
NATIONAL MINORITIES IN THE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION BETWEEN SLOVENIA AND ITALY

MINORITĂȚILE NAȚIONALE ÎN COOPERAREA TRANSFRONTALIERĂ DINTRE SLOVENIA ȘI ITALIA

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Rezumat: În articol este examinat rolul minorității italiene în Slovenia și a minorității slovene din Italia în cooperarea transfrontalieră între cele două țări. Sunt enunțate principalele abordări teoretice pentru definirea unor concepte precum cooperarea transfrontalieră, regiunile de frontieră, Euroregiunile. Cercetarea empirică se bazează pe analiza implementării cooperării transfrontaliere Interreg și face apel la trei, dintre principalii săi, factori, care afectează minoritățile naționale: organizarea mobilității transfrontaliere funcționale și intensive; stimularea afinității culturale / etnice între populațiile de pe ambele părți ale frontierei; sprijinirea prin cooperare instituțională.

Cuvinte cheie: minorități naționale, Slovenia, cooperare transfrontalieră, euroregiune, Interreg.

Abstract: The article presents the role of the Italian minority in Slovenia and the Slovenian minority in Italy in cross-border cooperation between the two countries. The main theoretical approaches to the definition of such concepts as cross-border cooperation, boundary regions, Euroregions are set out. Empirical research is based on the analysis of the implementation of cross-border cooperation Interreg and appeals to three of its main factors affecting national minorities: the organization of functional and intensive cross-border mobility; stimulation cultural / ethnic affinity between populations on both sides of the border; supporting by institutional cooperation.

Key words: national minorities, Slovenia, Italy, cross-border cooperation, Euroregion, Interreg

The issue of European integration impact on the mobilization of national minorities' resources on the Italian-Slovenian border is relevant due to the fact that both minorities are a kind of "bridges" between the East and West countries, which were constantly moving away from each other during the Cold War, reducing the chances of creating a "untied Europe". The cross-border cooperation programs were supposed to overcome the accumulated

contradictions and glue together the map of Europe, as the ideologists of the European Union searched for creating a state without borders (not only in terms of administrative and territorial borders, but also in terms of language, culture, etc.). However, another problem arose - the identity preservation of the ethnic groups that found themselves on different sides of the conditional border. A striking example of such ethnic groups were the Italians in Slovenia and the Slovenians in Italy (in the latter case, the example of the Friuli-Venice-Julia region is especially indicative).

Objective: To clarify the role and place of the Italian minority in Slovenia and the Slovene minority in Italy in cross-border cooperation between the two countries.

Theoretical framework

First of all, it is necessary to clearly define the main definitions of our research - cross-border cooperation, border regions, Euroregions, as well as their theoretical and methodological basis.

The Russian scientists S. Tkachev, D. Bolotov and N. Mezhevich define the concept of cross-border cooperation as "a set of coordinated actions performed by state authorities located in neighboring territories at all levels, local administration, economic bodies, public organizations, scientific and educational institutions"[Ткачев, 2016: 9].

This definition, in our opinion, is rather vague. The concept of cross-border cooperation is much more clearly formulated by D. Davidov and T. Chekalin, who define it as "one of the forms of cross-border cooperation, which is a combination of bilateral and multilateral relations between authorities, economic bodies, public organizations and the population of the border regions of two or more countries" [Давыдов, 2009].

Cross-border cooperation can be implemented in several ways:

- local border contacts;
- cooperation on the level of organizations, regions, cities, etc. (based on agreements);
- temporary networks that involve project fulfillment in a certain industry);
- cross-national cooperation, Euroregions are a prominent example of such.

Cross-border cooperation must be considered in the light of the two main processes typical for the whole world - globalization and regionalization. The latter is especially important in our case, since the pace of the neighboring countries regionalization in a certain region of the world forms the character of cross-border cooperation.

