

RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS



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RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS

for increasing effectiveness of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation and the model of its institutionalisation



I. POLICY FRAMEWORK AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

I.1 Strategic commitment and support of the Carpathian region

Cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine is extremely important, as evidenced by many bilateral documents and international fora. Enhancing this cooperation and increasing its efficiency are not only the objectives of central authorities of the two countries, but they are also crucial for implementation of practical steps at regional and local level. Firstly, long-term and ambitious plans based on an initiative from both Slovak and Ukrainian side and supported by the European Union are needed. Central authorities, together with local structures in both countries, should promote the sustainable economic and social development of border regions, in particular by helping to bring the economies of border regions from neighbouring countries to their markets, support the integration and spreading of the European Union, addressing environmental and healthcare issues, tackling organized crime, ensuring the effectiveness and security of borders, including the fight against illegal immigration, facilitating human contacts in border regions, all based on sufficient financial resources.

The results of long-term analyses of the potential of cooperation and the results of the project research and activities indicate the need to create *specialized international, regional and national structures and authorities* and to strengthen the commitments of the governments of Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic, the European Commission and Ukraine and to help develop cooperation. A joint declaration with a vision of cooperation could be a step in the right direction. Cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia cannot be developed only as a segment of bilateral relations, it needs to be supported in the context of the Carpathian region and within the Eastern Partnership, as well as with the possible prospects for enlargement and deeper integration of the EU. In order to implement the European Neighbourhood Policy and cooperation in relation to Ukraine, taking into account developments in the Carpathian Euroregion, participation of key EU institutions (European Parliament, European Commission, European Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions of the European Union) is also necessary.

The first recommended step is to support the idea of implementing the so-called Carpathian Summit which would create a framework for further CBC development. In order to strengthen cross-border cooperation and establish its institutional framework, the Summit of representatives of Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic, the European Commission and Ukraine could, in the event of a consensus, adopt a joint declaration that would lay the foundations for more effective cooperation and define commitments relating to its support and development. Based on Scandinavian experience, it is necessary to institutionalize regional cooperation and, according to analyses and agreements, to establish and fund a progressive and sustainable institutional cooperation base.

We propose to consider the possibility of creation of specialized international regional institutions for cross-border cooperation:

The Carpathian Cooperation Forum – a body of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the participating countries - for macro-political support and regulation of cross-border cooperation;

The Carpathian Regional Forum – a body of the representatives of border regions - for systematic, practical cooperation of border areas, its management and solution of potential problems;

International Carpathian Secretariat - standing authority of representatives of participating countries - for organizational and technical support for multilateral cross-border cooperation.¹

The ultimate goal could be to create an international structure in the Carpathian region (Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic and Ukraine) and, on the basis of the experience of Nordic cross-border cooperation and its institutions, prepare or implement the optimal form of cooperation. Compared with the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the role of the European Commission could be more fundamental and ultimately could lead to a member's status in the planned institutional structures.

1.2 Development of Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation in strengthening the European Union and in the context of development of the Carpathian region

Institutional and technical provision of cooperation in the Carpathian region should be linked to the support of bilateral cooperation between the countries. Optimally, these two processes should be parallel and complement each other.

Adoption of the European Neighbourhood Policy and its support mechanisms, as well as the continued support of local initiatives through EU cohesion policy, have proved to be extremely important for the expansion and development of cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia. As part of an important issue for Ukraine's pro-European orientation, the implementation of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement and a comprehensive free trade area would support the development of cooperation. The introduction of visa-free travel between Ukraine and EU countries is a step in the right direction.

Sustainable economic and social development of the regions at the borders of Ukraine and Slovakia should be ensured in particular by promoting the production of border regions on European markets and a joint tackling of both global and regional issues.

Within the existing Eastern Partnership mechanisms, the European Union is politically covering and supporting cooperation also on the Slovak - Ukrainian border. It also strengthens cross-border cooperation within the cohesion policy. Given the high level of development, the Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation segment could become one of the platforms for cross-border cooperation on a pan-European scale.

