

The institutional and agreement basis of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation: The Ukrainian perspective (2004-2021)

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Abstract | Background: Cross-border cooperation regulates organizational, legal, economic and other principles of interstate relations of border regions in particular. The agreements indicated in the paper can envisage the establishment of cross-border cooperation bodies that perform the tasks assigned to them by territorial communities, their representative bodies, and local executive bodies, in accordance with the powers and in the manner prescribed by the legislations of the countries. Objectives: The paper focuses on the examination of the existing institutional mechanisms, which implies a consideration of the structure and role of institutions and agreements that regulate Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation and the assessment of the effectiveness of the institutional framework and their impact on the development of cooperation between the regions. Another objective is to study the challenges of identifying key problems and obstacles of an institutional nature that can inhibit the development of cross-border cooperation, and to consider possible ways of overcoming the institutional ones. Methods: The research was conducted with the use of the method of analyzing the normative-legal basis of bilateral cross-border relations at the national, regional, and local levels. It aims to study the institutional framework of cooperation and involvement in joint programs at the national level, to examine the existing agreements of local and regional entities, their role and competence. There have been conducted interviews with experts who are involved in the explored field. Results: The entire list of cross-border cooperation forms has been recorded: cross-border groupings and cross-border bodies, particularly a Euroregional cooperation grouping and a European grouping of territorial cooperation; Euroregions; agreements, joint initiatives, projects, events, programs, strategies; mutually beneficial contacts and other forms not prohibited by law (though not specifically defined by the legislator either). To the promising ones worth implementing, belong a cross-border grouping and a cross-border cooperation body, a Euroregional cooperation grouping and a European grouping of territorial cooperation. Considerable attention in the paper is devoted to the state strategies and programs related to cross-border cooperation in Ukraine, which were developed during the specified period, and to bilateral local and regional agreements. Discussion and conclusions: The paper describes the challenges and prospects of cross-border cooperation providing some recommendations on institutional changes for the improvement of cooperation through implementing joint cross-border projects, and at the same time for integrating Ukraine into the EU.

Keywords | cross-border cooperation, community, region, oblast, self-governing territory, Ukraine, Slovakia

Background

The research was carried out in view of the importance of filling the existing knowledge gaps regarding the institutional aspects of cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine. This is significant because understanding the institutional context can be the key to revealing opportunities and solving problems. Being aware of institutional details can help improve cooperation mechanisms as well as avoid possible difficulties.

The institutional framework is one of the factors that forms an internal platform for cooperation with neighboring countries, the adaptability of which to international standards and conditions largely determines the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation (CBC - hereafter) of countries. Due to the rapprochement, unification and harmonization of the border regions, the integration of neighboring countries in general and Ukraine in particular, into the EU, is taking place. As Ya. Zhalilo underscores, 'at the local level, new institutional practices of transitional transformations are generated under the influence of new mechanisms and tools for the use of local resources instead of those that were usually transmitted from the Center. Therefore, the nation state must enter into institutional competition with cross-border networks. CBC cannot be limited to local border relations. The task of state policy is not only to overcome local obstacles for CBC of the border regions, but also to integrate it into the context of nationwide development. Complementary to the policy of increasing the *transparency* of the national border for CBC is the task of managing cross-border interaction with the aim of achieving positive synergistic effects due to strengthening the performance of border entities in obtaining better factor productivity in the use of local resource' (Zhalilo, 2021).

Objectives

The research explores the institutional basis of cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia with regard to cross-border cooperation issues, and reveals the degree of involvement in joint programs at the national level through the analysis of existing agreements of local and regional entities. It also clarifies the role, competence and engagement of local and regional entities.

Over the past decades, the issue of cross-border cooperation has been of interest to many researchers on both sides of the border, since it was after signing the association agreement that the number of contacts and entities of cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia increased.

