BULGARIAN REGIONS AT EU EXTERNAL BORDER:
THE CASE STUDY OF BULGARIA-TURKEY BORDER AREA

Petar STOYANOV
Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Faculty of Geology and Geography

Abstract: The study of border areas is a very important scientific and regional political problem. Aim of this paper is to deal the problems and perspectives of Bulgarian border areas development on example of border area to Turkey. It comprises three Bulgarian districts: Burgas, Yambol, and Haskovo. Total area of 16.6 thousands km$^2$ and population is 824 thousands inhabitants. Development of Bulgarian border area to Turkey is more specific due to its belonging (together with Bulgaria-Greece border area) for long time to the buffer space between Warsaw pact and NATO. Possibilities for entirely revitalization of Bulgarian border region to Turkey exist both through Bulgarian regional policy and planning and EU regional policy. Experience gained in previous period has been used for elaboration of IPA Bulgaria-Turkey CBC Programme 2007. Suggestions are made to further development of Bulgaria-Turkey cross border co-operation, incl. founding of Euroregions.

INTRODUCTION

Border areas development is suffering deficits because of their geographical position (peripheral, but in addition close to a political boundary), especially when the border has been for a long time a border of confrontation. Nowadays to development conditions comes the fact if the border is an outer or inner EU border.
Bulgaria has all over 2234 km border line, of which as an external EU border 132 km (51 %, border to Serbia, Macedonia, Turkey and Black Sea) and as an inner EU border 1 102 km (49 %, to Romania and Greece). Development problems of Bulgarian border regions are similar: slow economic growth, ageing of population, depopulation of rural areas. An exception is the Black Sea coast where transportation and tourism functions contribute to its flourishing especially the areas of two main port centers Varna and Burgas. In addition comes the short-term interest to immobility market in the area from citizens of UK, Ireland, Netherlands, and Israel. Total opposite is the situation on the western border with Serbia and Macedonia, now external EU border. The border area development is affected by the long-term confrontation and nowadays by constituting as external EU border after becoming Bulgaria EU member in 2007. According the latest EU regional development research in February 2010 the least developed region in EU is Bulgarian North-West. Repeatedly appeals for constructing a regional development programme for this region remained in vain. The EU association of Serbia and Macedonia gives hope for better future for this Bulgarian region.

Now we shall focus on the case of Bulgarian border region to Turkey as a good example for under-development problems and efforts of mutual cooperation through EU financial support.

1. BULGARIAN BORDER AREA TO TURKEY: GEOGRAPHICAL DIMENSIONS

Development of Bulgarian border area to Turkey is more specific in view of its belonging (together with Bulgaria-Greece border area) for long time to the buffer space between Warsaw pact and NATO. Delimitation of this border dates to Balkan wars 1912-1913 when Bulgaria looses territories north of Midia-Enos line in favor of Turkey. In general the new delimitation of Bulgaria-Turkey border line impacts negative upon Bulgarian border communes development as many of them have been economically oriented more to the central places of Odrin (Turk.: Edirne) and Lozengrad (Turk.: Kırklareli) nowadays in Turkey (fig. 1).

It follows mass migration of Bulgarian population from occupied territories to Bulgaria and loss of property. Today the casus of compensation for this property plays an important role in Bulgarian-Turkey relations in terms of Turkey EU accession. Bulgarian border area to Turkey comprises Bulgarian administrative districts Burgas, Yambol and Haskovo with total area of 16.6 Thousand km$^2$ and population of 824 Thousand inhabitants. It is a part of South-Eastern Planning region (NUTS 2). Border line between Bulgaria and Turkey amounts to 288 km. Until 1990 the so called “border zone” (about 15 km) has a special regime of access for Bulgarian citizens. Today on the border are functioning 3 check points: Malko Tarnovo-Dereköy, Svilengrad-Kapıkule and Lesovo-Hamzabeyli. The last one has been officially opened on 19.6.2005 from Bulgarian and Turkish prime-ministers Simeon Saxoncoburg-Gotha and Erdogan. In 2005 it has been launched a common plan for constructing of 15 more check points on Bulgaria-Turkey border, e.g. Belevren-Ahatlı, Tsarevo-Ineada and Strandžha-Koçaz.
Fig. 1. Central places in Bulgaria-Turkey border area
2. SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF BULGARIAN BORDER AREA TO TURKEY