1.3 A more active role of Slovakia within domestic policy and the European Union

Analogically to the Nordic countries, especially Norway, Slovakia, as an EU Member State, should within EU bodies more actively seek the approval of solutions aimed at expanding and deepening

¹ This proposal results from a functionality structure analysis and the results of Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Regional Council and the International Barents Secretariat

cross-border processes at the EU's eastern border with Ukraine, creating new effective financial instruments for stimulating CBC. In this respect, it is also appropriate to use the possibilities and contacts of the Visegrad Group.

Some reserves exist in the work of local public administration authorities in border areas with Ukraine. There is a need to develop joint concepts of managing social and economic development and addressing environmental or humanitarian problems.

1.4 Supporting development of cooperation on the side of Ukrainian government

Central state authorities of Ukraine should actively support initiatives to create specialized international and regional institutions for the development of cross-border cooperation. In this respect, it would help to complete the formation of a legislative and normative legal system of cross-border cooperation and institutional mechanisms for its implementation, the creation of effective forms and methods of state support for cross-border relations based on generally recognized European standards, especially those that have been successful in Norway. Furthermore, it is necessary to strictly define the legal framework and scope for local government, local self-government and municipalities in the international cooperation system, which will strengthen the position of the regions in the area of external relations.

1.5 Transfer of knowledge from the Barents Euro-Arctic area: Learning from the best

Project "Provision of Information and Implementation of Innovative Approaches to Cross-Border Cooperation between Slovakia and

Ukraine" (supported by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and co-financed from the state budget of the Slovak Republic) was designed to provide key proposals and new ideas for the effective development of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia.

Gaining adequate, relevant and comprehensive information on practical implementation of cross-border cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic region has helped to better analyse obstacles to Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation and to create space for developing the concept of its further development. **Continuing contacts and study of the experience of cross-border cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic region is one of the key recommendations.**

1.6 Search for sustainable solutions: Towards institutionalisation of cooperation

Questions of common interest must be formulated as permanent challenges for regulating and managing cross-border cooperation. There is the principle that states are sometimes too big to solve small problems or too small to solve big problems.

Practical issues should not be addressed ideologically, but rather in terms of practical possibilities and sustainable results. The real and functional dimensions of cross-border cooperation are important not only as a tool but, also as an objective.

A fundamental recommendation for sustainable approaches to effective CBC development is the institutionalisation of Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation. Based on an analysis of Scandinavian experience and local conditions, we propose to work on the model proposed in Chapter III. of this draft.

II. TECHNICAL AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

II.1 Development based on local knowledge and experience: Search for synergies in diversity

Real experiences and examples from other countries show that although the role of official relations at the level of national governments is the cornerstone of cross-border cooperation, there must also be a pendant at the regional

level. The micro level of cross-border relations, i.e. regions and locations, is not only just an important but also a necessary component of effective and successful cross-border initiatives. As a result, transnational and bilateral structures at national level can be complemented at local level and can successfully work in day-to-day practice and in specific activities.

For this purpose, local specifics should be maintained. Regions operate in a system of relations, but they also exist in their own legal system and are influenced by the specific characteristics of the neighbouring regions and the contacts that were formed in the past. The aim of regional cooperation is not to change priorities, but to change the attitudes towards borders and border regions. In some cases, there are differences between national priorities and global challenges, or at least in their understanding.

II.2 Strategy and legal framework support

It is necessary to clearly define the legal framework of local self-government and community participation in the international cooperation system, to provide more competencies to regions in foreign relations, similarly to what is happening in northern Europe, especially in the Barents Euro-Arctic region.

The policy framework and regulation should prevent replacement of regional and municipal authorities, micro-management and overlapping activities. They should ensure effective monitoring of implementation of national cross-border cooperation programs that define its strategic objectives and tactical roles, control mechanisms and implementation stages. If necessary, changes to these programs are possible. Their synchronization with national and international economic and social projects aimed in particular at balancing the development of border regions is often decisive.