Cooperation between the border regions is an essential part of international integration, or rather its first stage. Putting it in a more simplified way, cross-border cooperation is a regional form of integration, the

interpenetration of the main vectors in neighboring states development. Therefore, the main element of such cooperation is the elaboration of effective development programs, which are adequately funded by the partner countries, and both countries are interested in leveling socio-economic growth in the neighboring regions,

A holistic approach to the cross-border cooperation study is possible only if considering both economic and humanitarian aspects of development. In our case, this is seen as respect for cultural traditions and customs of national minorities in the border territories. Omitting this, effective economic cooperation is simply impossible [Грибова, 2006: 17-19].

Those analysts who consider cross-border cooperation programs to be effective call the interaction between the regions of the two neighboring countries "an alternative state, where, as a result of the subnational bodies interaction, transnational governance arises, which ignores existing administrative-territorial borders. The Italian researcher E. Nadalutti, who called cross-border cooperation programs the doors previously opened exclusively to national states, was quite precise [Nadalutti, 2015: 40-41].

Just giving the first definition, we encountered such concepts as the border region and the Euroregion. The British sociologist Marcus Parkmann defines border regions as territorial units whose authorities participate in the cross-border cooperation initiative [Parkmann, 2003: 157].

Euroregions are special types of cross-border cooperation agreements signed not by regional bodies, but by associations of local authorities [Керка, 2002: 51-69]. It should be noted that Euroregions are more efficient than cross-border cooperation programs, both from a bureaucratic and administrative point of view, as well as in time terms, since they are long-term institutions, while cross-border cooperation activities are valid only for a few years [Yolder, 2003: 263-286]. They are also more successful in overcoming past enmity and conflicts between countries and regions. It can be agreed with most cross-border cooperation specialists that Euroregions (as well as cross-border cooperation in general) are aimed at breaking cultural, economic and social barriers [Nadalutti, 2015: 43].

In this article, we will consider the implementation of such cooperation both generally and more specifically from the point of view of national minorities as the main engine of the projects on the example of the Interreg V-A Slovenia-Italy cross-border cooperation program in the current program period (in our case, this is closely related to one of the constitutionally enshrined national minorities) [Ustava Republike Slovenije].

Cross-border cooperation as an integral part of economic, social and cultural development

Within the European Union, the main areas of cross-border cooperation can be identified as:

1. Programs at the internal borders of the EU, better known as the Interreg initiative. The existence of these programs is determined by the existing specificity within the EU, which causes some difficulties in the field of cooperation. These may be maritime borders, highlands, underdeveloped infrastructure, political or cultural barriers.

2. Programs at the external borders of the EU with neighboring countries. These are programs that connect EU members and neighboring countries, for example Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein.

3. Programs at the external borders of the EU with new members of the union. These are those projects that until 2004 were implemented by the EU under the Interreg initiative, and on the other side of the border under the parallel PHARE CBC40 program. After 2004 they joined the group of programs at the EU internal borders due to their expansion.

4. Programs at the external borders of the EU with third countries. The programs involve regions at the external borders of the EU, including those bordering the Balkans, Bulgaria, Morocco and Russia.

The main objectives of cross-border cooperation programs:

- to promote economic and social development in the border areas;
- to solve general problems in the areas of environment, public health, safety and security;
- to create better conditions for people, goods and capital movement.

These objectives contribute to developing an approach to common problems/challenges in border areas, joint actions and policies, experiences and knowledge exchange among national, regional and local entities. The challenges faced by the EU member countries today increasingly transcend national borders and require united action. Cross-border cooperation is aimed at promoting balanced economic and social development of border territories, strengthening cooperation at local and regional levels, solving problems identified on both sides of the border. Similar and different projects contribute to saving and increasing wealth of various border zones identities. Participation in cross-border programs enables to learn more about the specific features of individual regions, identify common development trends and priorities, establish interconnection and cooperation between individual institutions and local municipalities, which contributes to greater mutual trust and, as a result, progress in the development of each individual region [Kaj so čezmejni programi in projekti].

