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Local Dimensions of a Wider European Neighbourhood: Developing Political Community through Practices and Discourses of Cross-Border Co-operation

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4.2.1 New Borders, New Visions of Neighbourhood

Cross-Sectional Analysis Working Paper 2

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I. Introduction

This report seeks to highlight the main themes emerging from the work of the expert teams drawn from a hugely differentiated and complex European borderland ranging from Finland/Russia to Greece/Turkey (with a reference study based on the Spanish/Morocco border). The emergent themes have been shaped by a set of common research questions addressed by the teams in the very different contexts studied. This overview draws on the main research findings of the first two years of the project. Given the qualitative, flexible and context-sensitive methodology employed, no simple summary of overall findings is possible – rather core themes are identified around which the findings tend to coalesce.

Cross-border co-operation among civil society organisations (CSOs) in the European Neighbourhood, typically if not always, includes participating states and sub-state agencies. The enlargement of the EU, its promotion of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and the growing complexity of international and transnational networks, provide a developing structure of opportunity for civil society organisations in forging links across the external borders of the EU. The nature and extent of these links is heavily conditioned by the differentiated policies pursued by the EU in its eastern and south-eastern borderlands, by the great variety of inter-state, inter-regional and transnational relationships which exist.

Co-operation among civil society organisations in the borderlands of the EU is multi-level and operates on a variety of scales. Actual instances of co-operation may bring together diverse influences operating at different scales. The key themes emerging from the research of the expert teams are organised under three headings which distinguish analytically between the levels at which CSO cooperation operates.

- 1. The transnational level**
- 2. The regional/local level**
- 3. The international (i.e. inter-state or inter-governmental level)**

These levels do have broad geographical referents but they are not to be simply confused with geographical scales *per se*. Rather they are more indicative of the different mix of actors and rationales active at different levels. As mentioned above any given instance of cross-border cooperation among CSOs may involve actors and rationales operating at one, two, or all three levels.

Results from our research teams to date in the complex and differentiated borderland that stretches from Finland-Russia to Greece/ Turkey, suggest considerable variation in terms of the levels at which civil society activity is focused. Certainly it is the case that cross-border CSO cooperation is influenced in every case by the nature of the relationships between the national states involved. Inter-state relations can reflect geo-political

tensions and disputes over borders, minorities, or energy for example, all of which may inhibit civil society cooperation across borders. There is also considerable variation in state-civil society relationships which in turn impinges on the prospects for cross-border co-operation. Nevertheless, states are important mediators and implementers of EU programmes and CSOs are rarely able to operate without some support, or permission, from state institutions. State agencies and CSOs are frequently involved in networks of co-operation although there is considerable variation in the roles played by both and in the levels at which activity is focused. Table 1 indicates the importance of transnational networks in nearly all the study areas, while there is variation among the research areas in terms of the importance of the inter-state and regional/local level as promoters of civil society cooperation.

Table 1: Levels and Focus of CSO activity

Expert Partner/Team	Transnational level	Regional/local	Inter-State Level Strength of Civil Society in each state	Key CSO Issues
Finland/Russia	X	X	Strong/weak	Health Social deprivation Women's issues
Poland/Russia	X		Medium/weak	Environment
Polish/Ukraine	X	X	Medium/weak (strong)	Culture/youth
Estonia/Russia	X	X	Medium/weak	Environment Cultural-national level Economic (business advisory)
Hungary/Ukraine		X	Medium/weak	Minority issues Economic
Romania/Moldova	X		Weak/weak	Social deprivation Women's issues
Greece/Turkey	X		Weak/ Medium to weak	Ecology/Tourism Gender (Turkey)
Spain/Morocco			Medium/Weak	Migration

II. Transnational Civil Society

At the transnational level, organisations operate with rules and rationales which transcend those specific to bounded territorial states; however states may be involved in a subsidiary role working, as one actor among many, alongside, or in conjunction with transnational civil society organisations. For example, organisations developed to advance human rights, prisoners; welfare, the alleviation of poverty, education and health may have CSO members in a variety of states, and may work with (and sometimes in opposition) to national governments. At this level, the influence of the US and various transnational CSOs is strong although the EU is the central transnational actor at this level. Its transnational dimension is promulgated in particular by the European Commission and the Parliament¹. At the transnational level, these institutions seek to promulgate rules and agendas which transcend states, or groups of states. Many of the rationales, agendas and funding sources driving civil society co-operation emanate from the transnational level.

