have a chance that thanks to participation in a joint project, they will combine their potentials and be stronger together* (IDI_6). Local government cooperation is also perceived as an element of local government diplomacy, which supplements or continues the government's concept of public diplomacy (Sienkiewicz 2021).

Box 8: Assistance in the establishment of the Local Democracy Agency within the ALDA network (PL-UA)

The Local Democracy Agency in Dnipro is a non-governmental organisation under Ukrainian law established in 2015 with the support of the Lower Silesian Marshall Office, a partner of the Dnipropetrovsk region. The Agency is the first LDA in Ukraine, a part of a network run by the ALDA – the European Association for Local Democracy – the global alliance of local and regional authorities and civil society actors working together with a participative approach for resilient, inclusive, and sustainable communities. The Agency aims to implement projects focusing on civil society development, social participation enhancement, and transparency of management improvement. Part of the Agency's activities relates to integrating internal migrants from the Donbas region, which is under Russian occupation.

Source: own elaboration based on Ostrowski 2020; https://www.alda-europe.eu/partner-socio/lda-of-the-dnipropetrovsk-region/ (Accessed: 13 January 2023).

Mutual trust

Another intangible benefit stems directly from joint socio-cultural projects. Due to the various territorial cooperation activities involving partners representing different cultures, the border gradually transforms from a dividing element into an integrating factor, a meeting place for neighbours, no matter if there are one or more borders between them. As one of the interviewees explained: *The global effect of cooperation is that the fact of the existence of the border is somehow eliminated. We do not see this border. Thanks to these projects, the border is simply not an obstacle for cities and other entities to be able to cooperate with each other* (IDI_6). The cooperation overcomes mutual prejudices and resentments between the inhabitants of the border areas resulting from the historical heritage. The growing social mobility between collaborating regions and cities is conducive to the mutual understanding of value systems, improving intercultural acceptance and dialogue, and trust-building (Bielecka 2019; Gwardzińska-Chowaniec 2019).

Box 9: Trust-building within European Days of Good Neighbourhood (PL-UA)

The Spiritual Culture of the Borderland Foundation initiated European Days of Good Neighbourhood in 2004. The series of annual events organised on the Polish-Ukrainian border aims to break down psychological barriers and stimulate cross-border contacts. In selected places on the border (Korczmin-Stajivka, Krylov-Kreczow, Zberez-Adamczuki, Dolhobyczow-Uhrynow, Niżankowice-Malhowice) temporary border crossings open, and for a few days, border residents and visitors can cross the border, and participate in cultural, religious, and sports events. The municipalities of Przemyśl (PL) and Lviv (UA) have co-organised the European Days of Good Neighbourhood at the closed Malhowice–Niżankowice border-crossing annually since 2004. In 2014 two thousand people took part in the concerts and cultural events located directly at the border in a 'no man's land' area. The event symbolically changed the border space, if only temporarily, and proved the need for more intensified communication. As a tangible result of this initiative, an investment project was launched in 2022 to develop the infrastructure necessary to open a new border crossing point.

Source: own elaboration based on Nowicka et al. 2019; https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/9766/Artykul/3020707,Poland-Ukraine-to-open-new-border-crossing-next-year-officials (Accessed: 19 January 2023).

4.1.2. Tangible benefits of territorial cooperation

Connectivity

The direct and tangible result of the territorial cooperation agreements is the development of cross-border infrastructure, which has far-reaching consequences. Modernisation and development of the existing transport network increase its capacity, and the development of border crossings ensures trouble-free flows of people and goods. The smooth operation of the transport networks and border infrastructure is a vital prerequisite for socio-economic growth in cross-border regions (Osikowicz 2017).

Box 10: Connectivity improvement on the Romanian-Ukrainian border (RO-UA)

Among the awarded projects within Romania-Ukraine Joint Operational Programme, are four projects related to connectivity improvement within cross-border areas: (1) promoting the mobility of the people, goods, and services in the area of Izvoarele Sucevei-Shepit by improving the infrastructure in the historic Bucovina region, (2) construction work on the road to checkpoint Diakivzi-Rakovez, (3) developing a cross border inter-modal connection between Isaccea-Orlivka-Tulcea-Izmail, (4) improvement of the Transport Infrastructure in the Cross-Border Area Chernivtsi-Suceava.

Source: own elaboration based on https://ro-ua.net/en/about-the-programme/awarded-projects.html (Accessed: 13 January 2023).

Environment protection

Transborder regional and local cooperation impacts the conservation and management of the natural environment. The collaborating LRAs jointly recognise and manage environmental threats, promote sustainable economic use of natural resources, develop renewable energy sources, and support saving energy. Addressing strategic cross-border ecological challenges, environmental protection, sustainable use, and management of natural resources enhance the quality of air, water, soil, and forestry resources.

Box 11: Energy transformation (LT-UA)

Two cities, Ukrainian Myrhorod and Lithuanian Anykščiai signed a partnership agreement in 2017. In 2018, in the framework of the project "Strengthening the administrative and institutional capacity of Myrhorod municipality" supported by the Development and Democracy Promotion Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, a delegation from Myrhorod attended seminars on the use of renewable energy sources, energy saving in the residential sector, and waste management during their visit to Anykščiai. Energy experts from Anikščiai also visited Myrhorod and met with housing and communal services employees, budgetary institutions and local deputies. The experts prepared a comprehensive energy audit of one of the secondary schools.

Source: own elaboration based on: Brovdiy 2021.

Risk prevention and protection

The vital benefit stemming from transborder and, in particular, cross-border cooperation is joint management and planning to reduce risks of damage to the natural environment. A coordinated approach is essential to develop long-term solutions to the environmental problems faced by the border areas, particularly those associated with ecological emergencies. Also, cooperation in crisis management leads to the increased security of inhabitants through specialists in emergency medical services training, purchasing special vehicles, and providing the emergency infrastructure such as training grounds or helipads. Such joint activities have led to the improvement and development of the legal framework for the organisation and operation of structures involved in crisis management.