Scientists argue that cross-border cooperation programs can be (or could be) an engine for the emancipation of local and regional communities against the

domination of national states. In other words, cross-border cooperation helps to preserve the identity of national minorities [Nadalutti, 2015: 40].

Slovenia joined the programs in 2004, when it became a member of the EU. To realize their exceptional importance, we must recall that this is a small country with 2 million inhabitants and 20.271 km² area, which borders Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia. The ratio between the state area and the total length of political borders is 5.7 km of borders per 100 km². There is a higher proportion of borders relative to land only in Luxembourg (about 9 km per 100 km²). Half a million people cross borders daily (in comparison with 2 million of the entire Slovenian population). Of this figure, about 30% of Slovenian citizens who perform about 50 million border crossings per year (about 140 thousand Slovenian citizens, or 7% of the total permanent population, cross the border daily, or, in other words, each Slovenian citizen on average visits a foreign country once every two weeks) [Bufon].

National minorities: the key players in the border regions development

The development of cross-border cooperation is based on improving good-neighborly relations between the two countries; identifying and addressing common challenges; ensuring efficiency and border security; protecting the national minorities' rights; increasing the economic potential for border territories, as well as improving the quality of people's life on both sides of the border. They, in our case, play the role of liaison and tend to be the key bodies in the process of regional development on both sides. Undoubtedly, they can be called "ambassadors of culture" and "experts in the field of culture" in cross-border territories [Pivec].

The link between ethnic and linguistic diversity in border areas (especially due to the presence of national minorities) and cross-border cooperation has only attracted the attention of researchers in recent years [Klotz, 2019: 32]. Some authors note that cross-border cooperation is fundamental to the border areas' development where indigenous or other national minorities live, as they are often of particular interest in establishing contacts with people or authorities in a neighboring country due to cultural, linguistic and historical proximity. These common ties can be political and symbolic levels stimulating cross-border cooperation. At the same time, it must also be borne in mind that conflicts can often arise between governments and other state bodies, especially if the border area used to encounter political tension, as in our example when it comes to the Slovenian-Italian border area. And in this sense, the program we are considering at the junction of Italy and Slovenia is exemplary, because "Italian nationalism systematically destroyed the Slovene community for twenty years" [Peric, 2015], and nevertheless as a result we see not two enemies or rivals, but

two harmoniously and interconnected developing partners. Other authors discuss recognition and protection of minorities. Their research seeks to answer the question of the extent to which minorities should actively participate in the development of bilateral relations and agreements. The third group of authors understands ethnic and linguistic diversity as the added value of border areas and cross-border cooperation. Minorities are perceived as contributing to economic and social development and helping to strengthen relations between countries.

Social and economic cooperation between the Slovenian minority in Italy and the Italian minority in Slovenia until the 1990s was very free, i.e. unregulated, if at all. All this was due to the existence of the Iron Curtain and a certain level of international isolation in Yugoslavia. It is also worth keeping in mind that Interreg's programs were not specifically targeted at national minorities and therefore these issues remained on the periphery for a long time. In some cases, Interreg projects simply legalized an already existing network of relationships, without moving towards any real change in the possibilities for minorities [Rigo, 2007].

Interreg V-A Cooperation Programme Slovenia - Italy

Cross-border cooperation, also known as INTERREG V-A, is aimed at supporting the cooperation of regional partners from at least two different EU member states along their land or sea borders. At the moment, Slovenia is participating in such programs that are implemented for the following periods (2000-2006, 2007-2013, 2014-2020, 2021-2027,...): V-A Slovenia - Croatia, Interreg V-A Slovenia - Austria, Interreg V-A Slovenia - Hungary, Interreg V-A Slovenia - Italy.

In terms of actual involvement of national minorities, we are most interested in the Interreg V-A Slovenia - Italy program. Currently, the third and most productive period from the view of national minorities' engagement (2014-2020) has come to an end. The cost of the Interreg V-A Italy-Slovenia program was around 90 million euros. These funds were used to implement the strategy of intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth in line with the Europe 2020 strategy. They include namely measures promoting growth and innovation, improving the quality of life, environmental sustainability and public administration. The program will have been implemented during the seven-year period 2014-2020 and will maintain continuity with the previous program period 2007-2013, in which 87 projects in the field of competitiveness, research and innovation, protection and evaluation of cultural and natural heritage and cross-border services were co-financed [Interreg].

