

# Cross-boundary cooperation in service of development of Bosnia and Herzegovina - the sample of priority backward areas along the borderline

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*Abstract:* The paper discusses the role and pertinence of cross-boundary cooperation within the context of sustainable development of poorly developed (backward) areas (regions) along Bosnia and Herzegovina borderline. We identified and defined extremely backward areas, their development issues, development advantages and limitations, and the specificities of their geo-systems. Fundamental and practical relevance of the paper reflects in the current limelight of the concept of cross-boundary regional development based on the “center-periphery” paradigm, which is here perceived as a prerequisite of a harmonized spatial (regional) development and territorial cohesion of Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e. a rational spatial-functional organization of Bosnia and Herzegovina borderline areas.

*Key- Words:* Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Srpska, cross-boundary development, backward areas, sustainable development, periphery, and development processes.

## 1 Introduction

The evident development imbalance, which is determined by different development factors and spatially recognized on both local and global levels, is the basic issue of modern spatial development that results in disparities of modern humankind. Modern development problems are in opposition to the proclaimed policy based on the principles of sustainable development

These development issues and many contradictions of social development initiate different development policies that target at overcoming the growing problems and achieving sustainable development. Dynamic development processes and new global challenges determine a more rational approach to space (evaluation, functional organization, etc.). European Union (EU) encounters problems of rational spatial development in the affirmation and application of the territorial cohesion concept (1). The territorial cohesion concept is accepted as “a territorial dimension of sustainability of development of European space” (2). Cross-boundary cooperation and cross-boundary regional development are some of modalities of cohesion policy as promoted and enhanced by EU. In EU regional policy, region is

the basic spatial unit and the international cooperation along the borderline is an imperative to cross-boundary cooperation and development. According to the traditional paradigm of “center-periphery” relation (Friedmann), geographically, areas along the borderline are actually the periphery. This usually entails commercially under-developed areas, i.e. backward areas. Process of globalization caused “defunctionalization” of borderlines and borderline areas. Hence, „modern development processes and needs resulted in changes in approach to spatial-functional organization and the role of borderline areas” (3).

In case of cross-boundary regional development, the territorial cohesion concept is not being sufficiently paid attention to within the geographic space of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) despite the fact that most of the country’s areas along borderline are backward ones. The cause may lie in the inadequate awareness which further raises the question of knowledge of values of current paradigms of EU regional policies and development problems as will be defined later in this paper. This is also corroborated by the fact that there are only few scientific papers and projects addressing these issues. Geographical-historic development resulted

in different development limitations rather than in advantages.

Geographical space of BiH is of different morphological types as follows: Pannonian, highland-lowland, and Adriatic. The overall physiognomy is determined by the dominant highland-lowland geo-system. Morphological units cause other natural-geographical typicality which, along with the cultural-civilization particularities of mid-European, oriental and Mediterranean impacts, causes many development advantages and limitations.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the total geographical space of South-East Europe, belongs to European periphery and bears all the negative connotations of this term. Geographical space of BiH is the poorly developed part of the region with strong spatial (regional) development disparities. This is a direct consequence of a whole range of factors among which the destructive development processes in war (1992-1995) and post-war periods play a key role. Bosnia and Herzegovina is characterized by large spatial units with different development issues (economic, social, demographic, etc.), all of which share the properties of backward areas. Thus, a borderline area is also a backward area, which makes it crucial and pertinent. The future perspective and development of BiH is largely determined by its resolution to participate in regional and global development processes. In this regard, there is alternative to cross-boundary cooperation and cross-boundary development. "Commerce in BiH is compatible with and mutually dependent on the commerce of newly-formed countries within the former Yugoslavia geo-space. The relations and connections between the Serbian and Croatian people in BiH (in the Republic of Srpska and some administrative-territorial units (cantons) of BiH Federation) and their national states of Serbia and Croatia are determined by the degree of cross-boundary connectivity and cooperation" (4), which are still inadequately performed. All this accentuates a special interest of Bosnia and Herzegovina and both its entities to cooperate within the region.

Formation of cross-boundary regions, as the most common and most rational types of cooperation and EU integration, has a particular relevance for BiH. Despite the large social need and opportunities for the formation of cross-boundary regions, this type of cooperation is still poorly addressed. An instance of one such cooperation is only in north-east BiH with the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Croatia (Drina-Sava-Majejica Euro-region).

Sustainability of cross-boundary peripheral backward areas in BiH currently has no perspective without the integration into modern development processes in the region. This is supported by the fact that the ongoing development processes that target the creation of South-East Europe country association are under the umbrella of European Union.