II.3 Diversified financing and support: Cooperation as an asset, not a liability

Implementation of progressive solutions and the development of local CBC structures necessarily require financial support. It is important to understand that the development of cooperation is not a liability, it is a profit-making investment.

It is necessary to increase the efficiency of spending already allocated funds. Nordic experience shows that this can be achieved by better coordination of existing programs of financial assistance, better expert training and

a well premeditated selection of projects to be funded, as well as by simplification of procedures and by de-bureaucratization of decisions on the allocation of financial assistance, ensuring proper control of its use. Following the introduction of efficiency mechanisms, it would be necessary to create a long-term forecast of financial support of cross-border cooperation.

Like in northern countries, including Norway, it is essential for the European Union institutions to actively support decision making focused on extending and deepening cross-border processes at the EU's eastern borders, especially with Ukraine, to create new, effective financial instruments stimulating CBC and to coordinate efforts in this direction, including the use of the regional association of the Vyšehrad Group countries.

II.4 Involvement of civil society

The development of Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation will require involvement of governmental and non-governmental organizations, associations, experts and the general public. It will be necessary to initiate further ideas from other Slovak and Ukrainian experts, as well as other experts dealing with cross-border cooperation.

The next steps should be the creation (identification) of support groups that have an impact on individual parts of the Carpathian region and local communities, involvement of existing Euro-regional cooperation organizations in the region, selection of target groups with support and influence in a business environment supporting creativity and development of creative clusters of non-governmental organizations and analysis of possible initiatives of the opponents and their background, as well as preparation of appropriate argumentation.

II.5 Testing new approaches and innovative solutions

To make effective use of financial resources on eastern border, including the Carpathian region, as well as testing new cooperation mechanisms, it would be appropriate, as it is done in the Norwegian-Russian border region, to identify the most prepared areas - a type of

“experimental laboratory”. The successful results of cross-border cooperation in these areas would be a demonstration of the prospects, a “business card” of CBC. On the other hand, addressing the problems that arise would allow for avoiding potential mistakes of cross-border cooperation subjects in other border areas. Given the relatively high level of development, the segment of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation could be one of such “test routes” of European cross-border cooperation

II.6 Building a comprehensive and functional structure of working committees between organizations of different ethnic minorities

At present, cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine lacks the regular work of regional working committees for its individual aspects. Such committees should be set up primarily at regional level and should define and reflect its priorities. The activities could focus on the issue of minorities in the region and their mutual contacts. The funding of such a committee should be provided at national level, but their specific activities should be carried out on the basis of defined regional needs and priorities. In this respect, we recommend focusing, for example, on the little used potential of individual regions and on their activities related to national minorities (the regions are the founders of many ethnic, cultural or educational institutions).

II.7 Support of local cross-border cooperation through regular meetings at regional level

Successful development of cross-border cooperation requires regular contacts in economic, social, political (municipal), cultural and academic life, including ethnic minority representations. We recommend focusing on regular exchanges of information on both traditional and contemporary culture, education and science, media and information resources,

religious life, etc. It seems very effective to focus on local self-governments in ethnically mixed areas, on the education of minorities and on nationally oriented organizations or institutions. Currently, there is no mechanism for mutual exchange of press, radio and television programs, student and pupil groups, and so on.

II.8 Establish a small program of “easily accessible” grants to support cross-border cooperation between the representatives of various organizations and institutions

Implementation of some recommendations requires financial coverage. It could be regular and relatively easily accessible resources, the amount of which would allow for less costly activities. However, the definition of a supported area, the allocation and administration of such grants should remain at the regional level. It seems that the potential of both East Slovak regions could also be used in this direction. They already have positive experience with cross-border cooperation with Hungary and Poland, but also with the implementation of projects under the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, and they can also engage in cross-border cooperation with Ukraine

II.9 Reduce administrative obstacles to cross-border cooperation

One of the biggest barriers to CBC, which has been repeatedly identified by most stakeholders, is the considerable administrative burden associated with the real existence of borders. These are administrative restrictions when crossing borders (long waiting times, very long and inefficient checks, etc.). Many problems will be resolved by the visa-free regime for Ukrainian citizens on their way to EU countries, but others will probably arise when demonstrating their solvency. Some administrative restrictions persist in non-trade areas such as press, cultural products, and so on.

