

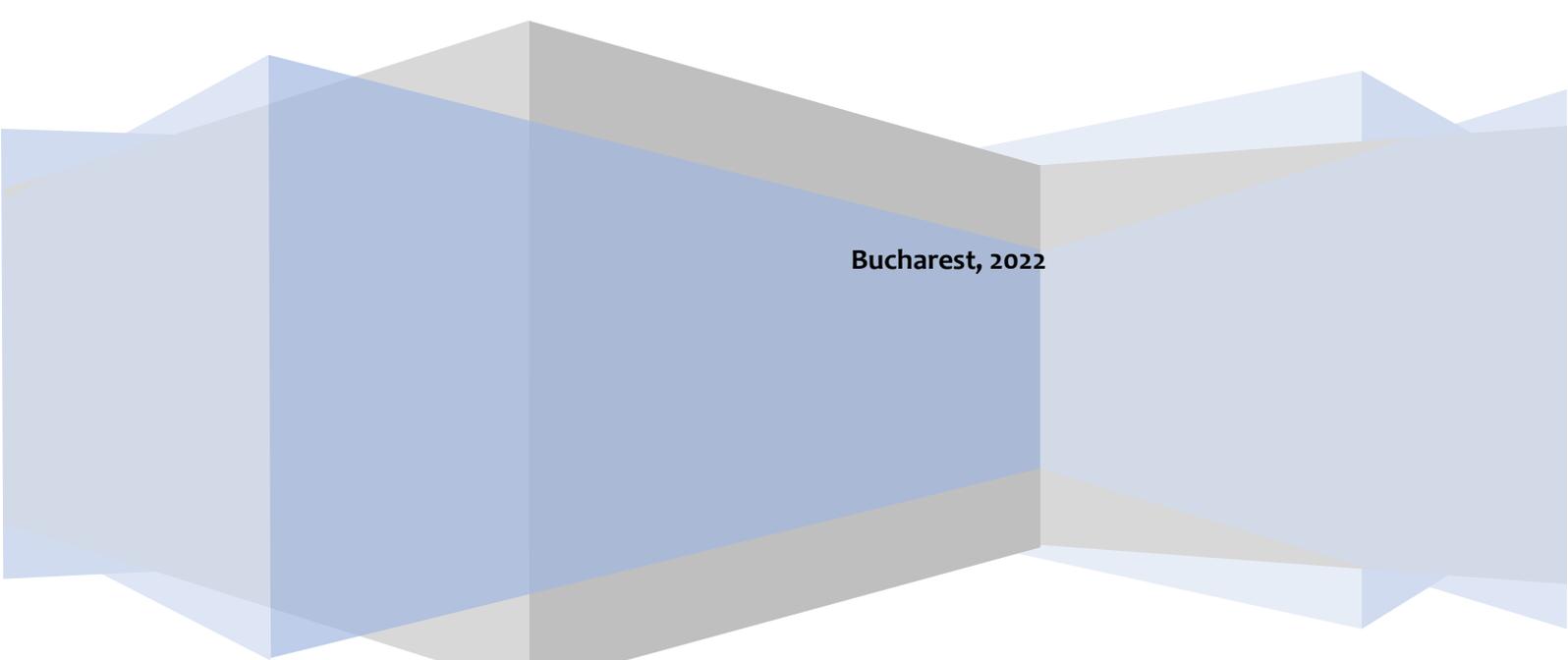
Experts for Security and Global Affairs

**ROMANIAN-UKRAINIAN INTERUNIVERSITY COOPERATION – ONE OF THE MOST
EFFECTIVE EUROPEAN NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIP INSTRUMENT**

Policy brief

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Abstract¹

This article is dedicated to the analysis of cross-border cooperation in the educational field between the universities in Romania and Ukraine, and analyzes the prospects of the Romanian-Ukrainian partnership in higher education, their preconditions, and the factors that should be paid attention to and elaborated for the continuation of the successful collaboration. The extension of the contacts in the consolidation of the interuniversity partnership plays a crucial role in the bilateral relations, inasmuch as this area is key for the humanitarian ties of states, involving young minds in expanding and strengthening interaction, especially in the process of obtaining higher education. The research methodology applied in this paper has its basis on the content analysis of the evaluation report of the Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine 2014 - 2020, of the joint educational projects.

Keywords: education, academic exchange, cross-border cooperation, development, neighbourhood partnership.