Box 12: Integrated Tisza River Basin Management (HU-SK-UA)

JOINTISZA Project (Strengthening Cooperation between River Basin Management Planning and Flood Risk Prevention to Enhance the Status of Waters of the Tisza River Basin) was realised within the DANUBE Interreg Transnational Programme in the years 2017-19. The project's main output is an Integrated Tisza River Basin Management Plan. The project ensured that flood risk management planning became more deeply embedded in the River Basin Management planning process and facilitated the involvement of interested stakeholders representing different sectors, e.g. flood risk, water resource, urban hydrology, and drought management. The project enhanced the status of the waters of the Tisza River Basin as an effort of five countries (Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine). The project's results can be adaptable in complex river basin management in other sub-basins.

Source: own elaboration based on Dumitrache et al. 2018, https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/jointisza (Accessed: 13 January 2023).

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has demonstrated the effectiveness of local governments in crisis management. The municipal structure and its focus on practical effects allow for quick and effective action in case of emergency. Thus, local governments can be better suited than national governments or international charity organisations to delivering humanitarian aid without undue delay. An interviewee explained:

> The mayor-to-mayor cooperation is just faster, much more streamlined, and practical. The humanitarian tracks from the EU cities were there long before Red Cross or any other international organisation […] The mayors are always practically orientated. They don't like blah blah, they don't like a lot of speeches, they don't like talking. They are practical people who are used to dealing with practical problems and looking for practical solutions and doing it also in a fast way. They are doers. Therefore, when they have the right means, resources, and instruments, they can be much more effective in addressing needs than some of these organisations that just work with a different mindset (IDI_2).

Growth and jobs

Manifold studies of the EU space confirm the positive economic benefits of European integration employing CBC (Basboga 2020). This cooperation gives impetus to creating supportive conditions for economic development. It might be related to utilising the tourism potential in the border areas, boosting entrepreneurship among the younger population, or enhancing cooperation between businesses and universities in critical sectors. These actions help encompass more regional economic activities and potentially attract foreign investors (Shuliak et al. 2020). The expectations towards economic developments related to the territorial cooperation between UE and UA are exceptionally high due to the lower level of development of the Ukrainian cities and regions in comparison to their EU partners, as well as differences in living standards between the two sides of the EU-Ukraine border (Bielecka 2019).

Box 13: Tourism development in the Carpathian Mountains (HU-SK-RO-PL-UA)

A number of ENPI-CBC 2014-2020 projects focus on developing tourism in the Carpathian Mountains: 29 in the HU-SK-RO-UA CBC Programme and 20 in the PL-BY-UA CBC Programme. The expected impacts include sustainable development on both sides of the border, helping to decrease the differences in living standards and preventing the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe. These projects have improved the promotion of the region, enhanced services offered to tourists, and enhanced the qualifications of staff involved in the tourism sector. In particular, the projects substantially contributed to diversifying the tourist offer by developing new tourism products. A vital aim of the project "Cross-border cooperation for health tourism of Polish-Ukrainian borderland" was to promote health tourism as a new product in the area of the Polish-Ukrainian border, where numerous health resorts operate. Likewise, the "Carpathian tourism road" project developed new touristic products such as Transcarpathian hiking and biking trails and a wine road. The project "Geo-Carpathians – Creating a Polish-Ukrainian Tourist Route" introduced geological tourism in the region by creating a tourism route comprising 28 geotourist sites (12 in Poland and 16 in Ukraine).

Source: own elaboration based on: EC 2018.

Quality of life

Territorial cooperation between Ukraine and the European Union also supports the development of communal infrastructure and services of general interest to guarantee the safety and security of the citizens in the collaborating regions and cities. In the long term, activities in this area ensure a comparable quality of life for residents in different (often peripheral) locations. The cooperating LRAs devoted cooperation priorities to investments in water and waste management systems, renewal and promotion of cultural heritage, institutional networking for health prevention and well-being interaction, and cooperation among civic organisations. Different groups of regions and cities residents, including young, seniors, and people with disabilities, were the focus of such projects.

Box 14: Comprehensive joint activities to improve the quality of life of residents (DE-UA)

Two small towns, Shchyrets in Ukraine and Gudensberg in Germany, established cooperation in 2013 and signed a partnership agreement in 2016. The cooperation focuses on establishing and improving local services of general interest in Shchyrets (voluntary fire brigade, drinking water supply, and wastewater disposal) and promoting European integration. A broad multi-actor approach characterises this partnership. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the German municipality provided Shchyrets with protective clothing, cardiographs, infrared thermometers, medical stretchers, oxygen masks, and other equipment. The effectiveness of this cooperation was recognised in 2018 when it received the German Sustainability Award as one of seven such municipal partnerships globally.

Source: own elaboration based on Brovdiy 2021; https://www.nachhaltigkeitspreis.de/en/translate-to-englisch-spielwiese/webseite-bis-mrz-2020/wettbewerbe/municipal-partnerships/nominierte-kommunale-partnerschaften/the-city-of-gudensberg/ (Accessed 13 January 2023)

4.2. Obstacles to EU-UA territorial cooperation

4.2.1. General barriers to territorial cooperation

Territorial cooperation between Ukraine and EU regions and cities is characterised by various barriers, ones that can be grouped into seven categories (Gwizdała 2016; Ciok 1998; Krok, Smętkowski 2006; Kawałko 2011; Mrinska et al. 2014).

The first and most commonly described is insufficient development of transport infrastructure, which hinders the flows of people and goods between the neighbouring countries: *It's about having enough communication, airports, and so on and so on* (IDI_4). The number and the capacity of border crossings do not correspond to the level of economic and humanitarian relations between Ukraine and EU member countries (Gizicki, Peciakowski 2020). The main hampering factor is the low quality of road infrastructure and the low level of customs and border services. Small in value, but numerous purchases in cross-border regions generate significant traffic of people and goods. Insufficient infrastructure prolongs waiting times and customs procedures (Gwizdała 2016; Osikowicz 2017; Plenta 2017; Varnaliy, Vasyltsiv 2016).

The infrastructural problems are closely related to the second barrier associated with administrative and legal obstacles. Cooperation is hampered by the complexity of procedures and differences in the legal systems of individual countries, e.g. in public procurement law, which is significant for the subsequent implementation of joint projects (IDI_6). Economic relations are also obstructed by corruption, the low level of security, excessive bureaucracy, and instability of the legal framework on the Ukrainian side (Gwizdała 2016).