The transnational environment strongly influences, and at times determines, the nature and development agendas of civil society. More crucially, in countries with weak civil societies, access to transnational networks can determine to a great extent the range and effectiveness of CSO activities. Here, we are interested in how the interactions with other transnational actors shape the dynamics of CSOs in our case studies. In other words, the transnational environment is an important conditioning factor which allows us to better understand how CSOs operate in case studies areas.

The influence of the external, transnational environment, particularly the role of the EU in shaping the agenda of civil society sector is not entirely positive however – it can at times hinder the pursuit of CSOs goals. In this section, we will look at the dynamics and nature of newly emerging transnational networks among CSOs across the neighbourhood in order to address the set of research questions related to the role of the EU as facilitator in the various areas of cross-border activity. Political decision-makers and various social science disciplines have acknowledged the growing importance of transnational civil society and networks; however, to date empirical research on the subject has been relatively limited in the EU Neighbourhood. The ‘quality’ of transnational or international cooperation among CSOs is shaped by multiple factors originating in domestic and external environments.

In order to assess the impact of the EU on CSO cooperation, it is useful to distinguish the different relationships between states in the study area and the EU:

Established member states:	Finland, Greece and Spain
New member states:	Estonia, Poland, Hungary and Romania
Candidate Status:	Turkey

¹ Of course, the EU has also a strong inter-state or inter-governmental dimension epitomised by the key role of the Council of Ministers and the prevalence of bi-lateral arrangements between member states and non-EU states in the Neighbourhood and elsewhere.

ENP countries: Ukraine, Moldova, Morocco
Permanent non-member: Russia

Geographical location and the precise relationship with the EU are certainly important factors that influence the development of civil society sector. Generally, it is believed that a process of adaptation of European norms or what is called in the EU related literature 'Europeanization' has positive effects on the development of civil society. As declared by one representative of a Romanian CSO *'the main advantage of EU integration was that the past seven years have brought about more than what the past thirty had been able to. The fact that someone has monitored closely the extent to which the requirements have been met was actually a way of speeding up reform.'*²

In general, EU enlargement has brought about acceleration in civil society activity and new cooperation practices. The accession of new member states to the EU has significantly stimulated their respective civil societies. Greece, is something of an exception in this respect, however; its civil society remains relatively weak, despite being a member of the EU since 1981. In the post-communist countries, there has been a shift from the oppositional role of civil society in the early 1990s to more cooperative and complementary relationships between civil society and the state. Many CSOs consider enlargement as a favourable process that brings not only financial opportunities but also expertise, knowledge and exchange of 'good practice'. At the same time, some CSO representatives noticed that the new situation in Ukraine and its deeper integration with the EU increases the polarisation of society while simultaneously creating new opportunities.

The EU obviously exercises its 'transformative' or 'soft' power in an asymmetric framework but has had difficulties in pursuing a 'common values' dialogue with its more reluctant neighbours. The big carrot of EU membership remains the most influential tool to promote the EU's proclaimed values of democracy, rule of law and civil society, however, the effectiveness of this tool is limited in countries with no desire, or little immediate prospect of joining the EU.

To avoid drawing new lines of division between the EU and non-EU countries, the EU has designed European Neighbourhood Policy- a new policy framework for its immediate European neighbours but also for countries outside of the European continent altogether. Russia's self-exclusion from the ENP and its 'big power' strategic influence underlines the difficulty of developing a uniform borders policy. In practice, the EU's eastern bordering policies as manifested by Enlargement, the ENP and the extension of Schengen borders are frequently incoherent and contradictory. They comprise a mishmash of frequently incongruent goals, simultaneously seeking closer cooperation with non-EU states while emphasising greater security for the Union.

² Romania-Republic of Moldova, The Second Summary Report (2008) p.15

In other words, one of the consequences of 'Europeanization' is that it reconfirms borders between those who are accepted as *quasi* full members of the EU³ and those who are excluded (i.e. Ukraine and Moldova) or who wish to stay outside the EU (Russia). Recognising the negative effects of hard borders, the EU seeks through different assistance programs (i.e. ENPI) to diminish existing socio-economic differences and to promote cross-border cooperation across the neighbourhood. All non-EU countries included in EU Dimensions have disputed relations with the EU which is perceived as an 'exclusive' club.

Russian NGOs for instance complain that they are excluded from several European NGO support programmes which are only available in the member states. Although these lines between outsiders and insiders are re-confirmed by some current EU's practices (i.e. visa regimes) it seems that civil society can find ways of operating outside this established framework of ins/outs. Russia, despite its rejection of the ENP, is included in the ENPI, a program designed for the ENP countries.