### **3 Cross-boundary areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina as prerequisites for cross-boundary development**

BiH borderline is largely determined by water streams as follows: the Una River in north-west and the Sava River in north (borderline with the Republic of Croatia), and the Drina River in east (borderline with the Republic of Serbia). The south and south-east borderline with Croatia and Montenegro is determined by the young mountain range of Dinarides. Ever since 2013, the borderline with Croatia has also been the EU borderline. The borderline areas have been burdened by long-term development issues, which have caused troubles for the total sustainable development within the defined geo-system. The BiH geographical space is characterized by geo-diversity, which may also be a backbone and factor of the potential sustainable development. Generally, the country is determined by a set of different geo-system structures and forms as well as by the functional and development particularities and opportunities. Taking into account the current state of affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to the previously set methodology and criteria, the differentiation of priority action zones was performed by using criteria from VASION PLANET project within the IPA program of cross-boundary cooperation (6 and 7). These BiH cross-boundary areas are The Sava River cross-boundary area, The Drina River cross-boundary area, The Adriatic cross-boundary area, and The Una River cross-boundary area. Within these, we identified and conditionally defined several priority backward areas (upper and middle Drina river area, Dinaride-Adriatic area and Una-Sana backward area (Appendix 2).

According to Hagel's classification of backward areas (8), we singled out backward areas within cross-boundary areas that belong to commercially under-developed areas. These three backward cross-boundary areas are presented along with the joint development problems of the two entities and their geographical and development specificities and issues. These areas are basically characterized by urban and rural systems of poor functional capacities and development opportunities, „loss of

demographical and social energy, poor infrastructure equipment, peripheral position, and commercial orientation towards the exploitation of insufficiently evaluated natural basis" (9). The backward BiH cross-boundary areas singled out in the paper comprise 18 administrative-territorial units (municipalities) with the total surface of around 9 500 km<sup>2</sup>, the settlement network of 1 223 settlements populated by 411 439 people (2013). The average population density is 43 people per km<sup>2</sup>, which is significantly below BiH average of 69 people per km<sup>2</sup>. The urban settlements have are inhabited with around 35% of the population, which makes this area typically rural. In 2013-2015 periods, 1 936 people left these areas, and 879 people left BiH (there is no data for the Drina area). Hence, we may speak of classical emigration region.

The destructive development processes affect the demographic and total sustainability. The form of BiH territory, functional connections with neighboring countries, functional dependence of borderline centers (correspondent settlements), cultural-civilization connectivity and other things define the cross-boundary nature of BiH and determine a crucial component of the country's development advantages.

### 3.1 Cross-boundary development of the upper and middle Drina River area

The area of upper and middle Drina River area is largely determined by the Drina River. It is the borderline area between BiH (the Republic of Srpska) and Serbia and Montenegro. The area is geopolitically divided and ethnically unique Serbian geospace. In addition, it is peripheral and backward area, which covers east RS which is principally a national backward area. It belongs to highland-lowland region of complex and diverse morpho-physiognomy and many natural resources (bauxite, quartz sand, forests, hydro-potential, thermal water and rich mountain eco-systems). The demographic capacities keep dropping. The population density is poor and high below BiH average. The area is extremely emigrational and prone to senilization (Table 1). The settlements are characterized by depopulation and municipal centers are underdeveloped with poor functional capacities and intra-regional functional connectivity all of which negatively affects development (Appendix 2). It has development characteristics similar to cross-boundary areas of Serbia and Montenegro.

Geographical position, natural potentials, and cultural-ethnic features, which are inadequately evaluated are all components of sustainable

development of RS and Serbia, and Montenegro, and affect the long-term development perspective. Ethnic, cultural, economic and functional connections with the boundary areas in Serbia and Montenegro are evident. Certain complementary commercial activities (tourism, etc.), relative traffic connectivity, needs and opportunities enhance the cross-boundary cooperation in service of cross-boundary regional development.

### 3.2 Cross-boundary development of the Dinaride-Adriatic area

Dinaride-Adriatic area is the bordering area between Croatia and BiH Federation and its natural position and background are determined by the vicinity of the Adriatic Sea and the karst relief of Dinarides. It is the contact zone between highland-lowland and Adriatic morphological regions with typical karst relief and poor development opportunities. The north-west part of the area is rich in forests. Decades of emigration processes weakened the demographic energy of this area, which is already poorly populated and has low level of urbanism (Table 2). Due to the lack of functionally developed urban centers, development impulses usually result from the Adriatic coast (Croatia) and needs of the coastline population (BiH Federation). Cross-boundary cooperation is initiated by the functional strength of the coastline area (Croatia) and the needs of the population living in the rural coast vicinity (BiH Federation). It is based on the same historic-ethnic origin of the population (Roman-Catholic Croats) and economic and political interests of the inhabitants. Poor natural resources of the Dinaride-Adriatic cross-boundary area are usually based on modest forest potential and traditional extensive cattle breeding. It is an extreme rural backward area focused on Croatian coastline gravitating to the city of Split (Appendix 2).

### 3.3 Cross-boundary development of the Una-Sana Rivers area

The Una-Sana rivers boundary area is determined by the Una River. It covers north-west parts of BiH Federation and merges with Serbian ethnic space in the bordering Croatian region. Modern geopolitical affairs negatively affected the transit position and spatial-functional organization. The space has a heterogeneous morphological structure (peri-Pannonian area and highland-lowland karst region), which determines diversity of natural-geographical and total natural development potentials (forests, hydro potential, soil). Although the population

density is below BiH Federation average, this area has larger population density than other backward areas in BiH. In addition, it is characterized by agrarian overpopulation. Emigrational processes are recent and are focused on other countries. The area is dominated by Bosniac (Moslem) majority. The demographic energy is large and it is a rural area of the traditional lifestyle with typical Islamic-Oriental ethno-cultural heritage. The leading center is the city of Bihac whereas other urban centers are poorly developed due to the polarized commercial development (Appendix 2). Another difficulty for the cross-boundary cooperation is the cultural diversity and poor demographic and economic potentials of the Croatian boundary area. Ecological standards, natural basis protection, protected area management, and hydro-potential management are all crucial for the sustainable development and cross-boundary cooperation.