The third barrier is a lack of institutions engaged in territorial cooperation. Existing studies highlight the difficulties or impossibility of establishing effective social transborder institutions, which gives long-lasting foundations for fruitful cooperation (Pasternak, Demedyuk 2018; Raczyk, Dołzbłasz 2022). On the one hand, this stems from the strongly formalised nature of the eastern EU border, which makes it much more challenging to initiate cooperation at the grassroots level than to pursue cooperation via supralocal institutions (Dołzbłasz 2018). On the other, it stems from underestimating cross-border cooperation as a regional development tool in Ukraine. An additional matter is that of the low awareness among local authorities of the nature of such cooperation, requiring above all coordinative skills, not rigid administration. Consequently, too few entrepreneurs and non-governmental organisations are involved in implementing territorial cooperation projects (Shuliak, Shuliak 2021;

Sienkiewicz 2021). The lack of competencies on the part of regional and local authorities negatively impacted cooperation (Pasternak, Demedyuk 2018; Varnaliy, Vasyltsiv 2016). Other institutional aspects that impede cooperation development are (Dołzbłasz 2018; Koval et al. 2020; Melehanych 2020; Osikowicz 2017):

- the declarative character of many cooperation agreements,
- the obsolescence of some agreements due to administrative reforms in Ukraine,
- incompatibility of competencies of authorities in cross-border cooperation,
- the frequency of changing the territorial authorities,
- unstable political situation.

The fourth group embraces barriers of an economic character. Next to the low capacity of the border infrastructure and legal obstacles, the most severe barriers to economic cooperation between Ukraine and UE countries are (Gwizdała 2016; Pasternak, Demedyuk 2018; Plenta 2017):

- the asymmetry of border territories' development and the different levels and character of economic transformation;
- the economic peripherality of cross-border regions in comparison to their countries and related poor innovative technologies development, low awareness of innovative forms of business activity (consulting, outsourcing, fundraising, freelance, crowdsourcing, crowdfunding);
- the challenges related to the verification of potential Ukrainian business partners;
- the links between business, the state, and organised crime;
- the problems of Ukrainian legislation's approximation to EU business norms and standards.

The fifth group embraces financial limitations, such as the differing access to external funds for the development of CBC areas, in particular, the nonexistence of regional development funds in Ukraine (Plenta 2017), and the low level of financial services in Ukraine and absence of financial aid mechanisms for cross-border partners (Osikowicz 2017; Pasternak, Demedyuk 2018). Limited local budgets, particularly those of smaller, peripheral cities and regions, hampers cooperation (Gwizdała 2016). Interviewees confirmed this by saying: *They cannot all of a sudden dedicate thousands of euros from their budget to do something for their new contact in Ukraine. Money is also often not there. The smaller you go, the fewer resources they have* (IDI_2).

The sixth group of obstacles relates to socio-cultural issues. Ukraine is not wholly regarded as a stable and reliable partner due to corruption and the unclear political situation (Gwizdała 2016). The literature highlights the dissimilar mentalities of border regions' residents (Pasternak, Demedyuk 2018) and the uneasy heritage of the shared history creating persisting tensions (Dołzbłasz 2018; Gizicki, Peciakowski 2020; Melehanych 2020). Misunderstandings resulting from complex historical relations were also mentioned by the interviewees involved in the implementation of programmes for border regions (IDI_1, IDI_6). The problem with territorial cooperation also stems from the fact that the needs of cross-border local communities that might be satisfied in cooperation are not adequately recognised and shadowed by the political aims (Kawałko 2011).

Additionally, territorial cooperation can be impeded by language barriers. As mentioned by the interviewees, most information on how to establish cooperation is provided in English, which can be a significant barrier for smaller cities and regions both in the EU and in Ukraine (IDI_2). The linguistic problems are closely related to another barrier, which is the lack of sufficient knowledge and experience in establishing international relations. *Smaller and more rural municipalities in Ukraine do not*

simply have the experience or knowledge on how to establish international partnerships an interviewee explained (IDI_3). This problem also affects some local governments in the European Union. As the interviewee said: *They don't have international experiences. They might have never even met a foreign person in their life before* (IDI_2). The lack of experience and knowledge makes establishing cooperation difficult and requires much effort.

The seventh group, physical constraints from natural barriers such as mountains, also impact cross-border cooperation with Ukraine (Tiganasu et al. 2020). The permanent problem, for instance, on the Polish-Ukrainian border is the high activity of natural geodynamic processes, primarily channels and sloping. The Bug River frequently overflows, changing the spatial position of its channel relative to the initial boundary line. Moreover, this area suffers from ecological problems, namely biogenic water pollution by nitrogen and phosphorus compounds, due to intensive agricultural use of sloping lands in the river basin (Busylovska, Maksymenko 2019).

It is worth noticing that the perception of specific barriers depends on the location along the border. The survey results among beneficiaries of the Romanian-Moldovan-Ukrainian CBC programme show that the Ukrainians perceived the quality of governance as the more important. In contrast, in the opinion of Romanian beneficiaries, the other barriers related to natural resources, cultural values, accessibility, and connectivity, business environment, living standards, and social disparities were more important (Tiganasu et al. 2020).

4.2.2. Barriers to bottom-up cooperation

Twin cities

Cooperation between twin towns in the cross-border area may be limited by the lack of financial resources, personal changes in the partner's local authorities or lack of partner's activity. In contrast, in the case of interregional long-distance cooperation, the problem might be different languages or so-called "investment risk", understood as the local authorities' fear that the cost of cooperation and exchange will be inadequate to the effects of such activity (Furmankiewicz 2005). The generalisation of twin cities' cooperation based on the several studied examples of Ukrainian partnerships below is challenging. However, the overview provides a broad spectrum of potential barriers.

The results of the survey among the heads of the municipalities within Amalgamated Territorial Communities established in 2015 revealed that the obstacles in twin cities' partnerships vary from city to city. Respondents pointed out the ongoing administrative reform and related unresolved issues of competencies, other more pressing community priorities, limited knowledge of foreign languages, geographical distance to the respective community, lack of awareness of the opportunities from twin-city cooperation, missing support, the absence of qualified staff, lack of foreign language knowledge. The essential factor was the difficulty with finding partners abroad due to scarcity of information, a lack of responsiveness from potential partner communities, or simply a lack of already existing partnerships which – as it occurred – is a prerequisite to establishing the new ones (Pintsch 2020).