Well-known researchers and practitioners in this area are Alexander Duleba, Vladimir Bench and Michal Sirner, and in Ukraine – Serhiy Ustych and Myroslava Lendel. Some of them have published a number of monographs in co-authorship and jointly conducted numerous studies of the dynamics and prospects of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia.

Methods

The methodology of this research lies in the exploration of the policy and the existing experience of cross-border cooperation entities. The following methods were used in the process of studying: analysis of institutional documents such as official agreements, contracts and other institutional documents that regulate cross-border cooperation between regions or cities of both countries, and expert interviews – conducting interviews with experts who have experience in cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine. The enabled us to obtain personal points of view and to analyze expert estimation regarding the institutional dimension of cooperation.

Results

For the effective functioning of cross-border cooperation of regions, it is necessary to form and comply with a number of conditions at the international, interstate, national and local levels. This creates the basis for the institutional framework. The legislation of Ukraine on cross-border cooperation includes international treaties and agreements (multilateral and bilateral), laws and bylaws reflecting the standards of the Council of Europe and the EU. As for cross-border cooperation with Slovakia, it is regulated by the Treaty on International Cooperation with the Slovak Republic (1993), the Agreement between the Governments of Ukraine and the Slovak Republic on Cross-Border Cooperation (2000), the Law of Ukraine 'On Cross-Border Cooperation' (2004) and, ratified by Ukraine, the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (The Madrid Convention) with its Protocols as well as the respective provisions of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. 'The Law on Local Self-Government in Ukraine' and 'The Law on Local State Administrations' are also important for CBC because they establish the rights and obligations for local self-government bodies and local executive bodies as the ones acting as cross-border cooperation entities. The general coordination of cross-border cooperation and control over compliance with the legislation on cross-border cooperation in Ukraine is carried out by the central executive authority, which ensures the formation and implementation of state regional policy, with the participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in accordance with the powers defined by the legislation and international treaties of Ukraine (Pro transkordonne, 2004).

In compliance with the amendments to 'The Law on Cross-Border Cooperation' and 'The Law on Local Self-Government in Ukraine' in 2018, the right to create a cross-border grouping and a cross-border cooperation body, in particular, a Euroregional cooperation grouping (hereinafter - ECG) and a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (hereinafter: EGTC) it was pointed out. This expanded the powers of the village, settlement, and city councils in the field of cross-border cooperation (the approval of agreements on ECGs, decision-making on the formation of ECGs, on joining such a grouping or on leaving it, adoption of the statute of an ECG, introducing changes to it and on making decisions related to joining an EGTC or leaving it) (Pro vnesennja, 2018). The mentioned amendments created the basis of the institutional framework for CBC, and a wider list of CBC forms was drawn up: the above-stated cross-border groupings and bodies of cross-border cooperation, in particular an ECG and an EGTC; Euroregions; agreements, joint initiatives, projects, programs, strategies; mutually beneficial contacts and other forms not prohibited by law (though not specifically defined by the legislator). The newly introduced legal forms, which could become the institutional basis for CBC, are exactly the cross-border grouping and the body of cross-border cooperation, and particularly, a Euroregional cooperation grouping and a European grouping of territorial cooperation. It is due to them that other forms will become more effective, because for their establishment it is necessary to sign an agreement, and the main type of activity is the development and implementation of joint initiatives, events, projects, programs and strategies of cross-border cooperation. The key entities of CBC, delineated by the legislator, can be the founders of such a grouping (territorial communities on behalf of their representative bodies and their groupings, local executive bodies of Ukraine and territorial communities, and respective authorities of the member states of the Council of Europe, which have the appropriate powers in accordance with national legislation).