III. MODEL OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF COOPERATION BETWEEN UKRAINE AND SLOVAKIA

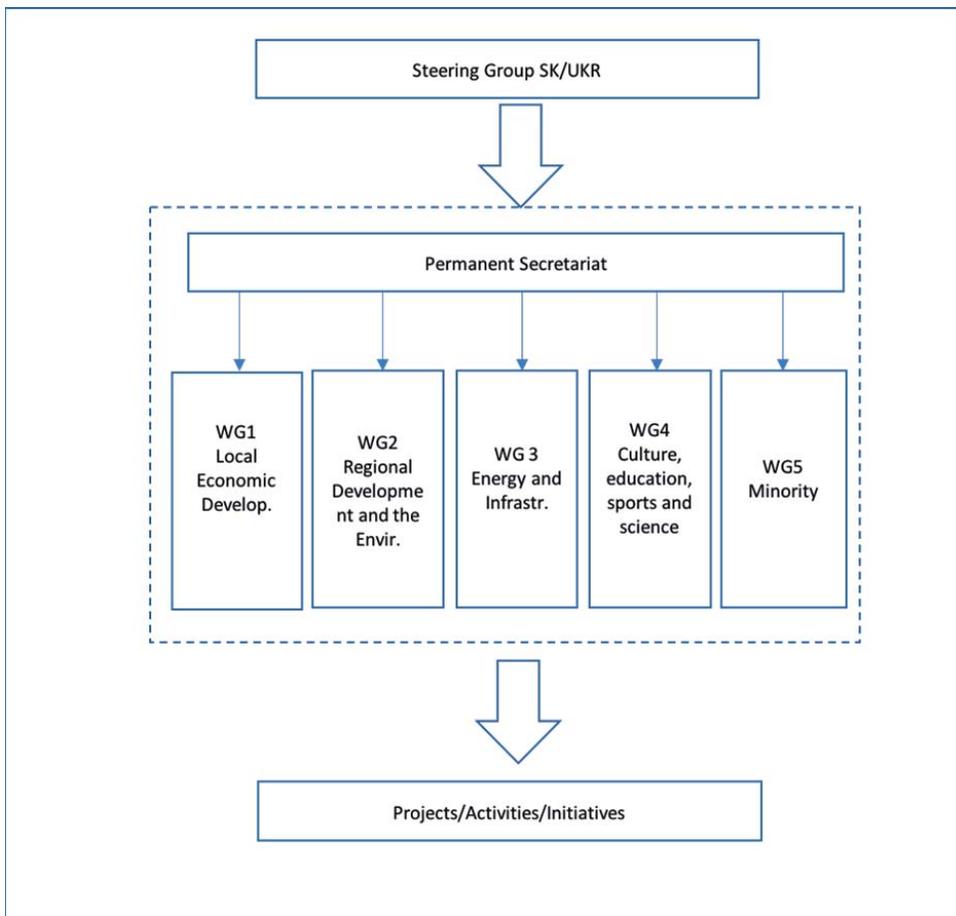
In view of the analysis of past experience and examples of best practice, it is clear that institutionalised, planned and practically oriented cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia could help increase its level, improve coordination between various initiatives and boost progress in border regions on both sides of the border. The recommendations that we describe in Part I. and II. of this material should provide scope for the establishment and implementation of a cooperation model based on the analysis and application of best practices implemented by the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Regional Council and the International Barents Secretariat. The model would also take into account the local conditions and possibilities of the Slovak-Ukrainian border.