The study on the twin cities of Ukraine and Poland also provides a list of factors that hinder or make the existing cooperation impossible: lack of activities and contacts within existing partnerships, diversity of priorities and challenges for development, management shortages, low citizens' awareness of cooperation, lack of marketing activities. (Bogorodetska 2015). The cultural cooperation of twin cities demands specific circumstances. The interviewees from Lviv and its twin cities (Lublin, Łódź, Wrocław, Kraków, Rzeszów and Przemyśl) agreed that apart from complicated visa procedures, excessive bureaucracy, and public sector domination, other barriers stem from (Nowicka et al. 2019):

- lack of systemic solutions and long-term planning in Ukraine,
- lack of adequate programmes educational programmes in Ukraine,
- no experience in applying for external funds in Ukraine,
- non-existence of cooperation between NGOs and national bodies in Ukraine,
- lack of funds for local cultural projects in the centralised state budget.

Euroregions

Euroregions on Ukraine's borders lag significantly behind the level of activity and effectiveness of Euroregions observed in Western European countries (Prytula, Kalat 2016). The Euroregion's operation so far depicts the range of problems. Firstly, Euroregion did not live up to the expectations directed at transborder cooperation due to already established structures which were functioning on a community project basis (Shaban 2019). Also, the large number of participating administrative units with different cultural, economic, administrative, and legislation systems made challenges (Demedyuk 2016). Due to the lack of territorial self-governments on a local and regional level, all Euroregions on the Ukrainian side were established on a top-down basis, primarily driven by political motives (Kawałko 2011; Korop, Miszczuk 2018). This resulted in a lack of a systemic approach to the organisation of Euroregional cooperation, and an imperfect mechanism of joint planning. For instance, there is an absence of a standard system of natural disaster notification, protection from emergencies, and rational use of natural resources (Kish 2018).

The lack of political leadership on both sides of the border is a significant barrier. The bilateral projects are realised, but broader multilateral cooperation has a mostly declarative character with low engagement at the level of districts and territorial communities (Demedyuk 2016; Kish 2018; Sienkiewicz 2021). Moreover, the literature points out the lack of competencies of self-government authorities in border regions and the poor level of regional authorities' staff preparation to organise joint projects and maintain cooperation (Demedyuk 2016). Another element hampering cooperation is the significant interregional disparities within Euroregions in terms of living standards and the slower pace of development in the regions of neighbouring countries than those being members of the EU. At the same time, we can observe a low level of using the development potential of Euroregions, for instance, based on tourist resources and cultural heritage. National, ethnic, and religious disagreements are also not conducive to transborder cooperation. A significant group of problems relates directly to the border as a barrier in cooperation, namely: poorly developed border transport infrastructure (motorways to state border checkpoints, bridges and car ferries), insufficient traffic capacity of the state border checkpoints, the slow pace of introducing modern methods of control at state border checkpoints, the absence of a visa-free regime for the population to travel on the territory of transborder regions (Kish 2018). Last but not least, a vital drawback is the insufficient organisation of financial support. In particular, unstandardised procedures for preparing and financing transborder cooperation projects and unequal access of Ukrainian participants to financial resources within the framework of realising common programmes with the EU member countries (Demedyuk 2016; Kish 2018; Shaban 2019).

The detailed evidence from the Upper Prut Euroregion confirms the challenges mentioned above (Box 15).

Box 15: Barriers to territorial cooperation in Upper Prut Euroregion (RO-UA)

- The lack of well-trained and professional staff (linguistic, diplomatic, and technical aspects);
- The risks of corruption;
- Low quality of infrastructure in areas attractive to tourists;
- The aim of effective EU funds acquisition has replaced interest in mutual horizontal cooperation;
- The growing disparities between partnering regions in GDP per capita, demography trends, average salaries and pensions growth, and medical care and educational services standards;
- Lack of experienced Western European partners that might play a mentoring role for the Eastern-European partnership;
- The number of border passages and air flight connections is inadequate for the demographic, tourist, and economic potential;
- The legal framework for financing cross-border projects and providing appropriate guarantees is unclear;
- The large geographical area of the Euroregion and multiplicity of partners do not contribute to finding optimal management decisions.
- The business sector is insufficiently represented and involved;
- Regional and local authorities do not sufficiently provide support for cross-border cooperation at the level of civil society institutions.
- Shortage of cooperation on spatial development of borders and infrastructure development;
- The lack of a legal entity status of the Euroregion makes it impossible to attract projects and investments directly;
- Complex dialogue on the rights of national minorities in Ukrainian-Romanian relations.

Source: Own elaboration based on Kruglashov 2019; Sokolovskyy 2022.

4.2.3. Barriers to implementation of EU-funded programmes

Other – often more technical – types of barriers hampered the implementation of projects within EU CBC programmes. The survey carried out among beneficiaries of the Romanian-Moldovan-Ukrainian CBC programme revealed that among the most vital perceived challenges encountered during project implementation (3.5 or more on the 0-5 scale), respondents listed: co-financing possibilities; harmonising national legislation with EU regulations; requesting modifications to the grant contract; ensuring a proper accounting system for the project; undertaking activities in other countries; and writing the proposal according to programme requirements. Other difficulties – perceived as moderate (2.95-3.50 on the 0-5 scale) refers to factors like writing a good quality proposal; hiring expertise team members; involving the target groups; budgeting and management issues; achieving projects

indicators; delivering project activities on time and at the quality requested or following the action plan of the project (Tiganasu et al. 2020).

The most important barrier in applying for EU funding mentioned by the interviewees is the lack of knowledge about EU programmes. This is i.a. due to the language barrier described above. When asked about EU funding, an interviewee said: *You have fantastic programmes, but first, you have to know they exist* (IDI_4). In the second place, among the barriers impeding the application for subsidies from EU funds are the high competitiveness of the programmes and the too-low level of funds allocated to them (IDI_6). The need to provide their contributions by local governments can also be a problem. Smaller and peripheral municipalities may have limited possibilities to cover their own contribution required for some types of EU projects (IDI_2). Procedural issues also constitute an essential source of barriers to applying for EU funds by local governments. Preparing proposals compatible with the legal systems of both countries involved is described as a challenge for local governments. The procedures' complexity also makes applying for funding very time-consuming and challenging: *it takes months, and you have to fill out loads of papers to do so* (IDI_4). As one of the interviewees recalls, sometimes it takes up to 3 years to go through the entire application process, and the conditions and criteria that must be met can be described as very demanding (IDI_2). The waiting time for results is also long. As a result, the selected projects may not correspond to dynamically changing reality. As the interviewee said, *The challenge is that a lot of time passes from the submission of the application to the beginning of the implementation of activities in the project. Quite a long time passes, and we already have a completely different world, different prices* (IDI_6).

5. FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES FOR EU-UA TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

KEY FINDINGS

- Future opportunities for cooperation between regions and cities in the EU and Ukraine are related to the ongoing Russian invasion and integration of Ukraine with EU.
- The cooperation with European LRAs will be vital for the Ukrainian postwar reconstruction efforts, as well as for a further approximation of Ukraine to membership in the EU.
- The associations of regions and cities have a great chance to play the important role in the facilitation of future EU-UA territorial cooperation.
- There is the need to establish a common platform that would coordinate and systematically support the ongoing collaborations while bringing together regional and local organisations and institutions.
- The main barrier to future cooperation is the imbalance between the demand from the Ukrainian LRAs and the supply from the EU LRAs.
- A transactional approach to cooperation ("donor-receiver logic") can hinder the establishment of long-term cooperation in the future.
- In the short term, cooperation between UA and EU LRAs may be limited due to the ongoing Russian invasion in Ukraine (security concerns, financial burdens, influx of refugees).
- To develop territorial cooperation, transparency and the rule of law should be strengthened in Ukraine.
- Territorial cooperation between the EU and the Ukraine can release additional potential to strengthen the administrative capacities of Ukrainian LRAs, especially through peer learning processes, best-practice exchange, and benchmarking.
- The LRAs from the EU can support their Ukrainian counterparts in further democratisation of society, with the goal of bringing Ukraine closer to the EU standards.
- The "U-LEAD with Europe" programme should be developed and reinforced, to continue to play a significant role in developing the capabilities of the Ukrainian LRAs.
- There is a potential in new partnerships between local and regional governments for supporting civil society in Ukraine, by developing the tools of social participation and direct involvement of the community in the implemented projects.

5.1. Future opportunities for EU-UA territorial cooperation

Future opportunities for cooperation between municipalities in Ukraine and in the European Union are mainly related to the end of the ongoing war. On the one hand, war can be described as "development in reverse" (Collier et al. 2003), since it causes profound destruction of communities and disrupts the development of the social and economic fabric of the nation. However, beyond the suffering and humanitarian crisis, war can foster social cooperation and strengthen the existing state (Bauer et al. 2016). In response to Russia's continuing aggression against Ukraine, many EU local and regional

authorities have renewed or established new partnerships with their Ukrainian counterparts. Currently, the support is mainly focused on immediate humanitarian aid. However, there is a potential to build more sustainable long-term cooperation based on current aid initiatives.

The cooperation with European municipalities will be vital to the post-war reconstruction efforts of Ukraine's cities and regions. The Russian invasion has led to the massive destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure and buildings, and estimates of physical damage costs continue to increase. As the European Committee of Regions stresses (2022), the reconstruction process should follow a bottom-up approach, involving Ukrainian and EU local and regional authorities. European partners can work together with Ukrainian cities and regions to gain national recognition and take on a leadership role in the recovery of Ukraine. The EU can provide immediate relief funding to Ukrainian municipalities. More importantly, European cities and regions can contribute with technical expertise and know-how on restoring damaged cities and regions.

Immediately after the end of the Russian invasion, cooperation can focus on the restoration of critical infrastructure and services, including central heating, electricity, schools, hospitals, and civilian housing (CoR, 2022). For instance Croatian cities such as Zagreb can play a significant role in this process, as they *have a very strong experience in how to establish rebuilding policies, how to rebuild, how to preserve cultural heritage, how to meet the energy efficiency criteria in this process* (IDI_5). These cities can not only share their practical experiences with Ukraine but also conduct bilateral coaching exchanges or provide concrete programmes, such as 3D mapping and planning tools.

In the next stage, cooperation can focus on creating rebuilding plans in line with long-term sustainable growth strategies, ones to be built on principles of green, smart, and inclusive development (CoR, 2022). European regions and cities can nominate groups of architects that could help Ukrainian partners in reconstruction plans (IDI_4). Through exchange programmes and partnerships, EU cities and regions can provide assistance to their Ukrainian counterparts with the aim of the sustainable rebuilding of infrastructure and fostering democratic participation and local governance. Additionally, they can help to build and develop local brands of Ukrainian regions and to promote them internationally (IDI_3).

In the longer term, the opportunities for future cooperation are related to the process of Ukraine's European integration. Although Ukraine has expressed the intention of joining the EU since the late 1990s, it was the Russian invasion that accelerated the development of the political relationship between these two entities. The declaration granting Ukraine official candidate status opened new possibilities for territorial cooperation. One of the possible areas is energy policy. Cooperation can focus on reducing Ukraine's dependence on fossil fuels, for example, by replacing municipal central heating systems with ones that do not rely on burning fossil fuels (CoR, 2022). Furthermore, EU cities and regions can support further approximation of Ukraine to EU standards and policies, but promoting good governance and capacity building, including education, and democracy (see Section 5.3.).

The associations of regions and cities have a great potential for an important role in the facilitation of future territorial cooperation between partners from the European Union and Ukraine. A special role will potentially be played by the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, which is aimed at coordinating the efforts of associations directed towards helping the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine (see Section 2.2.1.).

The potential role of the European Union authorities could consist of coordinating and systematically supporting the activities of these entities, also in terms of funding. The European Union should prepare a strategy to transform the current wave of solidarity into more sustainable cooperation that will *use the synergies that are now existing between the different partnerships and offer a common space* (IDI_5).

An example could be the establishment of an effective cooperation platform that would bring together organisations and institutions from Ukraine and the EU. Financial support for such initiatives is also crucial. As one of the interviewees stated:

> I think the opportunities are there, and the interest is also there. Cooperation will continue, regardless of whether the European Commission provides funding or not. But I believe that the Commission can help – additional funding can make these partnerships more large-scale, more in-depth, and more systematic. Without this support, they will be sporadic (IDI_2).