Introduction

Inter-university cooperation is a source of socio-economic growth and competitiveness in all societies, offering partners a number of benefits, for example, the creation of additional opportunities for the import and export of scientific and educational services, obtaining international recognition for the quality of educational activities, creating the conditions for the joint implementation of projects with partners in the field of their interests. In promoting joint regional effort in the area of higher education, the EU encourages partner countries to make full use of possibilities offered by assistance instruments such as joint operational programs. In contrast to economic globalization, the humanitarian internationalization of universities is not a new phenomenon in world practice. Nowadays, universities are no longer just attracting foreign students but are developing pragmatic development strategies, which include recruiting highly qualified personnel from around the world, collaboration in the scientific field, and building an innovative infrastructure. The governments of many countries began to actively participate in this process, adopting the corresponding state programs.

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The European Union has encouraged Member States and EaP countries to use the *principle of complementarity*² of funds and programs that serve to achieve the same intervention objectives. In the case of transfrontier collaboration between Romania and Ukraine can benefit from a gradual expansion, based on the "*more for more*"³ principle, of access to other EU-funded programs and initiatives. In this regard, the last five years have allowed us to witness an opening of the access of Romania and Ukraine to various programs and initiatives of the European Union. Systematic quality assurance practices provide information to governments, students, employers and society about tertiary education institutions and programmes. Such information increases accountability and transparency and helps policymakers, institutional leaders, students, and stakeholders make informed decisions.⁴ In general, this is attributed to the fact that funding decisions are being taken with an increasing amount of attention to increase productivity outcomes.

The culture of implementing programs and projects is a key dimension in strengthening cross-border collaboration. Efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and adequacy of interventions are criteria that indicate the level of culture of project implementation in a particular community or area of intervention.⁵ In fact, it is necessary to take into account that the cross-border programs are not only aimed at the economic development of neighbouring states. However, education, research and innovation fields are among the priorities of transborder programs. Therefore, regional programs are appropriate to meet common challenges, provided a regional or transnational dimension. Currently, the state is actively applying a programmatic approach to solving socio-economic problems, including requirements to evaluate programs funded from European funds. The program approach implies results-oriented management, and the main indicator of the successful implementation of a program or project is not the "development" of the allocated funds, but the achievement of the goals and objectives set. The evaluation allows for an assessment of program implementation, identification of problems, and the study of program implementation.

The Synergy of joint activities for research and innovation

The strategic objective A of the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) on education is also transposed within Joint Operational Programme RO-UA 2014-2020. The priority pillars

²Coherence between funds to optimize coordination mechanisms between those responsible to avoid duplication during planning and implementation.

³The "more for more" principle, on the basis of which the EU is developing stronger partnerships with those neighbors who are making greater progress towards democratic reform.

⁴The Centre for Cross Border Studies, "Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects," 2015, <https://www.crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/Toolkit-for-Evaluation-of-Cross-Border-Projects.pdf>.

⁵Iordan Gheorghe Barbulescu, Mircea Brie, and Nicolae Toderas, *Cooperarea transfrontaliera între România și Ucraina, respectiv între România și Republica Moldova oportunități și provocări în perioada 2014-2020.*, 2016, <http://hdl.handle.net/11159/127.p.72>

contribute significantly to the achievement of the strategic objective on education and research. The official language used in the Programme is English. Moreover that the specific objectives and issues addressed in each project were set from a local perspective by the stakeholders involved, reflecting local priorities. The program also reflects its relevance in the active participation of the target group. The participation of Romanian and Ukrainian institutions was considered successful in terms of the numbers of calls for proposals submitted, the number of partners involved.⁶

Table 1: Logframe for implementing strategic objective A

(ENI Strategic objective: A)		
• Support to education, research, technological development and innovation.		
<p>Specific objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop education and support research and innovation at the level of the Programme area by facilitating the cooperation at local, regional and central level 	<p>Priority 1.1 – Institutional partnership in the educational field for increasing access to education and quality of education</p>	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint development of educational strategies; - Developing specific joint programs of entrepreneurship education, programmes that stimulate creativity, innovation and active citizenship.
<p>Beneficiaries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National/regional/local public administration • Universities; • Research institutes/organizations/NGOs. 	<p>Priority 1.2 – Promotion and support for research and innovation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of partnerships/networking between universities for joint development of theoretical research - Promotion and support for research and innovation through modernization of the specific infrastructure, including related equipment procurement. - Joint research actions and studies in the field of environment