Institutionalization of cooperation and its support through standing and functioning bodies should, among other objectives:

- in matters of state regulation of cross-border cooperation, prevent the interdependence of regional and local public authorities as well as overlapping activities at lower levels of management;
- ensure effective monitoring of implementation of cross-border cooperation programs that define strategic objectives and tactical roles, control mechanisms and phases of implementation;
- synchronize implemented programs with national and international economic and social projects focused particularly on balancing the level of development of cross-border regions;
- ensure the specificity and efficiency of the work of individual institutions (bodies) providing state support for cross-border cooperation;
- establish a stable platform for the participation of governmental and non-governmental organizations, experts and the public.

The model of institutionalized cooperation would at the same time maintain its functioning and generate pressure to deepen and expand mutual relations. The proposed model would work on four levels. The controlling body would be in charge of covering the entire process, approving the work plan and checking and commissioning the secretariat. It would be made up of high representatives of Slovakia and Ukraine, representatives of the regional administration, the academic community and important non-governmental organizations. **The key role in this case would be that of a numerously modest standing secretariat**, coordinating steering group meetings, providing technical support to working groups, and coordinating fundraising activities as well as provide contact with the public and the media. The annual work plan of the secretariat and working groups would form the foundation for its work and activities. The proposed structure is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The proposed structure and institutionalization of cross-border cooperation.



Based on the knowledge of the CBC results in the Barents Euro-Arctic region and the qualitative research carried out as part of the project solution, the optimal number of working groups could be five, in the following key areas:

- **Working Group on Local Economic Development (WP 1)**
- **Working Group for Regional Development and Environment (WP 2)**
- **Working Group for Energy and Infrastructure (WP 3)**
- **Working Group on Culture, Education, Sport and Science (WP 4)**
- **Working Group on Minorities (WP 5)**

The main condition for functioning and productive activity of the working groups would be transparent invitation and involvement of significant regional experts and effective work management through qualified and experienced coordinators. In addition to improving mutual awareness, acquisition of new partners, exchanging ideas, popularizing activities and coordinating activities, the main outcome of each working group could be to develop particular projects, but also stimulating initiatives and activities to strengthen regional cooperation and promote the economic development of border regions.

Working groups could also help organize regular and dedicated events (fora, workshops, conferences, colloquia). These can be supported by discussion groups on digital portals (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn) to address the public, thereby increasing public support for cross-border cooperation. Coordination of the individual activities of the working groups would be carried out by a managing authority, which would also play an important role in identifying and supporting the funding of specific projects. At the same time, the Secretariat could play an important role in creating a single portal of funding resources available in the region and provide analyses and documentation to project initiatives.

The results of the Scandinavian experience and cooperation development potential indicate **the three main directions of necessary interventions**

1. **Development of a wider framework of cooperation in the Carpathian region,**
2. **Active support of the governments of Ukraine and Slovakia as well as the institutions of the European Union,**
3. **The transition from ad hoc projects and initiatives to coordination and stabilization of systematic cooperation.**

The proposed model should help implement the strategic and technical recommendations described in Chapters I and II. At the same time, it is necessary to anticipate that the **model we are presenting is not a universal solution but rather a basis for further discussion and its final form should be the result of a consensus of the concerned parties** on both Ukrainian and Slovak side, at the level of the governmental bodies and in accordance with the interests of the regions concerned.

TECHNICAL NOTES AND AUTHORS

These recommendations are one of the outputs of project *Provision of information and implementation of innovative approaches to cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine* supported by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and co-financed from the state budget of the Slovak Republic.

These are the result of research, study and analytical-synthetic work of the solution team, which was made up of scientists and university workers, experts from the state and regional authorities of Košice and Prešov self-governing region (Slovakia), Finnmark (Norway),

Zakarpattya region of Ukraine, diplomats and representatives of public organizations and institutions.

Part of the practical recommendations to governmental bodies and local self-government and non-governmental organizations is specified in the analytical reports on the results of the project implementation. The authors of the draft "Recommendations and proposals for increasing the efficiency of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation and the model of its institutionalization are:

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Abbreviations

CBC	Cross-border cooperation
CSPS SAS	Centre of Social and Psychological Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences



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