#### 4 Conclusion

Backward boundary areas are a consequence of the overall geographical-historical development and modern development processes, which did not have a property of a balanced polycentric growth and did not contribute territorial cohesion. Spatial-functional exclusion and commercial under-development triggered negative demographic processes that are predominant in backward boundary areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the backward areas may have a large territorial capital, they still have multiple limitations when it comes to sustainability concept (demographic issues, economic development, infrastructural connectivity, centers of growth, spatial-functional organization, external impacts, and internal antagonism). If we managed to set the concept of cross-boundary cooperation, it would enable us to strengthen development capacities in order to revitalize backward areas and include them in modern development flows.

The prerequisites of development, as it was addressed in this paper, are determined by their own territorial capital - natural background, optimum evaluation, and institutional capacities, which is the primary weakness and a limiting factor of development, and regional development processes.

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Table 1- Spatial distribution of the population of the backward boundary area of upper and middle Drina River area in the Republic of Srpska

Priority backward boundary areas	No. of municipalities	Surface km <sup>2</sup>	Surface ratio RS %	Population	Population ratio RS %	People/km <sup>2</sup>	City population %	Migration and internal balance 2013-2015
Upper and middle Drina river area	10	4 521	18	112 650	8,5	24,9	43	-1 662

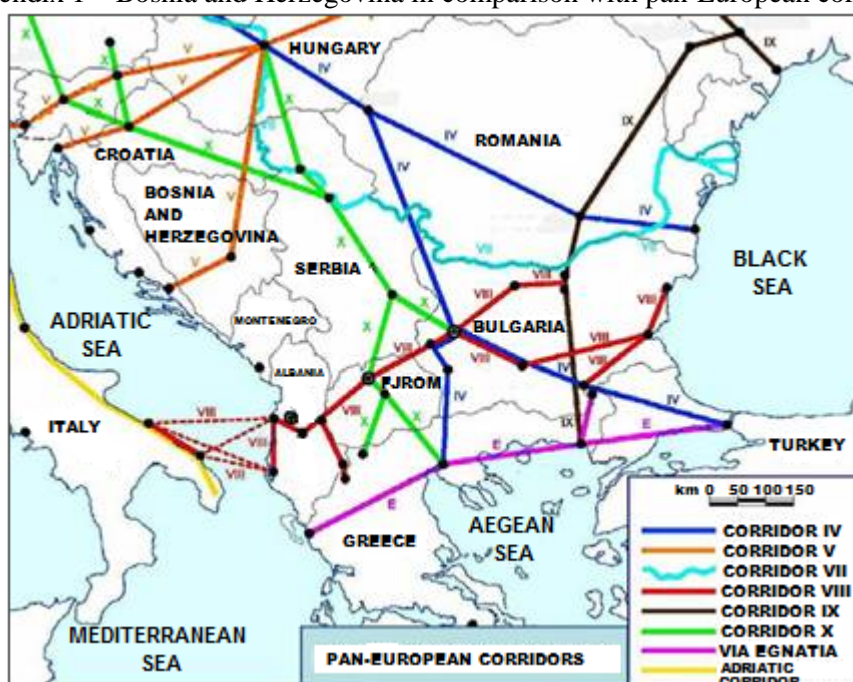
Sources: The 2013 BiH Census of Population, Households and Dwellings. Preliminary results, Sarajevo, 2013. Statistical year books for 2013, 2014, 2015. (2016). The Republic Statistics Institute of the Republic of Srpska. Federal Statistics Institute of the BiH Federation, Banja Luka, Sarajevo.

Table 2 – Spatial distribution of the population of the backward boundary areas of the Una-Sana and Dinaride-Adriatic areas in BiH Federation

Priority backward boundary areas	No. of municipalities	Surface km <sup>2</sup>	Surface ratio RS %	Population	Population ratio RS %	People/km <sup>2</sup>	City population %	Migration and internal balance 2013-2015
Una-Sana are	6	2 984	11,5	228 270	9,6	76,5	35	-1 028
Dinaride-Adriatic area	2	1.961	7,5	70 519	2,9	36	21	-245
Total	8	4 945	18,9	298 789	12,7	60,4	31,7	-1 273

Sources: The 2013 BiH Census of Population, Households and Dwellings. Preliminary results, Sarajevo, 2013. Statistical year books for 2013, 2014, 2015. (2016). The Republic Statistics Institute of the Republic of Srpska. Federal Statistics Institute of the BiH Federation, Banja Luka, Sarajevo.

Appendix 1 – Bosnia and Herzegovina in comparison with pan-European corridors



Appendix 2 – Priority cross-boundary backward areas