At the same time Russian respondents, not surprisingly, constantly re-iterate that it is either impossible or unnecessary for Russia to become a member of the EU due to the huge dissimilarities between them. The respondents seem to be quite aware of the advantages that the EU membership could bring to them like travelling without border control, using a single currency or wide opportunities of the common market but one may define this vision as vision of "deep association with the EU" without any loss of sovereignty. Russian CSOs have in general little understanding of the complex institutional and political process in the EU that derive from their practices of managing EU funded projects. Nonetheless, a majority of CSOs representatives interviewed by our Finnish-Russian team consider Russia to be a very special case in Europe: *'As a non-EU member and a country which does not aim to the EU membership, Russia has a very clear border, also in mental terms with the EU countries.'*⁴ Also, according to the research findings of our Estonian team, the cultural differences between Europe and Russia are so large and lacking in experience of cooperation with European partners that it is difficult to establish and to sustain long-term cooperation.

CSOs in Russia and Turkey are more sceptical about the EU's intentions and the nature of any relationship with it. The latter is described by a representative of Turkish CSO as a teacher-student relationship *'we have to be careful in terms of its pros and cons. We have to evaluate the local needs of this society without being in a command chain. We need to be in a real negotiation process rather than a teacher-student relationship'*⁵. There is also criticism that the EU uses civil society instrumentally to implement its own agenda and priorities.

Not all CSOs were so critical of the EU, however. Many civil society representatives interviewed by our teams spoke about the EU's efforts to support reforms while putting

³ For instance, new member states are still restricted the full access to labour market in most of the EU countries.

⁴ Finnish-Russian Case Study Report for the Second Cross Sectional Analysis (2008), p.42

⁵ Turkey –Case Study Report (2008), p. 27

pressure on the state to work with civil society via different assistance programmes. In this context, the EU represents democracy, protection of civil and political rights, the social model and economic development. These aspirations to values claimed by the EU - the rule of law, democracy, and the fostering of civil society are more commonly found in new member states or in the two ENP countries Ukraine and Moldova which are being integrated increasingly into EU spaces of governance, albeit only in fields designated by EU decision-makers. Preliminary findings indicate that the EU is not perceived simply as a single entity with coherent policies towards its neighbours. Rather the national strategic and historical interests of the member states often dominate the agenda and undermine the attempts to represent EU's intentions *via* a single voice.

There is consensus, therefore, across different case studies that the EU is not single actor with coherent policies but remains often divided among the different national interests of member states. These diverging interests are sharply illustrated in terms of relationships with Russia over such key issues as energy or indeed the promotion of democracy. The conditionality elaborated by the EU as a basis for closer relationships with neighbouring states can be considerably diluted for utilitarian reasons. At the same time, in designing its policies and instruments, the EU acts as if it was a coherent actor. This can lead to the worst of both worlds as many CSOs expressed the wish that the EU policies should be more sensitive to the specific practical problems of border regions.

- Transnational Funding and its Consequences

The transnational level is critical to the funding of CSO activity in the areas under scrutiny. This funding comes from the EU Commission and also from transnational civil society organisations with headquarters in Western Europe and North America. The latter are particularly important in Polish/Ukrainian collaboration and include such organisations as the Batory Foundation and PAUCI (Polish-Ukrainian Cooperation Foundation). The availability of funding and the terms under which it can be accessed are major factors influencing CSO activity and serve to privilege some CSOs at the expense of others. Hence the dynamic driving CSO activity may be located at the transnational, rather than the national or regional/local level. As explained by the head of an environmental organization in Turkey *'funds are motivations. If professionalizing NGOs have their funding from projects they will professionalize. If they do not have a stable core budget then they will look for funding and try to choose among them. In these cases, it is rather hard to do what they really want to do'*.⁶

With the exception of Finland⁷ all case studies are characterised by an increasing dependency on international donors which often leads to competition rather than cooperation among local CSOs. The majority of Ukrainian CSOs studies have some contacts with the EU through participation in the EU programmes or, alternatively, function as branch organisations of a transnational parent institution. Most of them have received EU funding. This dependency on international donors can hence hinder the local

⁶ Turkey – Case Study Report (2008), p.33

⁷ Due to high level of voluntary input, philanthropy accounts for 45 percent of all financial support CSOs receive.