'Such a form of CBC as an ECG is mentioned in a special international agreement of the Council of Europe, in which Ukraine has been participating since 2012 - Protocol № 3 to The European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities Regarding Groupings of Euroregional Cooperation. However, after the adoption of the necessary

amendments to the Law, not a single ECG has been registered in Ukraine. Such a state of affairs can be explained by the novelty of legislative norms and the need for their further implementation through the necessary bylaws and regulations. In this process, the respective central executive authorities and CBC entities should take into account the fact that our country's ratification of Protocol № 3 has created the conditions under which Ukrainian CBC entities are currently entitled to take the initiative in establishing an ECG. Among other things, this is due to the fact that the member states of the Council of Europe, which are located directly on the western border of Ukraine, have not yet ratified this Protocol. It must be admitted that CBC entities of these states, in particular Slovakia, by arrangement with Ukrainian partners, can participate in establishing an ECG with the headquarters in Ukraine or join such a grouping. Attention has to be drawn to the fact that under these circumstances, the activities of such an ECG will be regulated by the norms of Ukrainian legislation' (Ustymenko, et al., 2020). Another difficult issue is that, according to the Law, an ECG must be a legal entity (however, the aspect with an organizational and legal form is not clear) and accordingly function in conformity with a number of legal acts regarding legal entities (registration, taxation, non-profitability, etc.), which is not completely consistent with the other normative-legal documents.

Cross-border cooperation agreements

The Intergovernmental Agreement on CBC between Ukraine and the Slovak Republic dated December 5, 2000 entered into force on January 29, 2001. According to the agreement, the Slovak-Ukrainian Intergovernmental Commission on Cross-Border Cooperation was formed (annual meetings), with the right to create working groups to resolve specific issues. The statute of the commission, indicating its scope of activities, organizational structure, budget and procedures were adopted at the first meeting of the commission on May 6, 2004 in Zemplinska Sirava (Slovakia). The final meeting of the Ukrainian-Slovak Intergovernmental Commission on Cross-Border Cooperation was held in September 2021. The last meeting of the Ukrainian-Slovak Intergovernmental Commission on Cross-Border Cooperation was held in September 2021.

In order to comply with the norms of the above-mentioned laws and powers, in 2019, the Ministry of Development of Communities, Territories and Infrastructure of Ukraine (the Minregion) by its decree approved the Standard form of the agreement on cross-border cooperation, which CBC entities should use for the proper legalization of their cooperation with foreign partners. The agreement on CBC should be based on the provisions of multilateral treaties of the Council of Europe (The European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities three Protocols to it), the EU legislation (in case of establishing an EGTC), and bilateral Treaties on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and respective foreign countries. The subject of the agreement is the cooperation of the parties in the process of fulfilling the purpose of the agreement. It should regulate the procedure for forming CBC bodies, the rights and obligations of its parties. The parties also participate in the development and implementation of joint initiatives, events, projects, programs and strategies; they can make proposals on the organization of cross-border trade, the creation of cross-border groupings, etc. A CBC agreement, concluded between its parties, must undergo a mandatory registration procedure which is carried out by the Minregion in accordance with the Order of notification and ensuring the functioning of the Register of CBC agreements.

Speaking about CBC with Slovakia, one cannot but mention the Euroregion, within which the governments and border regions of Ukraine and Slovakia also cooperate. Euroregions still remain the main institutions in the system of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia within the Carpathian Euroregion, which, in addition to these states, also unites the regions of Poland, Hungary, and Romania. The Euroregion was established on February 14, 1993.

The decision-making body of the Carpathian Euroregion is the Council, which includes representatives of 5 national delegations (10 people from each country) of 19 administrative regions of the Carpathian Euroregion. During 20 years of its existence, the Interregional Association 'The Carpathian Euroregion' did not break any organizational and legal barriers and did not become a legal entity in accordance with international law. Instead, as separate legal entities, national representative offices operate in each of the states, which – with varying degrees of success and efficiency – work to achieve the goal of the Carpathian Euroregion, namely the promotion of cross-border cooperation between the border regions-members of the Association. Since 2008, the functions of the National Representative Office of the Carpathian Euroregion in Ukraine have been performed by the Association 'Euroregion. The Carpathians – Ukraine'. Territorial cooperation of the countries within the Carpathian Euroregion today, as a rule, is implemented in a bilateral format at the level of 'point projects', as well as within the framework of separate target programs in the cross-border, ecological, humanitarian, and cultural spheres. That is why the potential of the unified Carpathian space as a basis for the formation of a systemic policy of regional development remains not fully utilized.