The border communes of Bulgarian side of this border area is characterizing by extremely socioeconomic under-development accompanied with population ageing and settlements depopulation. Main reason is beside the peripheral situation, transition obstacles after 1989, but the political development during the last 10-15 years. As a result of Bulgarian membership in NATO a number of military garrisons on Bulgarian-Turkey border were abolished, for example Zvezdec, Elhovo etc. This led to employment loss for many local people and building devastation of former military equipment.

Bulgarian border area to Turkey is one of most thinly populated areas of Bulgaria. By nationally population density of 69 persons per km$^2$ (2007), in Burgas district it is 54, in Haskovo district 48, in Yambol district respectively 43, but in border communes it is lower (from east to west): Tsarevo 17, Malko Tarnovo 5, Sredets 17, Elhovo 25, Topolovgrad 18, Svilengrad 36 (Source: Bulgarian National Statistical Institute - Regions, districts and municipalities in Bulgaria, 2009). As a result of population ageing and young people out-migration to the large cities it is going a process of depopulation of rural areas. In a number of villages especially on the border line there are living 4-5 old men. As a whole index of ageing in this border area is higher than nationally (98.3). As a result the human potential is decreasing in opposite of Turkish side of common border area where birth-rate is higher, population is relatively young and despite the out-migration to city, there exists a demographic stability.

In the situation on labour market things look black: in 2007 on national level unemployment is 6.9%, but in the border area only in Burgas is lower (4.1), while in Yambol district is 7.2%, in Haskovo district 9.2%. In border communes the situation is more difficult (National Employment Agency www.az.government.bg).

The industry of region except for the harbor area of Burgas has a mono-structural character and is concentrated in the big cities, whereas in border communes agriculture and forestry (Strandzha Mountain) prevail. Just on Black Sea coast is marine tourism developed but beginnings of rural tourism appear in Strandzha area (natural and cultural artifacts of Strandzha Natural Park). The biggest industrial center in the region is Burgas (shipbuilding, chemical industry, tourism) followed by Yambol and Haskovo. But 98% of enterprises are SMEs, distinguished for its insufficient flexibility.

Agriculture is dominating in border communes with traditional crops as cereals, fruits and vegetables, grapes. Stock breeding is prevailing pasture grounded in the mountain. As a whole agriculture is faced with a number of restrictions: dispersed ownership, reduced irrigated areas, obsolete facilities, shortage of investments and new technologies, deficiencies in the integration with the food industry, etc. In case of rejuvenation of labour force there is possibility for market agriculture development in terms of delivering agrarian products to Black Sea resorts and big cities.

Transportation connections within the border region are well developed along the international road Sofia-Odrin/Edirne-Istanbul but a highway should be constructed. Same situation exists in railway connections (the railway Yambol-Elhovo is not expected to be prolonged to Edirne in Turkey because of personal traffic shortage; the same reason is for
the construction failure of Burgas-Malko Tărnovo- Kırklareli/Turkey railway. In border communes the transport accessibility is limited, e.g. if one wants to travel from the country inside to Malko Tărnovo on the border one should first go to district center Burgas and then to the border town. In addition the road quality of Burgas-Malko Tărnovo is bad despite modernization project financed by PHARE CBC Programme (project is not finished yet). There is still lack of transport connection of Burgas-Tsarevo road with border check point to Ineada-Istanbul in Turkey. The only one international airport in the region on Bulgarian side is in Burgas.