5.2. Future obstacles to EU-UA territorial cooperation

The Russian invasion has triggered the increased interest of Ukrainian regions and municipalities in cooperation with their European Union counterparts. However, there are several challenges to future cooperation between these two entities. The first refers to the possibility of absorbing the demand by regions and cities in the European Union. It is already evident that *the demand from the Ukrainian side is much higher than the supply from the EU side* (IDI_2). It can be predicted that the expectations of Ukrainian local and regional authorities will continue to grow and that the actual capacities of European regional and local authorities may not be sufficient to meet all the expressed needs. In order to meet expectations, European governments will have to prioritise some of the forms of cooperation, set clear aims and objectives, and strive for their precise implementation (IDI_3).

Another factor that may hinder the establishment of long-term territorial cooperation in the future is the transactional approach of local and regional governments to partnership, both on the Ukrainian and European sides. Interest in cooperation is high, but it often comes down to financial flows and not to create a deepened relationship between the two partners. Local and regional authorities in the EU share the concerns that the Ukrainian side wants to reap benefits from cooperation and funding, but does not want to contribute proactively. This is manifested, for example, by the lack of response from the Ukrainian regional administration to invitations to join consortia of EU projects (IDI_1, IDI_3). On the other hand, European regions and cities that have provided humanitarian aid and sent supplies to Ukraine often rely on the "donor-receiver" logic. To transform existing partnerships into lasting relations, the agenda should go beyond financial cooperation and deepen its nonmonetary dimensions (IDI_1).

The main barrier to the development of territorial cooperation remains the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. As one of the interviewees noted, effective cooperation requires regular contact, not only maintained online but also face-to-face, in both locations (IDI_2). If Russian aggression continues to persist, local and regional authorities may refrain from cooperating due to security concerns. *Even humanitarian aid can be very scary for a municipality in the EU […] oh my God, sending this to a region, maybe it's a dangerous region. They also are afraid to travel even to such regions that are not directly affected by the war* an interviewee explained (IDI_2). The sense of threat can result in greater cooperation with regions located in the west of Ukraine, unaffected by warfare, which poses a challenge to the territorial equality of the entire country.

The armed conflict in Ukraine and the post-pandemic economic recession led to significant budget restrictions in municipalities in member states of the European Union and in Ukraine. In 2016, the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine had already led several Ukrainian regions to limit their participation in international cooperation, unless activities were critical to security or international obligations (IDI_3). On the other hand, in the European Union, many cities and regions are struggling with inflation and higher energy prices. Financial problems and fragile city economies may leave no room for additional activities, including international partnerships.

In addition, many local governments accept and provide assistance to refugees, based on their local budgets. This may give a sense of cooperation with Ukraine, although no direct partnership is established (IDI_2).

Further limitations for future cooperation are related to the systemic constraints to which local and regional governments in Ukraine are subject. Although local self-government reform was introduced in this country several years ago, it has not yet been finalized. *It is very obvious that the legal framework in Ukraine is not completed. Even the decentralisation process is not complete. It is in the process of development*, an interviewee stated (IDI_5). The interviewee expressed concerns about the centralisation of Ukraine after the war and a top-down approach in shaping state policy, which is manifested by the low visibility of cities in the reconstruction plan of Ukraine. As a result of centralisation, the role of Ukrainian cities and regions can decrease, which can contribute to limiting cooperation with their European counterparts.

The need for credibility and accountability is critically important for future territorial cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. To encourage local and regional authorities in the EU to cooperate with Ukraine, transparency and the rule of law should be strengthened. Municipalities in the EU want to ensure that cooperation agreements are implemented in a transparent and lawful manner. *If you want to make a contract, you have to be sure that this contract will be enforced in a way which is following the content of the contract*, an interviewee explained (IDI_4). Further fighting against corruption is also critical for LRAs to cooperate effectively. Eliminating these obstacles will make it possible to establish long-lasting partnerships between municipalities. As one of the interviewees summed up: *There will be obstacles, but I think the context has changed so much that Ukrainians are also very willing to remove these obstacles and maybe also decrease the certain oligarchic capture of public policy and infrastructures that currently exist* (IDI_5).

5.3. Potential of future EU-UA territorial cooperation

Cooperation between regions and cities in the European Union and in Ukraine can release additional development potential in various dimensions: economic, social, and cultural. Supporting and investing in territorial cooperation not only benefits municipalities directly but also the European Union and Ukraine as a whole. In the case of Ukraine, the potential can be seen as focusing on two areas: strengthening the administrative capacities of local and regional authorities and supporting civil society.

5.3.1. Strengthening the Administrative Capacity of Ukrainian Local and Regional Authorities

Territorial cooperation between the EU and Ukraine becomes of particular importance in the context of the implementation of the local self-government reform in Ukraine. This reform has already contributed significantly to the consolidation of local democracy and the overall strengthening of the country's administrative capacities. For the reform to be successful, further steps are required in line with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (U-LEAD, 2022). The local and regional authorities from European Union can support their Ukrainian counterparts in the further democratisation of society. Cooperation can focus on improving the capacities of municipalities to perform newly assigned tasks and improving good governance, including transparency, fighting corruption, and protecting the freedom of media.

The ultimate goal of the support provided by EU partners is to bring Ukraine closer to the European Union. Cooperation allows Ukraine to transform its laws in line with European standards and prepare the approximation to the governance patterns of EU local and regional policies:

> I think there is a normative kind of understanding that Ukrainian cities are part of the European family and that integrating Ukrainian cities into existing programmes and helping them rebuild according to European standards will accelerate their process to join the European family. Going bottom-up, keeping the decentralisation process alive, and increasing the capacity building on key areas like transparency, tenders, and project management is something that they can help not only to increase the scope of skills but also understanding of what being a European city in the context of this very strong ties would entail (IDI_5).

Cooperation with EU cities and regions ensures the transfer of knowledge to Ukrainian municipalities. Sharing good practices, providing benchmarks, and expertise are some of the most important ways in which such cooperation can contribute to strengthening the administrative capacity of Ukrainian local self-government. This type of knowledge flow occurs during all projects undertaken jointly by local and regional governments:

> the Ukrainian side is learning a lot and sees that there are some other procedures. If Ukraine has European ambitions when it comes to joining the EU, participation in the joint programme is a laboratory, a zone where the Ukrainian side has a chance to come into contact with audit procedures, control procedures, with procedures such as public procurement law (IDI_6).