Important for the institutional framework at the national level are also strategic documents in the state, which correlate and shape the state policy in the area of cross-border cooperation as well. For example, the previous State Regional Development Strategy for the period until 2020, adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in 2014, defined the development of CBC as one of the priority tasks of implementing the state regional policy (Pro zatverdzhennja, 2014). The State Program for the Development of Cross-Border Cooperation for 2016-2020, approved by the Government's resolution, became a concrete tool for implementing this Strategy in matters of CBC. According to this Program, the priorities of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia were determined as follows: cooperation in the field of reforming local self-government bodies; ensuring the development of the tourist and recreational potential of the border regions; implementation of cultural and artistic programs; introduction of a simplified mechanism for small cross-border traffic and expansion of its scope; improvement of the mechanism of small cross-border traffic; modernization and reconstruction of checkpoints on the Ukrainian-Slovak border; minimization of the negative consequences of the impact of industrial activity on salt mines in the urban-type village Solotvyno, Tiachiv district, Zakarpattia oblast (Pro zatverdzhennja, 2014). In early August 2020, the Government of Ukraine adopted the updated State Strategy for Regional Development for 2021-2027. It envisages the implementation of the State Program for the Development of Cross-Border Cooperation for 2021-2027. Meanwhile, as stated in the fourth Program approved in 2021, which was intended for the period 2021–2027, in the course of implementing the previous programs, 'unresolved problems were still remaining, namely: the development of border transport infrastructure, protection and restoration of regional ecosystems, low institutional capacity of entities and participants of CBC' (Pro zatverdzhennja, 2021). That is why, according to the Program, the tasks in the area of 'Promoting the development of the institutional capacity of CBC entities and participants' include: the development of non-state institutions, improvement of local managers' professional skills in CBC issues, organizational, methodological, informational and analytical support of various organizational forms of CBC by means of strengthening the capacity of regional development agencies, etc. Admittedly, the Implementation Plan of the Program did not reflect any practical embodiment of the specified tasks.

Bilateral agreements between local self-government bodies

During the period of independence, a number of documents (agreements) were adopted in Zakarpattia oblast, which determine and regulate various types of cross-border cooperation of Slovak-Ukrainian territories at various levels. We will outline areas and characteristics of these agreements as a vertical hierarchy, namely: regional and local levels. According to the studied

scientific sources, there are bilateral agreements on cooperation between Slovak-Ukrainian regional authorities, local self-government bodies, and their representative bodies. First of all, we will consider the characteristics of the main agreements at the regional level.

The first to be signed were the two agreements: the Agreement on Interregional Cooperation between Zakarpattia Oblast of Ukraine and the Kosice Region of the Slovak Republic, which was adopted on December 17, 1999, and the Agreement on Interregional Cooperation between Zakarpattia Oblast of Ukraine and the Presov Region of the Slovak Republic, – adopted on November 19, 2000. They define the framework conditions for cooperation of the border territories of neighboring countries by main spheres of life.

After Slovakia became a member of the EU (May 1, 2004), new framework documents on partnership interaction, in particular, cross-border partnership, were signed between its border territories and the border territories of Ukraine. Cross-border relations are caused by the fact that Slovakia, as a member of the EU, is under the jurisdiction of two or more agreements parties.

In the new version of the Agreement on Cooperation between Zakarpattia Oblast, Ukraine and the Presov Self-Governing Region, the Slovak Republic (signed in Uzhhorod on March 15, 2005), the areas of cooperation are defined as follows: economy, regional policy, coordination of the preparation and implementation of joint EU programs, transport and transport infrastructure, tourism, environmental protection, culture, education, sports and science, health care (Rejestr). The terms of the mentioned agreement stipulate that its validity is five years with automatic extension over the subsequent 5-year period. It should be noted that this is a framework document on cooperation, based on which the cooperation in the specified areas is carried out.