developments agendas and redirect the attention of local CSOs to the issues and practices not familiar in the local contexts. Another NGO representative from Ankara, observes: *'the EU funds guides Turkish civil society. It provides a basis for a civil society which is not formed based on its will and internal dynamics. In other words if the EU concludes that there is no torture in Turkey, the reason of existence for NGOs working on torture would disappear. The number of voluntary organizations decreases whereas NGOs are forced to be dependent on the funding, political frameworks, political preferences of not only the EU, but also its member states' and other donors affect and shape Turkish NGOs'*.⁸

The dependency on foreign funding has provoked particular problems in Russia, where the national government's new slogan of 'sovereign democracy' has been used against a civil society that has been weak from the outset. The latter has been represented as an import or product of the West. Although it is mainly the Russian government that is criticizing the Western governments and the EU for being interventionist and imposing its values, critical voices can be heard from Russian non-state actors as well. A representative of Russian NGO argued: *'the available EU funding programmes are not for NGOs. Those programmes are designed for municipalities and state organization, which however do not always have sufficient knowledge and capacity to implement those project; the NGOs act as shadow organizations to state agencies and support implementation of European project'*.⁹

Other case studies of Poland, Ukraine, Russia and Moldova point to increasing competition among CSOs due to scarce funding and the struggle for resources available through foreign financial assistance instruments. A high level of competition for resources resulted in diversified structures with no umbrella organisations and very little cooperation. For instance, in Turkey we can observe diversification of tendencies and activities among women-dominated CSOs which have become specialised in their own issues. According to Turkish experts this can lead to a kind of alienation within the women movement where cooperation and collaboration becomes more difficult. Instead of collaboration, CSOs have to compete for grants and to become project-oriented and project-dependent. This kind of professionalisation and internationalisation of civil society sector *'harms the spirit of feminist activity which is based on the idea of solidarity among women'*. It has also alienated domestic civil society actors from their grassroots basis and weakened their relations with the core supporters and members.

The relationships of CSOs with each other can be based more on rivalry than on mutually beneficial collaboration. For example, women's organisations are becoming professionalized and institutionalised which is resulting in fragmentation of their activities, disintegration of feminist activism and increasing competition over international resources.

On the other hand, professionalization and the development of personal contacts and networks with international CSOs have contributed to developing expertise, sharing

⁸ Turkey – Case Study Report (2008), p.33

⁹ Estonia-Russia Report (2008), p.13

information and knowledge about neighbours and international policies *'by learning the rules of the EU tendering system the actors of civil society acquired a kind of European style behaviour as well'*. Funding constitutes the basis for the doing civil society work in the 'European way' which requires expertise, know-how and language skills. The former head of the Human Rights Associations in Turkey argues *'the EU requires a system based on project auditing, working plans, timetable and working discipline and these are important contributions to Turkish civil society culture. It also changed our way of doing things like employing experts as well as our style of thinking. You run a project with the EU and get the funding that you would normally get in 10 years time. In our case it weakens solidarity networks with individuals'*¹⁰.

Part of the impact of EU funding of CSO activity lies in the spread for certain organisational disciplines and skills. Smaller and poorly resourced CSOs are very critical of EU bureaucracy, its tendency to work through state structures and its complicated funding mechanisms. Nevertheless parts of civil society are strengthened in the new member states. For instance, in Estonia, the organisations usually decide themselves which projects to initiate and to implement. However, even here, EU policies and strategies are *prepared* mostly with state authorities and with little NGO involvement.

In contrast to already empowered Estonian CSOs, the Russian CSOs are invited into cooperative projects by European organisations or by state authorities in order to implement international projects where the Russian state lacks expertise or a mandate. As stated by a representative of Russian NGO in Pskov *'in some cases NGOs act as a hand extension of international organisations or governments in Russia'*¹¹. In other words, Russian CSOs are typically recipients of funds rather than fully fledged partners in these networks of cooperation. A similar situation can be found in Ukraine. According to our Russian-Finnish report. Russian women's organisations receive significantly more support and resources than other types of civil society groups because of the historical links in Finland between the women's movement and democratisation.

In other case studies, CSOs have been mobilised into larger regional and transnational networks. For instance, the Turkish Women's Entrepreneurs Association runs a project with partners in Romania, Bulgaria and Spain and another project 'Young Women are Building Bridges for the EU' that seeks to raise awareness about gender equality. In most of the case studies, CSOs operate in a highly asymmetric environment where larger and stronger international organisations set their priorities often regardless the needs of local communities. In other words, newly emerging global or transnational networks of CSOs are usually led by stronger organisations with their headquarters in the Western Europe.

