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THE ROLE OF CIVIC DIPLOMACY
IN BUILDING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY FOR TERRITORIAL
DEVELOPMENT AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

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The association of European Border Regions (AGEG/AEBR/ARFE) was established with the express purpose of promoting transregional relations and practical collaborative relationships between border regions across and beyond the European Union, in recognition of the role which border regions play in creating economic stability across member states and the EU as a whole, and in recognition of the special contribution which border region cultures and mindsets can bring to the European project [2].

In October 2019, as part of the annual events of the Association of European Border Regions in Dresden, Elbe/Labe Euroregion, Caitriona Mullan presented a Strategic Overview and Outline Proposal of Civic Diplomacy for Territorial and Cross-Border Co-operation at the meeting of the AEBR Task Force on External Borders.[1].

The presentation drew on the following areas of AEBR's mainstream activity as a European NGO set up in the framework of the Council of Europe, and areas of the work of the AEBR Information Centre:

the activity of AEBR Information Centre,

activity of the AEBR Executive Committee relating to Ukraine,

the specific work of the AEBR Task Force on External Borders in on developing the youth Euroregional movement, through creation of a cooperation vector focused on the development of knowledge-based youth diplomacy;

the initiation of the creation of an interregional model for the development of international relations between border regions, namely: Slobozhanschyna Region-Ukraine, South Karelia Region-Finland, Bayern Region – Germany, Ober-Österreich Region – Austria, Vojvodina Region – Serbia.

The Strategic Overview and Outline Proposal defines Civic Diplomacy as a tool for maintaining cohesion at the internal and external borders of the EU, as well as for promoting best practices in the development and growth of border regions with the facilitative leadership of organisations such as the Association of European Border Regions. The proposal influenced a planning process for organizing the Assembly of Ukrainian Border Regions and Euroregions, which was initially planned to be held in 2020 in the Odesa region in the city of Izmail together with the NGO «Bessarabia Development Center».

In order to determine priority areas for the development of civil diplomacy in 2020, on the initiative of AEBR Information Center and with the support of AEBR Executive Committee, an online School of Civic Diplomacy [3] was organized, co-moderated by Caitriona Mullan and Eduard Syromolot. The participants were representatives of the communities of Eastern Ukraine, municipal educational, scientific and cultural institutions, public organizations of the regions of Ukraine, who presented their project initiatives, work experience with the aim of disseminating it within the framework of the Assembly of Ukrainian Border Regions and Euroregions. The School of Civic Diplomacy took the format of online seminars in which key European Cohesion Policy themes were explored in terms of their

translational significance for holistic and balanced regional development ecosystems in Ukraine, and their significance for approaches to capacity building for governance reform, decentralization and the development of the role of local and regional governance systems that are capable and equipped to deliver outcomes for citizens akin to those ambitions set out in EU Cohesion Policy (a greener, more digitalized Europe that is closer to citizens, etc).

The final stage of the School of Civic Diplomacy was held in the form of a conference «Civil Diplomacy «Ukraine – EU» – a powerful tool for territorial and cross-border development of territorial communities of Eastern Ukraine» on September 23, 2020. This was attended by the Secretary General of the AEBR Martin Guillermo Ramirez, representatives of the Ministry of Regional Development of Ukraine, within the framework of which the leaders of the communities of Eastern Ukraine, namely Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv and Sumy regions, presented their own project initiatives for local and regional development [4].

Despite significant challenges, (namely Covid 19, the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict [5], and the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia) which directly affected the further development of initiatives for the development of Civic Diplomacy, it is our view that the issue and ambition of promoting Civic Diplomacy as a tool for development and co-operation in regions and across borders has not lost its relevance. Civic Diplomacy is arguably now an even more essential tool for building capacity for development co-operation in Ukraine's regions and along its borders with the EU. Revisiting this model of action could include the holding of an Assembly of Ukrainian Border Regions and Euroregions, further development of a School of Civic Diplomacy open to all regions of Ukraine, and the continued development of interregional relations between border regions.

Additional drivers for a new and updated iteration of the Strategic Overview and Outline Proposal on Civic Diplomacy for Territorial and Cross-Border Co-operation include, since 2020, the decision to continue scientific cooperation within the framework of the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of AEBR Information Centre[6], and a publication on the importance of the Council of

Europe's Good Governance toolkit for the development of territorial and cross-border cooperation [7]. There is a clear opportunity at this point in time to consider the School for Civic Diplomacy as a tool for developing good democratic and development governance for the development of Ukrainian border regions, taking into account the initiative of AEBR Information Centre to create a living laboratory for the development of territories, communities and regions- in line with the communication by the European Commission published in July 2021 [8].

Our vision of Civic Diplomacy in this context is as a powerful tool for territorial cohesion, knowledge sharing, creating innovative ways of cooperation in many economic sectors and sharing best practices in developing sustainable services and strategic planning. border regions.

Civic Diplomacy can help achieve mutually beneficial goals for regions, member states and political entities such as the EU and facilitate convergence processes within the framework of Ukraine's European integration course towards EU membership. As such it is a rich tool for the development of the necessary governance required to support Ukraine's EU integration journey, and a rich tool for the development of effective decentralized territorial governance based on the Council of Europe principles of good democratic governance in general.

Civic Diplomacy also creates opportunities for personal contact and deeper learning between regions and stakeholders in these regions in a way that can lead to better citizens.

Thus, the conducted analysis of the role of Civic Diplomacy within the framework of the history of the development of territorial and cross-border cooperation and the context of the multifaceted work of the AEBR in Ukraine allowed us to determine its relevance and timeliness for supporting the development of border regions and civic society.

Prospects for further research include the study of Civic Diplomacy as a tool for Good Governance of territorial and cross-border cooperation in order to support border regions and civic society within the framework of scientific cooperation initiated by AEBR Information Centre, AEBR Executive Committee and the

implementation of scientific and applied research in the field of development of community territories and regional efficiency in the development of European territorial cohesion and territorial cooperation as an important EU policy and a vector of political cooperation with Ukraine as a candidate for EU membership [9].

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The conference proceedings are published in the author's editions.