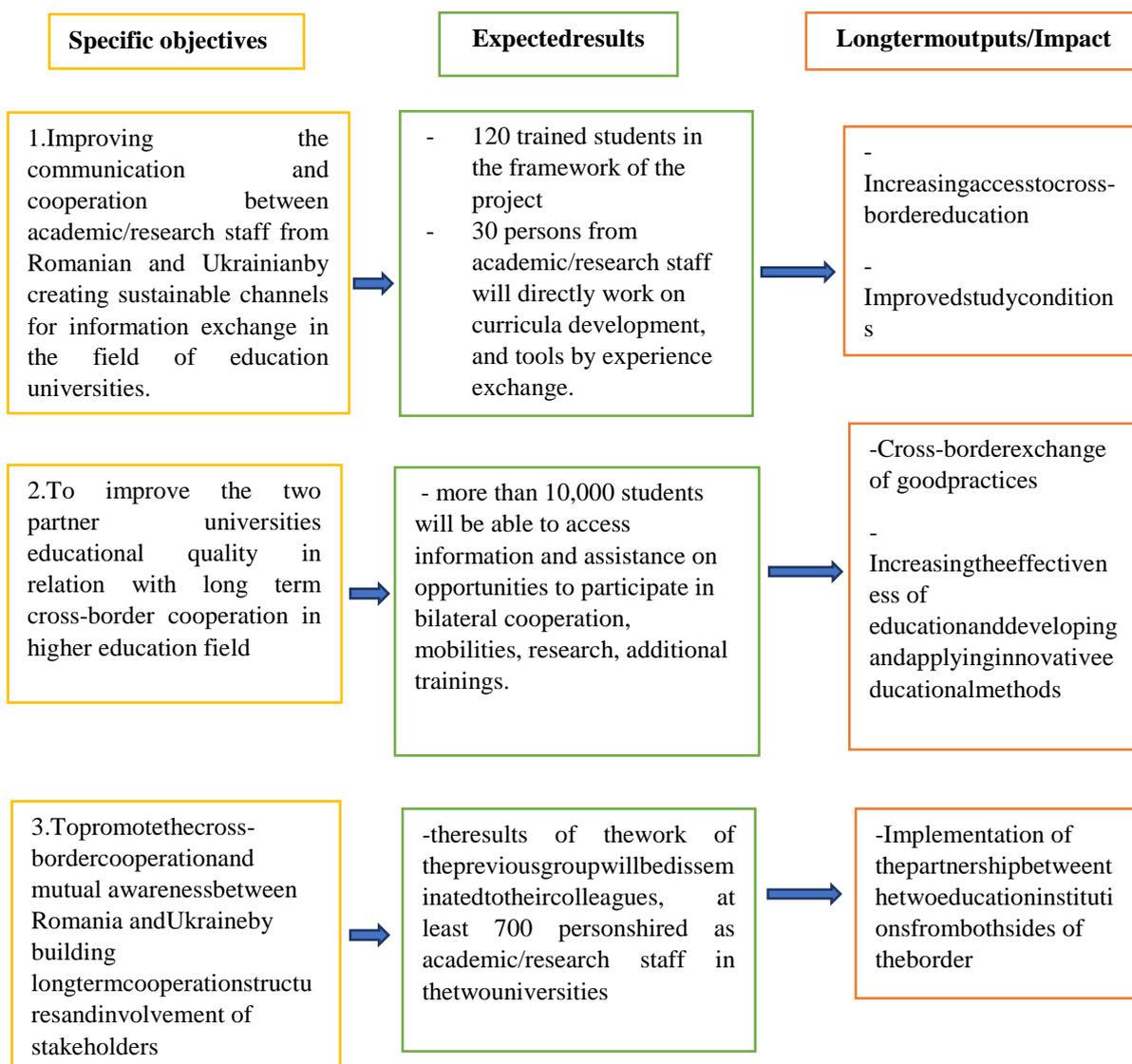
Source: Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020⁷

⁶Managing Authority and Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, “Joint Operational Programme Romania – Ukraine 2014-2020 Communication Strategy,” n.d.

⁷Managing Authority and Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, Romania, “Joint Operational Programme Romania – Ukraine 2014-2020,” n.d., <https://ro-ua.net/images/Programme/0-Romania-Ukraine-JOP-approved1.pdf>.