Within the program, projects are divided into three types:

1. **Strategic projects**, with a total value of over 1 million euros. By establishing permanent cross-border networks and organizations, they should

ensure continued cooperation even after completing projects. They must comply with 4 conditions in accordance with Article 19 of EU Regulation No. 1080/2006: joint training, joint implementation, joint staffing and co-financing.

2. **Standard projects** - they are selected through public tenders and include applicants from both Italy and Slovenia. They must meet at least two of the four conditions listed above.

3. **Small projects**: just like standard projects, they can involve both parties with at least two out of the four conditions. Their costs may vary between 50,000 and 100,000 euros.

Minority organisations are currently involved in three standard and one strategic project of the INTERREG V-A Italy-Slovenia Cooperation Program for the period 2014-2020:

- **PRIMIS - A multicultural journey between Slovenia and Italy through a minority perspective**. This is a strategic project aimed at promoting a new way of perceiving the multicultural and multilingual identity of the program area in the eyes of tourists and the population. The aim of the project is to transfer the characteristics of indigenous communities, especially language and culture, both in real and unrealistic forms to tourism and promote the cross-border environment. The project involves the use of innovative tools that will facilitate interaction between visitors and the locations covered by the project.

The project theme (minorities and multiculturalism) refers to the introduction of innovative approaches developed by national and linguistic minorities and public organizations. Promoting multiculturalism and multilingualism, they focus on the young people generation, by sharing best practices to establish multicultural values, expanding the scope of tourism areas and increasing their cultural attractiveness.

The main objective of the project is to revive and restore historical and cultural sites that will be considered as the repository of new museum content dedicated to national and linguistic minorities in the northern Adriatic; introduce new digital and ICT technologies; attract young people; offer users more language support tools (tangible and intangible cultural heritage) useful for a more sustainable tourism and cultural offer as well as attractiveness of the border area.

The total amount of the project co-financing is 2.4 million euros from ERDF funds. The project implementation period is 36 months starting from 1 January 2019. The PRIMIS project involves 10 partners, including three other minority organisations apart from the lead partner (the Italian Community):

1. **The targeted temporary association PROJEKT with the company EUPRO as the main representative** (Ciljno začasno združenje PROJEKT z glavnim predstavnikom društvo EUPRO). Thanks to its institutional activities and numerous projects with the same goals, the association is a partner with the

right competencies and the necessary experience, as, among other things, it participated in the JEZIKLINGUA strategic project in the period 2007-2013;

2. **The Slovenian Regional Economic Association** (Slovensko deželno gospodarsko združenje);

3. **The coastal self-governing community of the Italian nationality** (Obalna samoupravna skupnost italijanske narodnosti).

The main results of the project are the creation of 4 multimedia centers to disseminate knowledge about the characteristics of indigenous language communities; 1 multimedia platform and 1 electronic directory, cultural events evaluation and promotion, information activities and training for specific target groups. The project is unique as it considers the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of indigenous language communities as an additional value for economic activities - cultural and sustainable tourism [Interreg].

Standard projects with active participation of national minorities

Within the first four applications for standard projects, minority organisations participate in three out of the 27 approved co-financing projects: **FISH-AGRO TECH CBC, LIGHTING SOLUTIONS and EDUKA 2.**

FISH-AGRO TECH CBC project: leading partner - Azienda speciale Aries - Camera di Commercio di Trieste. The total amount of co-financing for the project is 1,016,780 euros. LAS KRASAGAL CARSO participates as a project partner (all municipalities of the Italian karst, the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia, agricultural associations and ZKB bank are members). The co-financing amount of this project partner is 82,000.00 euros. The aim of the project is to establish joint partnerships between parks, scientific and technological institutions and entrepreneurs in the fields of agro-food and fisheries as well as aquaculture with the participation of local actions and coastal groups.