A new framework document was also signed with another border region of Slovakia, namely the Memorandum on Cooperation between Zakarpattia Oblast of Ukraine and the Košice Self-Governing Region of the Slovak Republic (signed in Uzhhorod on May 13, 2006 for an indefinite period). Cross-border cooperation in the major spheres of life is the main subject of this document (Rejestr).

On November 24, 2006, the Agreement on Trade and Economic, Scientific and Technical, Cultural Cooperation between Zakarpattia Oblast of Ukraine and the Košice Self-Governing Region of the Slovak Republic was signed for an indefinite period. The specified document concerns the cooperation of the border regions on issues of development of the following: industry, agriculture, transport, trade; science, technology and education; culture and art; tourism and sports; local self-government; ecology, rational use of natural resources and flood protection; regional development and cross-border cooperation.

On September 14, 2013, the Memorandum on the Development of Tripartite Relations and Cooperation was signed between the Zakarpattia Oblast Administration (Ukraine), the Pardubice Region (the Czech Republic) and the Presov Self-Governing Region (the Slovak Republic) (Rejestr). The provisions of the specified document concern the implementation of cross-border cooperation of the border communities in the main spheres of the economy and the social sector. It was established that the mentioned memorandum contributed to the implementation of many joint investment projects in the field of education, ecology, tourism, etc.

The following joint documents, which will contribute to the strengthening of cooperation in the Ukrainian-Slovak cross-border region, were signed on May 15, 2015 at the regional level in the village of Ubla (the Slovak Republic) – the Program of Joint Actions between the Zakarpattia Oblast State Administration, the Zakarpattia Oblast Council (Ukraine) and the Presov Self-Governing Region (the Slovak Republic) for the period from May 2015 to May 2016 and Executive Protocol №

7 to the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Zakarpattia Oblast State Administration, the Zakarpattia Oblast Council (Ukraine) and the Kosice Self-Governing Region (the Slovak Republic) for the period from May 2015 to May 2016 as part of the implementation of the previously signed agreements by the border regions of Ukraine and the Slovak Republic. In the mentioned Program of Joint Actions and Executive Protocol №7 there are specified the concrete measures and directions, which involve: based on the principle of mutual exchange, organization of visits by the leaders of the two territories; exchange of delegations representing the local self-government bodies with the purpose to study and transfer the Slovak experience of reforming the local self-government bodies; contributing to an increase in the efficiency of the use of the existing tourist and recreational potential of both; implementing numerous educational, cultural and artistic programs, etc. The documents state that the parties will contribute to the formation of the Coordination Council with the aim of preparing and coordinating priority projects supported by the European Union within the framework of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, the SlovakAid Program, ENI and other programs in the period 2014-2020. It was also agreed to continue efforts focused on simplifying the mechanism of small border traffic between Ukraine and Slovakia, extending it to 50-100 km (from Presov and Kosice) and building the crossing point 'Zabrid - Ulich' (the Program of Joint Actions), opening the crossing point and developing the infrastructure 'Chierna - Solomonovo' (Executive Protocol №7) on the Ukrainian-Slovak border (Kravciv, 2016).

The next hierarchical level is the level of communities, i.e. local, and accordingly it provides for agreements on cross-border cooperation at the level of districts, villages of the border territories from Zakarpattia oblast and districts of the border regions of Slovakia. They concern cross-border cooperation at the level of local self-government bodies on the main issues of territorial development. Namely:

- The Agreement on Cross-Border Cooperation between Velykyi Bereznyi District of Zakarpattia Oblast and Snina District of the Presov Region, Uzhhorod District of Zakarpattia Oblast and Michalovce District of the Kosice Region, Uzhhorod District of Zakarpattia Oblast and Presov District of the Presov Region, Vynohradiv District of Zakarpattia Oblast and Vranov-nad-Toplou District of the Presov Region of the Slovak Republic (Lizanecj, 2017).
- The Agreements on Cross-Border Cooperation between the Village of Zabrod of Velykyi Bereznyi District of Zakarpattia Oblast (Ukraine) and the Village of Ulich of the Presov Self-Governing Region of the Slovak Republic, the Village of Trostianytsia of Mukachevo District (Ukraine) and the Village of Mlynky of the Košice Self-Governing Region of the Slovak Republic were signed in 2012;
- The Agreement on Cross-Border Cooperation between the Velykyi Bereznyi District Council of Zakarpattia Oblast of Ukraine and the District Government of Snina Town of the Slovak Republic (2014); The Agreement on Cooperation between the Velykyi Bereznyi Association of Local Authorities and the Obec Microregion of the Ublan Valley of the Slovak Republic (2014); The Agreement on Cross-Border Cooperation between the Velykyi Bereznyi District Council of Zakarpattia Oblast of Ukraine and the District Government of Medzilaborce Town of the Slovak Republic (2014); The Agreement on Cooperation between the Community of Kamianytsa Village of Uzhhorod District and the Community of Janovce Village of the Slovak Republic (signed on April 4, 2014); The Agreement on Cross-Border Cooperation of the Onokivtsi Village Council of Uzhhorod District of Zakarpattia Oblast of Ukraine and Petrovce Village of the Slovak Republic (signed on February 17, 2015). Cross-border cooperation in social and economic, cultural, infrastructural spheres are the subject of the enumerated agreements;
- Agreements on Cross-Border Cooperation between Perechyn Town of Uzhhorod District of Zakarpattia Oblast (Ukraine) and Humenne Town (Slovakia), between the Uzhhorod City Council

and the Local Self-Government Bodies of Michailovce, Košice (Slovakia), between the Velykyi Bereznyi District State Administration and the District Council, and the District (Obvod in Slovakian) Government of Humenne Town (Slovakia), between the Rakhiv Town Council and the Syidnik Town Government (Slovakia), between the towns of Svaliava and Stara Lubovna (Slovakia). The specified documents were signed in 2015 and have been implemented since then. These documents are aimed at establishing partnership relations between the indicated border territories in the main spheres. The Agreement on Cooperation between the Perechyn Town Council and the Association for the Development of Tourism in the 'Koromlia a Kole' microregion (Slovakia) (since 2015) is related to the development of tourism within the specified territories (Informacijne, 2018). Based on the defined framework agreements, annual conferences and meetings of representatives of the parties are held to study problems and optimize cross-border partnership directions. Programs of joint actions, executive protocols on the implementation of program tasks, objectives of memorandums are adopted at the level of regional authorities of Zakarpattia oblast, local self-government bodies of Slovakia (Košice and Presov self-governing regions).

Cooperation agreements usually declare the need to advance many areas of cooperation, including economic development of regions, transport infrastructure, safe and efficient use of natural resources, implementation of flood control measures, development of tourism, preservation of cultural and historical heritage. For instance, in the preamble to the Agreement on Cross-border Cooperation of Territorial Bodies of Local Self-Government in the Tysa River Basin, it is determined that cooperation is aimed at creating a structure for joint activities, not envisaged by other national, regional and local development programs. Therefore, the implementation of these measures is possible in the form of joint projects with the involvement of the existing financial sources of the EU (Duleba et al, 2023).

Thus, in 2015, there was concluded The Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Education, Culture, Sports, Tourism and Environmental Protection between the Education Department of Velykyi Bereznyi District State Administration and the Regional Council of the Union of Rusyns-Ukrainians in Humenne town of the Slovak Republic. On October 26, 2016, in order to expand partnership and friendly relations with educators from Slovakia, the Agreement was renewed between the Linguistic Gymnasium named after T.H. Shevchenko of the Uzhhorod City Council and the Gymnasium named after Pavol Horov, Michalovce town (Slovakia) (Informacijne, 2018). On May 26, 2018, the Department of Culture of the Oblast State Administration signed the Agreement on Cooperation between the Department of Culture of the Zakarpattia Oblast State Administration (Ukraine) and the Union of Rusyns-Ukrainians (the Slovak Republic).