Moreover, territorial cooperation can specifically focus on developing the administrative competencies of LRAs. Joint programmes can focus on

- peer learning and exchanges of municipal employees;
- wider events in different formats, for example, conferences (e.g. Eastern Partnership Local Leaders Forum organised by the CEMR);
- specialist workshops and trainings for elected officials and public servants in municipalities (e.g. training programme Steps for Specialist carried out within the "U-LEAD with Europe" programme);
- campaigns to promote decentralisation and accelerate municipal amalgamation.

The potential of territorial cooperation for the development of Ukrainian LRA capacity was revealed to a large extent during the implementation of the "U-LEAD with Europe" programme, which has been specifically focused on the decentralisation of Ukrainian municipalities (see: section 3.3.3.). Specialist training, events, and exchanges were organised as part of the programme. Also, U-LEAD with Europe facilitated partnerships between Ukrainian and EU municipalities. As the European Committee of Regions suggests (2022), this potential should be used in the future. A reinforced "U-LEAD 2.0" could support building the capacity of local and regional authorities to apply the acquis of the EU's cohesion policy.

5.3.2. Support for civil society in Ukraine

There is a potential for new partnerships between local and regional governments to contribute to the development and strengthening of civil society in Ukraine. This is due to the very nature of municipalities, which – being the lowest levels of administration – remain in contact with the citizens in the most direct way. *Cities are the closest level of governance to people. Who other than local governments can reach out best to the citizens*? an interviewee said (IDI_5). For many communities, especially smaller ones, local and regional governments constitute the focal points – they concentrate business, nongovernmental organisations, and the local population around them. *The sphere of international territorial cooperation can be used to develop this potential*, explained the interviewee (IDI_1).

The cooperation of EU cities and regions with their Ukrainian counterparts can encourage LRAs to adopt a democratic participation approach to their work. This can focus on developing policies and

procedures to provide more scope for greater participation of grassroots organisations and local communities in municipal plans and activities. Joint projects offer a space of dialogue and exchange, so the local and regional authorities from Ukraine can develop knowledge about such participatory methods and tools as participatory budgeting, deliberation meetings, living labs, or citizen panels. As stated by one of the interviewees, the idea of social participation and strengthening civil society pervades each of the forms of cooperation supported by the European associations of cities and regions:

> When we talk about sustainable mobility plans, we talk about how we can do citizen panels so that they can express what type of mobility they would need, what type of accessibility needs they have. So it is a cross-cutting area that cuts across all that we do. And for some cities, it is also a very exclusive area for collaboration (IDI_5).

Moreover, the local governments during the partnerships can work directly with local communities or with selected population groups (e.g. women, low-income groups, and ethnic minorities). The projects can also stimulate local non-governmental and civil society organisations to initiate different activities and actions, and support the formation and development of new community initiatives. For instance, one of the assumptions of the Interreg programme was the involvement of youth: *special lessons were held at schools, young people were involved in taking care of the common heritage, the awareness of the need to take care of the world around us was strengthened* (IDI_6).

6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The partnership cooperation of cities and regions of Ukraine with the European LRAs manifests and at the same time fosters the processes of Europeanisation of the EU's eastern neighbour. Furthermore, its importance, especially in the context of the Russian invasion, is constantly growing. At the same time, there is potential for the further development of EU-UA cooperation, which applies in particular to smaller urban centres and the eastern regions of Ukraine, as well as the growth of participation of Ukrainian self-governments in European LRAs organisations.

Geography shapes territorial cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. Firstly, cooperation between cities and regions is better developed in relations with neighbouring countries. Secondly, the western regions of Ukraine are involved in territorial cooperation with the European Union much more strongly than the eastern regions, especially at the local level. In addition to geographic proximity, this is facilitated by, among other things, socio-cultural similarities, EU funds for cross-border cooperation programmes, and favourable institutional settings exemplified by a number of Euroregions in the western part of the country and the first EGTC on the EU's external border.

European funds are important for the development of cooperation between European and Ukrainian cities and regions, although so far primarily in border areas. Meanwhile, European programmes and initiatives, including those undertaken in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, play an important role in Ukraine's decentralisation processes. However, Ukrainian partners are so far weakly involved in transnational cooperation at the macro-regional level, and their participation in EU interregional programmes is incidental. They are also less likely to be the leaders of projects implemented within the framework of cross-border cooperation programmes, although the distribution of project beneficiaries and funds itself are balanced.

The benefits of territorial cooperation between cities and regions in EU-Ukraine relations include both intangible effects, such as building institutional capacity, knowledge sharing, and community building and trust, along with tangible effects related to infrastructure development and improved service provision to residents. However, despite the ongoing evaluations of individual territorial cooperation programmes, it is difficult to identify cross-cutting and comprehensive studies of its tangible effects, due to the variety of forms of this cooperation, including those not covered by funding. At the same time, this cooperation faces a number of barriers – apart from the current one related to the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine – including those related to the legal-administrative, institutional, and socio-cultural spheres. Also, the implementation of projects financed by European funds is fraught with problems including the mismatch between the size of funds and needs, the lack of adequate know-how on procedures, and other administrative and legal barriers.

The existence of partnerships between cities and regions has facilitated the provision of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression, and the development of this cooperation can provide a basis for supporting Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, as well as for strengthening the administrative capacities of Ukrainian LRAs and supporting civil society in Ukraine.

In view of the above main conclusions of the research, the following general policy recommendations can be proposed at the strategic level, together with suggestions for actions that could foster the implementation of the objectives they identify.

There is a need to support the development/reactivation of existing twinning agreements between European and Ukrainian cities and regions and to assist in the creation of new ones, especially involving those Ukrainian entities which have not previously participated in territorial cooperation. The development of partnerships should include both financial and substantive support. In particular, it is

necessary to prioritise the themes of cooperation, establish their objectives, as well as methods of implementation. This should encourage the sustainability of cooperation, which should extend beyond the timeframe of externally funded projects.

