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**Higher School as the Activating Factor of Inter-Cultural Collaboration:
European Context**

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Abstract: The article deals with the international cooperation within the framework of the Euroregion “Lower Danube” and the place of Budjak in this network. The author believes that its potential is insufficiently appreciated. A special place belongs to Izmail State University for Humanities as the educational and cultural centre of the region. The author presents its main educational and international activities, as well as the perspectives of the development of the project “DAC People” on the base of Izmail University, that gives the real opportunity to deep the practical cooperation in the socio-cultural framework of the Euroregion “Lower Danube”.

Keywords: Euroregion “Lower Danube”; international activities; socio-cultural framework

At the present time the European Union pays more attention to cross-border cooperation between the border regions of the EU and neighboring states. The creation of Euro-regions is one of the key mechanisms for the implementation of European Union regional policy on the local places.

Euroregion “Lower Danube” is an international European organization, which was founded August 14, 1998 in the city of Galați by the heads of bordering regions of Romania (Galati, Tulcea, Braila cities), Ukraine (Odessa region), and the Republic of Moldova (Vulcanesti, Cahul, Cantemir cities). Creation of the Euroregion “Lower Danube” was intended to solve the following problems: to achieve a synergy in the economic development; to determine environmental challenges; to create the conditions for improving social protection, as well as the level and quality of life; to integrate the transport infrastructure of the border regions; to form a common cultural space in the Danube region.

In the framework of the Euroregion “Lower Danube” some huge projects were realized: “The Danube Lakes in Ukraine. Sustainable restoration and conservation of natural ecosystems” (2000-2003); “Business infrastructure of Odessa region as a part of Euro-region “Lower Danube” (2002-2004); “Preventing emergencies and flood protection in the Euroregion “Lower Danube” (2006-2007); “Cross-border cooperation improvement in the Euro-region “Lower Danube” (2007-2009); “Ukrainian-Moldavian border cooperation program” started in the end of 2015. At the opening of the exhibition “Lower Danube” in the Odessa Museum of Regional History in May 2014 Dumitru Keriki, economic adviser of the Consulate General of Romania in Odessa noticed that the cooperation in the region “Lower Danube” could be considered as one of the most successful. He believes that it is natural as our countries are connected by common traditions, what is particularly evident in the bordering areas (*Kinka*).

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Euroregion “Lower Danube” covers 53.55 sq. km. with a population of over 3.8 million. The half of a million (575 000) lives in the Southern part of Odessa region. Its historical names are: Budjak (from Turkish) or Southern Bessarabia (from Romanian). Geographically it is the area between Dniester and Danube Lowland. During its history Budjak was constantly in the focus of the political interests of great empires due to the strategic location in the Danube Delta that opened the way to Europe. The cities of Kiliya and Izmail were the major port-fortresses on the Danube till the end of the XVIII cent. According to the Paris Peace Treatment in 1856 both fortresses were destroyed. Now it is the most agrarian territory, nonindustrialized provincial part of Ukraine.

In general, the economic cooperation in the Euroregion “Lower Danube” is caused by the different specializations of administrative units of the three countries. The main industrial potential of Odessa region is located in its northern part, far away from the Danube. So, in Southern Bessarabia the agriculture, manufacturing and food industries dominate. Galați is an important industrial centre of Romania, the considerable attention of the rest territory of “Lower Danube” is given to agriculture and fisheries. Moldavian districts, which are included in the “Lower Danube” region, are specialized in agriculture, in particular, wine production. These conditions form the corresponding problems for the economic prospects of cooperation between the administrative-territorial units of the three countries in a single Euroregion.

Among the factors that hinder the full economic cross-border cooperation, the analysts of the National Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Ukraine notice the following: traditional peripherality of the border areas, aggravated by the decline of the processing and food industries in Ukraine; effects of the economic crisis of 2008-2009 influenced the service sector extension that began to dominate in the economy (trade, financial mediation, transit of goods); political crisis in 2014 (*National Institute for Strategic Studies*). In this regard, the usage of favourable geographical position is impossible without a significant financial investment in the infrastructure of the region.

Anastasiya Mironova, Deputy Director of the Department of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Odessa regional administration in her speech gave particular emphasis to the fact, that the development of cooperation in the Euroregion is not always in the field of economics, it is politics that reaches the level of intercultural cooperation (*Kinka*). In the same time, Budjak has great potential to be developed precisely in the cultural sphere. We are convinced that the main potential of Budjak is the people of the region. In the XIX century the territory was provided for settlement and cultivation of land for colonists of different countries: Bulgarian (centred in the city of Bolgrad), German (Artsyz, Tarutino, etc.), Swiss (Shabo) and others. Another category of residents is ethnic Ukrainian, Russian and Romanian population, in particular of the Gagauz, Armenian, Polish, Jewish, Greek, Albanian origin and so on. So, multiculturalism is leading feature of the social development of the region, which laid the foundations of its new collective identity. Multiculturalism has affected Budjak artistic traditions, which are enriched by the achievements of different cultures.

Izmail State University for Humanities is the only state educational institution in Budjak with the wide network of international contacts and stable reputation among internal and foreign scientific and educational establishment, the leading centre of education, scientific and cultural life of Ukrainian Danube region (ISUH site). It has the 75-year-old history and huge scientific potential. Peripheral location of the region dictates the University to focus on implementing of the educational needs of the region, as well as to consider the needs of its national minorities. Students are trained at four faculties (Pedagogical; Foreign Languages; Ukrainian Philology and Social Sciences; Administration, Management and Computer Science). Main directions of training are “Pedagogical Education (Social worker, Fine Arts, Music, Physical Culture)”, “Philology”, “Economics and Management”,

“Tourism”. The frontier status of Izmail University gives opportunities for the productive cooperation with educational institutions of the Danube basin countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Moldova, and Romania).

Izmail State University for Humanities automatically became a member of the University Association of the Euroregion “The Lower Danube”. Organization of ethnic music festivals, seminars, conferences, and forums has become a good tradition in the development of the cultural potential of the Euroregion. After entering the Danube academic new prospects have been obtained by our university consortium. DAC allows its participants to develop simultaneously and separately in the direction of the same European standards, to establish joint economic structures, to develop cross-border trade, and to implement various projects in the field of education and culture.

Most of the projects, implemented on the territory of the Odessa region in the framework of the Euroregion “Lower Danube” program are of restricted usage which is related to the environment. The realization of the project “DAC People” at the Izmail University gives real opportunities to expand the interaction of regional creative communities and the local academic environment. It also deepens the practical cooperation in socio-cultural framework of the Euroregion “Lower Danube”.

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