The activities specific to the objective of the Program were applied within the project **"Educational University Romanian-Ukrainian Cross-Border Cooperation - UNIV.E.R-U"**⁸ in which the main partners are Ștefancel Mare University from Suceava and Odessa Polytechnic National University. Therefore, the development and improvement of the Higher Education System in the programme area by transfrontier coordination in the direct benefit of Suceava and Odesa students, academic communities and Romanian/Ukrainian minorities will further increase the capacity of the communities from both sides of the border have high adaptability to common challenges and opportunities.⁹

Figure 1. Logical framework of the project UNIV.E.R-U



⁸ Project financed from the Joint Operational Program Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020.

⁹ Marcela Slusarciuc and Gabriela Prelicean, "Universities – Actors in Cross-Border Cooperation Building. Study Case: Romania-Ukraine Border," *Codrul Cosminului* 26, no. 2 (2020): 455–76, 53 Diaconu Coresi Str., Bucharest, Romania
 Web: www.esga.ro, E-mail: contact@esga.ro

Source: Own work based on the project indicators¹⁰

It is possible to notice a general and significant synergy and relevance with EU policies/strategies and other programmes at the project level. The proper implementation of the procedures and communication plans within the Program during the period 2014 - 2020 allowed the fulfillment of the objectives and results of the intervention. The main projects within the implemented priority axis (*Institutional partnership in the educational field for increasing quality of education*):

- **" RO-UA Trans-border Academic Development for Research and Innovation"**: The project is in full swing and aims to develop energy audit and energy management studies with the application of new sustainable energy technologies in the cross-border area. Efficient and innovative energy solutions are due to the collaboration with universities and professional institutions. The project aims to promote and support research and innovation in energy efficiency that will be harmonized on the EU and non-EU sides of the border. The project partners are the Technical University of Cluj Napoca and Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas.
- **"Partnership for Genomic Research in UA and RO"** - the project aims at establishing the foundation for active and sustainable collaboration in biomedical research. The implementation involved close coordination between 23 researchers directly involved in this project in two partner institutions: Uzhhorod National University and "Vasile Goldiș" University Arad, Baia Mare Branch. Joint efforts are being made to develop a publicly accessible online resource for genome variation in this previously unexplored region.
- "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati, through the project **"Internationalization Program in Higher Education in Romania and Ukraine"** aims to encourage young Ukrainians, ethnic Romanians, from Odesa Oblast to get involved in cross-border activities and to learn modern practices of using the Romanian language in unique communication contexts, without resorting to a support language, such as Russian or English, in the instructive-educational process.¹¹

¹⁰<http://univer-u.org/en/project>

¹¹<https://transfrontaliera.ugal.ro/index.php/ro/cercetare/proiecte/program-de-internationalizare-in-invataman-tul-superior-din-romania-si-ucraina>

Conclusions

Certainly, there are several key roles of development of interuniversity relations: building a single information space (database of vacancies, scholarships, grants, educational programs, exchange programs, synchronization of the development of a specific area of study) creation of platforms for communication and exchange of experience, promoting common interests. The effectiveness of cross-boundary partnership is determined not only by financial factors, but also by cultural and institutional differences between countries, the level of socio-economic development, and the intensity of cross-border flows. Therefore, for successful collaboration and institutionalising these relations, support from the state and society on both sides of the border is significant. Ensuring the effective implementation of the tasks of developing the collaboration in higher education creates a need for the creation and development of new instruments of extraterritorial activity in the framework of interaction between the educational community of universities in border regions. Last but not least partnership between Romania and Ukraine in the higher education field has a great future and huge potential, which can be realized by working out the weaknesses and strengthening the strong and promising ones.

Recommendations

In order to analyze the execution of already signed cooperation agreements, the parties need to take the following measures to improve their implementation:

- Common efforts should be focused on the analysis and assessment of the demand for potential joint educational programs and the development of the Regulation for the preparation and implementation of them in practice with specific universities from Romania and Ukraine.
- In considering the issues of cooperation in higher education, it is necessary to note one important factor that must be carefully worked out, namely: first of all, it is necessary to increase the number of outstanding students taking part in exchange programs.
- Implementing the conceptual approach will create conditions for the fullest use of the potential opportunities and resources of universities in the border regions to achieve maximum results in all areas and aspects of the partnership.

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