It is necessary to extend territorial partnerships to a greater extent to Ukrainian local authorities in the eastern part of the country, which could also be facilitated by involving more EU countries in cooperation. Associations of local and regional authorities should play an important role in transferring know-how. It would be important to create financial incentives for the development of cooperation between those local authorities which have not previously been involved in it, which should be conducive to expanding the cooperation among smaller and more peripherally located territorial units. Sustainable cooperation could also be established in connection with the humanitarian aid currently being implemented for Ukraine.

There is a need to strengthen Ukraine's transnational cooperation, which could be facilitated by new or expanded Macro-regional Strategies, as well as the inclusion of Ukrainian partners in programmes supporting interregional cooperation. In particular, consideration should be given to involving more Ukrainian regions in existing Macro-regional Strategies or establishing new strategies for the Black Sea or the Carpathians. In addition, Ukraine, as an EU candidate country, should be given access to interregional cooperation programmes.

There is a need to support measures to coordinate ongoing territorial cooperation, including the search for synergies between cross-border programmes and horizontal EU programmes. It would make sense, for example, to create a common e-platform that would coordinate and systematically support the ongoing city and regional collaborations while bringing together regional and local stakeholders. The platform could also include information on available funding sources and examples of their synergistic use.

It is necessary to continue efforts to break down the various barriers to territorial cooperation, especially those of an administrative-legal, institutional, and also socio-cultural nature. Breaking down these first two groups of barriers could be assisted by Twinning and Taiex instruments, which need to be more accessible to LRAs. This will ensure the transparency of governance and strengthen the rule of law and build an effective system of multi-level governance based on the OECD principles of public investment across all levels of government. In socio-cultural terms, it would make sense to support bottom-up initiatives linking people-to-people (including, for example, in the form of small Euroregional project funds), as well as youth exchanges and foreign language learning programmes, including those aimed at local government employees, which would also strengthen institutional capacity.

The role of local and regional authorities and their associations must be given due consideration in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction programmes. The involvement of European partners should take into account their limited financial resources, and it was therefore advisable to include many partners in the implementation of major investment projects. Ukrainian LRAs, on the other hand, should have a say in determining the direction of reconstruction and selecting specific projects.

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ANNEXES

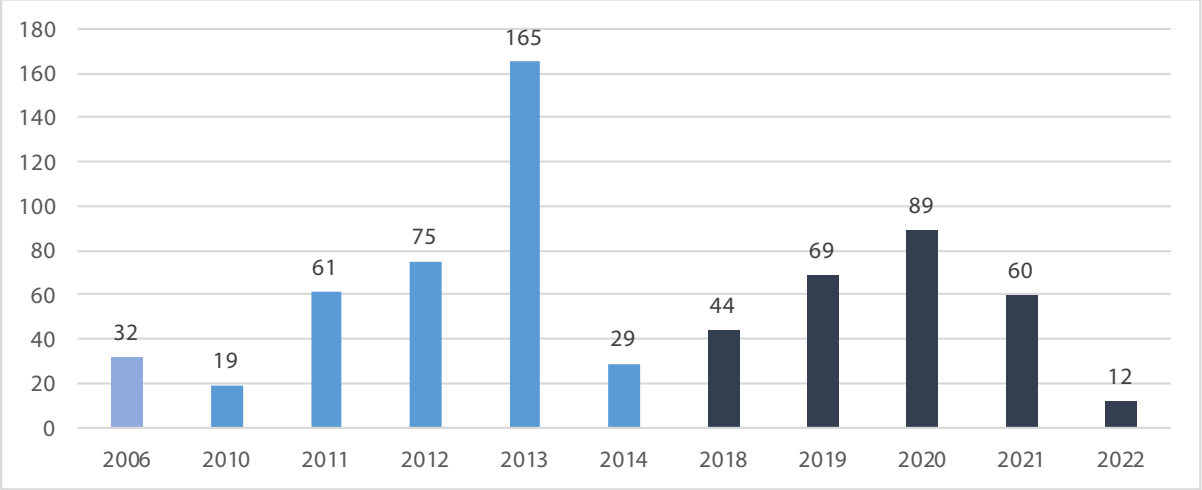
1. Source of data on twinning agreements between cities and regions

The database of the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine as of November 2022 contained 810 records on LRA partnership agreements. Among them, 434 agreements concluded by the authorities of 92 Ukrainian cities were registered. In contrast, the list compiled by Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_twin_towns_and_sister_cities_in_Ukraine) based on the various sources of information contained data on 117 cities and 813 concluded agreements. The final compilation took into account, firstly, that the official register of partnership agreements did not include agreements of cities located in the Autonomous Region of Crimea, as well as the post-2014 occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Secondly, according to the official register, Ukrainian LRAs did not have any agreements with the Russian Federation and Belarus. Therefore, this information contained about these entities and the directions of the agreements in the Wikipedia list was not included.

2. Changes in the number of CBC projects in a time perspective

Due to the delays that occurred in the programming phase, projects' starting dates were usually postponed, achieving picking points at the end of financial perspectives (Figure 12). Additionally, the Russian aggression in 2014 might have had some impact at the beginning of the perspective 2014-2020. The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak caused additional difficulties in projects' implementation. To counteract its influence the Interreg programmes adopted measures aiming at increasing flexibility and prolonging projects' realisation as well as developing activities aiming at addressing the pandemic challenge (Lierop 2020). According to the previous studies, the 2022 Russian invasion on Ukraine has a significant impact on the sustainability of the projects (ECA 2022). Its importance seems to be at least of the same scale in the case of future projects which realisation is endangered.

Figure 12: Number of EU-UA CBC projects per year in the period 2007-2022



Source: own elaboration based on Interreg projects database: keep.eu.
Note: The graph presents the number of starting EU-UA projects in 10 CBC programmes (three programming periods: 2000-2006, 2007-2013, 2014-2020). For 32 projects from the period 2000-2006, with missing data on projects' implementation years, the date of 01-01-2006 was imputed.

The development of territorial cooperation between European and Ukrainian local and regional authorities is an important step toward Ukraine's membership in the EU. This study presents the benefits of and barriers to the collaboration between European and Ukrainian cities and regions and shows the role of the EU programmes and instruments in supporting territorial cooperation. It suggests solutions that can promote cooperation between cities and regions and describes their potential to strengthen the capacities of self-governments and to support civil society in Ukraine.

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