

Transformation Of stepping into new



Slobozhanshchina: dimension of cooperation



The Russia — Ukraine national boundary is gradually gaining the status of a key link in the system of the European boundaries. It is well known that the EU has already determined for themselves the mode of cooperation with the countries which have become the direct neighbors of the ten new member states while the bilateral summit of October 2006 held in Finland initiated the dialogue on cooperation and strategic partnership between the EU and Russia.

Starting 2007 Ukraine will be proposed to go a seven-years period of rapprochement on the basis of European Neighborhood Program (ENP), which will enhance the compatibility of legal and institutional spheres. This period is supposed to appease the economic spread and to consolidate technical -and- scientific and educational contacts into the common space.

Some predict a much later date for the profound integration as 2020. It is expected that by that time the Ukrainian political circles will have learnt not to draw their country apart in the opposite directions but to fight the national interests within the triangle Ukraine — Russia — the EU.

The Instrument for European Neighborhood and Cooperation is planned to be the basic financial instrument to support the implementation of the ENP via the corresponding Action Plan. The domain of this document covers the reform of legislative basis, convergence of authorities, development of joint institutions. With the help of long-term bilateral

agreements the neighboring countries will get the opportunity to participate in the projects of the European Union. The specific and innovative direction of this project is the border cooperation within the frames of which the financing will be exercised via "joint programs". The principle of the so-called European "Structural Funds" that presupposes long-term planning, cooperation and joint financing will underlie this direction. The direction of the border cooperation of the Instrument for European Neighborhood and Cooperation will be additionally funded from the assets of the European Fund for Regional Development.

It is well known that the peripheral location of border regions underlies their unbalanced development as compared to the central parts of the corresponding countries. Border cooperation alleviates the negative sides of regions' development, helps to get over their peripheral status within the country and to improve the living conditions for the population. *

The most authoritative organization engaged in the development of border cooperation in Europe is the Association of European Border Regions, which has been operating since 1969. Jens Gabbe, the Secretary General more than once emphasized in his reports that nowadays border cooperation is the highest priority of European regional policy.

* European charter for boundary regions



With the emergence of new national boundaries the CIS countries faced the necessity to put them into order and establish neighborhood relations via a system of bilateral agreements. In 2001 the Russian Federation and Ukraine signed the Program for Interregional and Border Cooperation, which after the meeting of October 2006 held in Kiev between the Ukrainian Prime-Minister Viktor Yanukovich and the Chairman of the Russian Federation Government received prolongation till 2010.

With the aim of implementation of Ukrainian Law "On Crossborder Cooperation" the XXIIIth session of the 4th convocation of Kharkov Regional Council on January 27, 2005 adopted the program for the Development of Border Cooperation in Kharkov region till 2011. For the effective implementation of this program and for the coordination of border cooperation actors' activities the Centre for Border Cooperation was established. The activity of the Center is aimed to raise the competitiveness of border regions, to facilitate the development of small- and medium-scale business in border

territories, and to enhance the role of the local autonomous organs in the implementation of joint economic projects within the frames of Slobozhanshchina Euroregion.

Today the Center's priority activities are as follows:

- *development of business infrastructure of Slobozhanshchina Euroregion;*
- *ecological enhancement of the Udy and the Lopan crossborder rivers flowing over the high-urbanized border territories;*
- *creation of the system of joint trade houses in the border districts of Kharkov and Belgorod regions;*
- *preparation of the system of crossborder ecologic routes "Natural and Historical Bequest of Slobozhanshchina" to stimulate the recreational potential of border territories;*
- *rising of informational awareness of the local autonomous bodies and Heads of border regions of Russia, the Republic of Belarus and Ukraine via the internet site of the Executive Committee www.crossborder.org.ua about the progress of cooperation and investment appeal of*

the Russian — Ukrainian border regions;

- *preparation of the program for crossborder cooperation for a district level.*

Throughout 2005 and 2006 Dergachi district of Kharkov region and Belgorod district of Belgorod region worked out and started to implement the model for sustainable spatial development on the basis of program — project principle. With this aim a number of seminars was held which were attended by experts from Russia, Ukraine and the EU who determined the urgent tasks for cooperation, set up an interdepartmental work group and established regular contacts between the representatives of the district administrations. In February 2006 the Council of Dergachi district adopted the Program for Crossborder Cooperation Development that is coordinated by the aforementioned interdepartmental work group.