In Bulgarian border region there are 367 educational institutions, of which 306 are general schools; 59 are special and vocational schools and 2 universities (in Burgas). There is a common trend of closing general schools in rural areas. Health infrastructure is vastly insufficient. More better is the situation in water supply except for the dry land area of Sakar Mountain. But the majority of villages have no sewerage systems. Also only 52.6% of region population is served by wastewater treatment plants (WWTP). Under ISPA Programme WWTP for municipalities of Haskovo and Dimitrovgrad are still under construction.

Possibilities for entirely revitalization of Bulgarian border region to Turkey exists both through Bulgarian regional policy and planning and EU regional policy.

3. INSTRUMENTS OF BULGARIAN REGIONAL POLICY AND PLANNING

Among the instruments of Bulgarian regional policy and planning should be mentioned:


On regional level: South-East Planning Region Development Plan; District Development strategies of Burgas, Yambol, Haskovo; Strandzha-Sakhar rural development Programme 2007-2013.

On local level: Municipal Development Plans, Municipal Master Plans

The border communes Tsarevo, Malko Tărnovo, Sredets, Elhovo, Svilengrad and Topolovgrad are proclaimed as “CBC regions” in Operating program “Regional development” (according to the Law of Regional Development 2008 “CBC regions” are one type of so called “regions of purposive support”, which are instrument of Bulgarian regional policy).

The regional program “Strandzha-Sakhar”, called after two border mountains with Turkey, starts in 1982 under slogan “Republic of Youth” and is actually the first regional program in Bulgaria during socialism. The aim is to stop depopulation process in the region, which according the scientific research is most affected. But the Program failed. In 2005 Ministry of agriculture and forestry elaborated a new development program for this region - “Strandzha-Sakhar rural development Programme”, which is a part of National Rural Development Plan 2007-2013 with a budget of 733 MEUR. From South-Eastern Planning Region are involved districts and municipalities as follow: Burgas district (municipalities
Malko Tarnovo, Primorsko, Tsarevo, Sredets, Sozopol; Yambol district (municipalities Bolyarovo, Elhovo, Straldzha, Tundzha); Haskovo (Lyubimets, Svilengrad, Topolovgrad). Main directions of Program are: agriculture development; infrastructure improvement in rural areas. As a whole this Program should introduce the rules of LEADER (Source: Construction. City., No 23, 2005).

4. INSTRUMENTS OF EU REGIONAL POLICY IN BULGARIA-TURKEY BORDER AREA: IPA CBCP 2007

After period of functioning of several EU Programmes in this area as PHARE, ISPA, SAPARD, the Turkey pre-accession instrument and CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation), they were replaced in 2004 by a single instrument and namely IPA (Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance) as a reform of the cooperation practice with accession countries and countries outside the EU external borders. IPA addresses both the current candidate countries: Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the potential candidate countries: Albania, Serbia (including Kosovo), Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There is already elaborated an IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Turkey in 2007. This program is financed under the new Objective 3. European territorial cooperation (former INTERREG) of EU Regional policy by ERDF. In July 2006 for the purposes of programming of CBC Programme BG-TR a Joint Bulgarian-Turkish Task Force (JTF) has been established represented by relevant Bulgarian and Turkish authorities. During programming process 2006-2007 common meetings in capital cities (Sofia, Ankara), respectively in regional centers were carried out. In June 2007 followed the final approval of the programme by JTF.

The CBC area is determined in accordance with the IPA rules set out in Regulation 1085/2006 where only NUTS 3 regions (or respective equivalents) are eligible for cross border co-operation programmes. In Bulgaria the corresponding NUTS 3 administrative-territorial units are the districts established by the Law on the Administrative Territorial System in Republic of Bulgaria (in this case districts of Burgas, Yambol and Haskovo). In Turkey the corresponding equivalent of NUTS 3 administrative-territorial units are the provinces (bölge) established by Decision of Council of Ministers No 2002/4720 (in this case the provinces of Edirne and Kırklareli).