An interesting, but perhaps very exceptional, example of a CSO that refused to accept EU money is the Turkish human rights organisation. A representative of a pro-Islamist human rights association explained: *'some of our members and administrators are against the funding provided by the EU so we had to step back from the projects. If we need funding for a project we said either we will take from the members or institutions*

¹⁰ Turkey-Case Study Report (2008), p.33

¹¹ Estonia-Russia Report (2008), p.7

*working in the same field and we decided not to apply to the international funding if we don't have to.*¹²

The transnational CSOs networks frequently focus on so-called soft issues of cooperation such as environmental, social and health or youth sectors. There are several examples of well-established international networks of NGOs in the environmental sector. In some instances the private sector is more interested in funding and supporting environmental projects because they are seen as less political. As explained by a head of a Turkish environmental organisation, *'support to their project increases the private sector's visibility in the market and therefore provides them with a kind of publicity.'*¹³ In the same vein, Russian private donors are willing to support activities that are politically non-confrontational.

These 'soft' activities are also often tolerated and supported by states- hence CSOs can more easily bypass their respective national level and directly petition or lobby European institutions or other supranational actors for support. In other words, the cooperation agenda is often defined by international organisation based on common challenges or common interests. This process of **'scale-jumping'** characteristic for certain fields of activities is conditioned by mix of internal and external factors. As stated by a representative of a women's organization: *'We work in the international arena. Our main concern is to make lobbying to European Parliament and Commission through Brussels and to express our demands, to affect decisions and recommendations'.*

Many CSOs criticise the EU for its top-down approach that pays very little attention to local or regional problems. There is a great level of scepticism among CSOs actors about the EU's proclaimed common values dialogue and a greater involvement of civil society across the neighbourhood. From CSO actors' perspective the EU should pay more attention to the dynamics from below - otherwise the results will be short-term and hardly sustainable. As stated in our Russian-Finnish report *'instead of trying to change Russian society as a whole or merely import European values to Russia and hope for the best, emphasis should be placed on people-to-people contacts and on more constructive dialogue between neighbours, which in turn is likely to result in more proponents of deeper integration'.*¹⁴

These perceptions or images of Europe or the EU's policies need to be understood in the context of the EU's self-understanding as value-driven entity and as a model to be promoted in, and exported to, other parts of world. The EU now offers its neighbours a privileged relationship, building upon a mutual commitment to common values – as long as they are European values. 'Belonging to Europe' is not only about being located on the European map, it also means commitment to 'European values'.

To conclude this section, preliminary research findings demonstrate that transnationalisation or Europeanization is a selective and ambiguous process defined by

¹² Turkey-Case Study Report (2008), p.20

¹³ Turkey-Case Study Report (2008), p.23

¹⁴ Finnish-Russian Report (2008), p.38

combination of domestic and external factors with positive but also negative consequences. First, the increasing dependency on foreign funding can lead to double exclusion where CSOs are neither part of domestic or international decision-making processes. Second, this dependency on the West has increased competition among domestic CSOs. Third, we can observe structural shifts of civil society sector where the priorities are established by international communities, and grassroots or local movements are being replaced by professional and centralised CSOs with a corporate spirit. Fourth, the international networks and links with the West or transnational bodies have resulted in emergence of the so-called civil elites that often ignore other important and perhaps more influential actors on domestic scenes.

III. Cross-border Cooperation Practices: Local/Regional Views

In four of our research areas, considerable CSO cooperation occurs at regional or local level. At this level, CSOs respond to a series of practical issues and problems generated within areas proximate to the state borders and/or generated by the management of the border itself. Such issues include problems of mobility (over short and long distances), visas, trafficking, illicit smuggling, environmental degradation, economic underdevelopment or the specific issues associated with cross-border regions as a key nodes in wider transnational and international networks.

In this context, it is worth noting that the ENP has been designed to mitigate the negative effects of new dividing lines, and to avoid breaking historical, economic, cultural and social ties in the eastern European Neighbourhood. However, cross-border cooperation is often hindered by geopolitical interests (e.g. energy interests or concerns with illegal migration) of the member states and the EU itself. Despite declared goals of inclusiveness, and the opening of borders to the EU's neighbours, there are important counter-trends rooted in discourses of security which incline towards hard, rather than permeable, borders.

At first glance, it appears that the quality of the cross-border co-operation is generally assessed positively by CSOs. They mention that it was cross-border activities with their counterparts that allowed them to grow professionally and develop the skills to solve serious problems. Collaboration with foreign partners is seen in terms of support that allows CSOs to function. A closer scrutiny however reveals several problems surrounding cross-border practices.