The existing levels of cooperation in Belgorod — Kharkov section in 2007 will be supported by the State by means of the Program for Crossborder Cooperation

Development for 2007 — 2010, which is currently under the consideration of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. This program implies a wide scope of events to be held together with the representatives of the local autonomous bodies of neighboring countries and actors of cross-border cooperation over the whole perimeter of Ukrainian national boundary as well as particular projects submitted by regional state administrations to the Ministry of Economy in the established form. As a result of previous efforts in 2007 Slobozhshchina Euroregion will be exercising the vertically integrated mechanism of program support for crossborder cooperation.

The United Executive Committee of the Council of Heads of Border Regions of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, which will be located in Kharkov and Belgorod on a permanent basis, will enhance separate projects within the frames of Slobozhshchina and coordinate them with larger interregional, both ecological and educational projects. In particular, the project on the Lopan river enhancement will use the experience of Rostov region on the restoration of ecological systems of the Kundryuch'ya crossborder river and engage the resource of Border Belarus — Russia — Ukraine University Consortium. It is worth reminding that this ambitious educational project on rising competitiveness of classical education was initiated still in 2002 and launched in April 2003 after the Presidents of six conventional universities signed a joint Memorandum. It is aimed to enhance the exchange of knowledge in scientific-educational sphere, to facilitate students and professors' mobility on the basis of Bologna process. For the present moment Consortium's membership includes one Belarussian, four Russian and five Ukrainian Universities.

Inside the "ten" the best sustainable development is demonstrated by Belgorod State University which for the last four years has increased the number of

Doctors of Sciences threefold and the number of its students reached 27 000. It is the University what marked the intellectual vector of the whole region development and became a new business card of Belgorod region having replaced ore mining and processing enterprises.

The special accent for Kharkov and Belgorod regions as transit ones lies on the foreign economic activity with a unique poly-modal transport axis, which strengthened the regional centers' mutual gravitation as a result of intermediary functions.

Both the regions direct a half of their foreign trade turnover in the form of counter flows and disregard the stable tendency towards the increase of negative balance. For Belgorod region in 2005 it reached 1.1 bln USD and for Kharkov — 0.47 bln USD.

At the same time the six border districts of Kharkov receive 36% of imports intake and only 6% of the common exports. Thus, the transit potential is used by the neighbors while the immediate proximity of potential markets is completely ignored. This system error in the trade specialization of the whole crossborder region dates back to the early times of national independence. What consequences of this strategy do we face today? They are the dramatically low potential of border regions development, degrading economy complex and increasing depressiveness of the territories.

This is accompanied by the social gradient all over Belgorod — Kharkov section at the expense of positive dynamics of economic indices in Belgorod region.

To radically change the situation and go to the model of regional competitiveness we have to create a balanced system of interrelations by developing the common infrastructure. The first element of this infrastructure — Border Trade-and-Exhibition Complex "Slobozhshchina ExpoCentre" near the international automobile checkpoint "Goptovka — Nekhoteyevka". We brought this author's project to the special order of the Prime-Minister Viktor Yanukovich in October 2004 and then it dropped out of sight of



On photo: A. Kiryukhin

regional elite and central government for good reason. Meanwhile time flies. Belgorodchina is going stronger with dignity. Its regional budget exceeds the budget of Kharkov region three times and 2006 foreign trade turnover reached 3.5 bln USD. Between centuries in 2001 the Belgorods restored the level of 1990 and today they are developing with the XXI-century outlook.

In 2002 — 2006 the European Union prepared the single strategy of polycentric development for 29 countries (Norway and Switzerland included). Nowadays there is a growing interest in municipal cooperation between the neighboring governments and in the development of integrated strategies with territorial basis.

Whatever paradoxical it may seem to the orthodox followers of European integration the enhancement of Kharkovshchina's regional strength and its involvement into the common European integrational processes is turning to Belgorod where we have all the prerequisites for the creation of the up-to-date Kharkov — Belgorod crossborder agglomeration meeting the European demands.

Alexei Kiryukhin