Table 1 Common data about eligible NUTS 3 units in Bulgaria-Turkey CBC area

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<tr>
<td>District</td>
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<td>Burgas</td>
<td>Kırklareli</td>
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<td>Yambol</td>
<td>Edirne</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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The CBC area covers a territory of 30 Thousand km$^2$ with total population of 1,53 M inhabitants (2007). The common Bulgarian – Turkish border stretches along 288 km with 3 currently operating border crossing points. The eligible area in Bulgaria represents 14.99% of total territory of the country respectively the eligible area in Turkey represents only 1.58% of total country territory. In Bulgaria the CBC area includes parts of Thracian plain, southern outskirts of Balkan Mountains, part of Strandzha Mountain and Sakar Mountain and in Turkey – Eastern Thracia and southern larger and higher part of Strandzha Mountain (Turk.: Yıldız).

4.1 Previous experience in CBC

In 2003 cross border activities between Bulgaria and Turkey were financially supported by grants of EU in fields as follow:

- External Border Initiative Programme 2003 financed “people to people” activities between Bulgaria and Turkey;
- Phare Cross Border Co-operation Programmes between Bulgaria and Turkey in 2004 and 2005.

While in 2003 the CBC activities were directed to encourage establishing and further development of stable cooperation networks between local and regional partners in border area, in the next 2004 started the following infrastructure projects: “Construction of road Malko Tărnovo – Border Crossing checkpoint with Turkey” and “Construction of the road Kırklareli-Dereköy Border Crossing checkpoint in Turkey” in order to facilitate the heavy traffic flow between Bulgaria and Turkey through the existing Border Crossing Check Point at Malko Tărnovo-Dereköy. On the Turkish side has been implemented the reconstruction of so called “Ekmeçizade Karavanserai” in Edirne in order to intensify business and cultural links between two border sides. In 2005 started 2 important projects of mutual interest: “Capacity Improvement for Flood Forecasting in the BGNTR CBC Region” and “Promotion of sustainable development in the Strandzha/Yıldız Mountain area”.

The lessons learned in this period have been taken into consideration during the elaboration of IPA Bulgaria-Turkey CBCP 2007. The priorities of common interest set in the CBCP do not contradict one another and are complementary to the development priorities of the two countries (table 2).

**Table 2 Correspondence of IPA CBCP Bulgaria-Turkey 2007 with other EU funded and National Programs**

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<th>BULGARIA</th>
<th>TURKEY</th>
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<td>+ Operational Programs</td>
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4.2 Suggestions to further development of Bulgaria-Turkey CBC

Some suggestions to further development of Bulgaria-Turkey CBC could be made:

- **Prolongation of Panorama road** Burgas-Ahtopol to Turkish border by Rezovo, respectively to Ineada and Istanbul, incl. construction a new border check point;

- **Creation a Duty Free Zone** in the common border area and introduction of relieving visa regime for Turkish businessmen (wishes declared from Turkish businessmen in a study made by Burgas trade and industry chamber on business connections intensification with Turkey);

- **Coordination of district and province development plans, respectively municipality Master plans on both sides of border**; Stress on common CBC problems as well on depopulation problems in rural border areas especially as a result of population ageing and garrisons abolition;

- **Building Euroregions in common border area**. In tri-border area Bulgaria-Greece-Turkey since 2001 already exists Euroregion “Evros-Maritsa-Merik”, in which about 80 organisations are members from three countries ([www.evroregion.gr](http://www.evroregion.gr), 2.03.2010). Its aim is to contribute resolving of common problems in border area. Experience gained in the Euroregion could be successfully used to new euroregions on Bulgarian-Turkish border area.

After negotiations between Bulgarian municipality Elhovo and Turkish municipality Lalapaşa in 1996 and good relations established, in 2003 an idea for building euroregion came in to being. An Euroregion is not yet registered, but it has been established Association for local development “Strandzha” of Bulgarian and Turkish border municipalities. In my opinion possible new constructions are e.g. Euroregion Burgas-Kirklareli, Euroregion Yambol-Edirne.
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