Project **LIGHTING SOLUTIONS**. The leading partner is the Slovenian municipality of Šempeter-Vrtojba. The total amount of co-financing for the project is EUR 1,251,573. The Council of Slovene Organisations / Confederazione Organizzazioni Slovene participates as a project partner. Their co-financing sum is EUR 201,351.00. The project is a modernisation of the ENRI project, which was implemented as part of cross-border cooperation in the programming period 2007-2013. The project will contribute to changing the current situation through activities that in the long term will improve energy efficiency and lighting management in public buildings as well as energy saving management and behaviour in general. By improving energy efficiency in the border zone, we reduce energy consumption and, as a result, emissions into the atmosphere. Three sets of interconnected cross-border measures are planned. A common methodology, inventory and study of lighting in public buildings will be developed, which will provide municipalities with a professional basis for

long-term measures to ensure safer and more efficient lighting. Modern, innovative high energy lighting systems will be installed in selected public buildings.

EDUKA project 2. The leading partner is SLOVENO DI RICERCHE SLOVENSKY STUDENT/ISTITUTO SLOVENO. The total amount of co-financing for the project is EUR 775,500.00. The co-financing amount is EUR 205,000.00. The overall objective is to develop common didactic and educational models and tools for coordinated management. The planned activities will be particularly beneficial to schools and universities in the Program area with three direct effects. The first concerns the development of a single strategic document on common didactic models with guidelines, uniform methods and common content on topics related to the protection of cultural, linguistic, environmental and natural resources. The second effect involves joint teacher training, which will ensure that the said common didactic models are transferred to the school and higher education environment. The third effect refers to the creation of a single strategic document between universities and stakeholders to simplify the procedures for recognising the titles and qualifications of foreign students and graduates in education [Zamejski, obmejni, čezmejni, 2019].

TARTINI project. It involves the Italian Minority Association Giuseppe Tartini Community of Italians (Piran). 6 partners are participating in the TARTINI project. The leading partner is the Municipality of Piran. The co-financing of the project amounts to EUR 1,093,887.10 from ERDF funds, of which EUR 192,695 from ERDF funds were allocated by the Italian Minority Organisation. The aim of the project is to implement activities to preserve, assess, develop and promote Tartini's cultural heritage in order to increase sustainable tourism demand in the area of the central creative triangle of Tartini and to ensure sustainable use of the cultural heritage. The exhibition will present real cultural heritage - the house where Tartini was born and movable cultural heritage - music and compositions. Various cultural events will be held - exhibitions, concerts, seminars, research initiatives, professional works and collections will be published, and the Tartini network will be founded. The beginning or end of this new cross-border cultural route will start at the House of Tartini with its existing information centre and a new route for multimedia museums. The Tartini Cultural Trail will run in the real world and in time and will be marked and advertised accordingly [Interreg].

Conclusions

Summing up, three main positive factors can be identified for this kind of cross-border projects:

- The organisation of functional and intensive cross-border mobility;
- Stimulation of cultural/ethnic proximity between populations on both

sides of the border;

- Institutional cooperation ensurance.

Cross-border cooperation between Italy and Slovenia has helped to promote a new understanding of inter-ethnic relations in the border areas. By actively mobilising their resources for cooperation in new projects, ethnic groups have become subjects of the programs rather than just objects. In this way, mental barriers and inter-ethnic prejudices are being overcome. Without the tools and opportunities for cross-border management, it is impossible to develop intercultural relations and socio-political interaction between the national minorities in the Slovenian and Italian border regions.

However, despite all the positive aspects of Interreg's projects to build bridges between the Italian-Slovenian border regions in the research and education field, these programs have not yet achieved tangible results in matters directly affecting national minorities, as the main problem of cross-border cooperation between Italy and Slovenia - the latter's lacking regional relevance - remains unresolved.

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