Cooperation Agreements were also concluded between the collectives of the Zakarpattia Oblast Academic Puppet Theater (Ukraine) and the Puppet Theater in Kosice (Slovakia) (April 2018), between the Zakarpattia Organization of the National Writers' Union of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Writers's Union of Slovakia, the Cooperation Agreement between the Oblast Organizational and Methodological Center of Culture and the Vihorlat Museum in Slovakia (2018) (Petryshyna, 2020).

Cross-border cooperation in the field of tourism and various types of economic activities deserves attention. In particular, the border crossing point «Lubnia – Volosate» is located within the boundaries of the Uzhan and Bieszczady National Parks, which have significant potential for the development of various types of tourism. The Uzhan National Nature Park is a member of the 'Eastern Carpathians' International Biosphere Reserve, another member of which is the Poloniny National Park in Slovakia (Prytula, 2020). Tourist operators of the two countries cooperate in the field of organization of itineraries within the framework of the specified tourist facilities. One cannot but stress that the automobile industry is developed under the conditions of cross-border partnership between Ukraine and Slovakia. Namely, the Private Limited Company 'Eurocar',

located in Uzhhorod district of Zakarpattia oblast, manufactures the ŠKODA model range; components for this company are supplied by Slovak enterprises located on the border territories (SKODA). This cooperation has been ongoing since the opening of 'Eurocar' in 2001.

Today, local self-government bodies also actively use ties with twin cities, participate in the development and implementation of joint projects supported by international organizations, attract new partners in order to solve the problems of a separate territorial community or settlement. In general, cooperation between twin cities is realized through the exchange of educational and cultural delegations, artistic and sports teams, exhibitions, exchange of experience in urban management, and provision of assistance in case of emergency situations. Twin cities have the right to apply for support of joint projects provided by international and European organizations (Chepelenko, 2020); although it is worth noting that twin cities are not always the border ones. Admittedly, Uzhhorod (the oblast center of Zakarpattia oblast) has twin relations with Kosice, Michalovce and Humenne, the border territories of Slovakia; this is supported by the respective agreements and various activities.

Discussion and conclusions

In this article, we have studied the institutional aspects of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation in order to reveal and understand the factors that determine this cooperation efficiency. Analyzing the existing institutional framework, we discovered several key points.

One of the important conclusions is that the institutional basis of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation is already established. However, owing to our analysis, we also identified some challenges and opportunities for further improvement of this cooperation. The general aim of our work is to promote more efficient cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine, ensuring strong and mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries and sustainable development of the border regions.

At the same time, we can state that an urgent issue of cross-border cooperation in the specified territories is the lack of openness of information support regarding the main areas of partnerships, their implementation, and challenging aspects at different levels. In Ukraine particularly, there is no aggregate data on the implementation of all specified agreements, memoranda at the level of villages, districts, Zakarpattia oblast. This prevents the regional border authorities (the Zakarpattia Oblast Administration) from evaluating comprehensively the issues of the development of districts and villages, and building promising ways of cross-border partnership on the basis of the defined directions. With regard to cross-border cooperation of business entities, there is no initiative on the part of local self-government, regional authorities to promote its effectiveness (e.g. the allocation of land plots for manufacturing and trading facilities, organization of business meetings). The issue of developing logistics routes, cross-border territories and border infrastructure remains crucial.

Hence, it has to be emphasized that institutions play a big role in developing Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation since they establish the framework, coordinate actions and provide resources for joint initiatives. In this context, coordination, financing, political backing, technical and expert support, partnerships and associations, monitoring, etc. are referred to as key aspects. The institutions and agreements mentioned in this paper are of utter importance for the development and support of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation, helping to contribute to economic, social and political cooperation between the countries, as well as cultural exchange, tourism promotion and the strengthening of relations in the border areas of both countries.

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