The role of networks is perceived as crucial for maintaining cross-border connections and for assessing the quality of cross-border activities. In other words, networks shape the quality, thematic focus and dynamics of cross-border activities. They have enabled different actors and organisations to come together and share their knowledge. In this context, borders can be conceptualised as zones of interactions and cooperation connecting different actors and their interests. Networking is also a means of attracting funding for joint projects. There is consensus that long-term cooperation is more

beneficial for the actors. A closer scrutiny however reveals several problems surrounding cross-border practices.

Most cross-border activities at this level are project-based with limited duration and sustainability often defined by international organisations or existing funding opportunities. Cross-border projects often survive on public money rather than local will; they depend on central authorities or regional elites, not local civilians. In case studies with centralised systems, the development agendas are prepared by central organisations and their agencies, relegating local CSOs to an executive role through deciding what priorities will be funded.

The short-term character of many projects has resulted in a lack of long-term strategies and a lack of clearly defined perspectives and plans. Partners are often chosen on the basis of their objectives, expertise and capacities to carry out joint projects rather than on the basis of the needs of borderland communities. CSOs are often quite distant from local communities and act more as centrally managed development agencies than bottom-up entities. Technical criteria here may outweigh more substantive criteria.

Despite the understanding among CSOs actors that CBC can bring benefits, the majority of respondents are aware that CBC also involves substantial costs and risks. In this context, the border represents a barrier, an obstacle and differences to be overcome. As nicely captured in our Finnish-Russian report '*...crossing a border is a move out of one's own, familiar culture and into a different and unknown one. It is these differences together with general unpredictability that is being pushed into the foreground as an explanation for the lack of cross-border relations*'.¹⁵

- Mobility of People

It is obvious that the degree of border permeability and current border-related regulatory mechanisms impinge on cross-border practices and discourses. The problems surrounding cross-border mobility have been discussed across all cross-border case studies (albeit to a lesser extent by our Greek-Turkish case study). These problems manifest the existing tensions between EU inclusion and exclusion practices. On one hand, the EU seeks to export its assistance programme and technical expertise on cross-border and regional cooperation to its neighbourhood. This cross-border rationale requires certain permeability of borders which is however overridden by security concerns of the EU.

Visa procedures are recognised to be one of the main obstacles for cross-border cooperation. As stated by one representative from the Moldova CSO who is involved in CBC projects '*the impossibility of obtaining visas on time has compromised the successful running of a project*'.¹⁶ The simplified border crossing procedures in the 1990's were replaced by 'hardening' of external borders with the approximation of legislations in Hungary and Poland to the EU standards and norms. The enlargement of the Schengen zone in December 2007 had negative effects on the borderland

¹⁵ Finnish-Russian Report (2008), p.42

¹⁶ Romania-Republic of Moldova, Second Summary Report (2008), p.18.

communities on the external border of the EU. For the citizens of Ukraine acquiring visas to visit Hungary proved to be a more complicated and a more expensive procedure than before. This was so even as Hungarian government was striving to develop the best possible solutions for Ukrainians in visa matters. This form of 'europeanisation' resulted in the introduction of visas and the abolishing of local traffic which created 'unpleasant' situations for the local communities in the Eastern part of neighbourhood.

Thus when the local communities in the Polish-Ukrainian and Hungarian-Ukrainian border regions expressed opposition to the strengthening of border controls that was to accompany the implementation of the Schengen system after December 2007—thus creating new barriers to travel and trade among local communities—the EC responded by proposing to introduce local border traffic and visa facilitation agreements. The European Council therefore adopted (in December 2006) a new Regulation on local border traffic that provides borderland communities with simplified provisions to travel across borders—provided member states reach such agreement with neighbouring third countries. Following this European regulation, a bilateral agreement has been made between Hungary and Ukraine on this issue which defined a 50 kilometre zone on both sides of the border where the regulations of small border traffic should be applied.

Russia was the first one to conclude the visa facilitation agreement with the EU in May 2006 that simplifies the visa procedures for certain categories of people such as officials, businessmen, students or diplomats. So far Ukraine and Moldova have concluded visa facilitation agreements with the EU under the terms of 'strict conditionality' (readmission agreements). Amongst the EU's Southern neighbours, Morocco continues to negotiate with the EU for similar arrangements, but it remains reluctant to conclude readmission agreements on account of the large number of migrants that utilise Morocco as a transit zone for entry to the EU.

Despite these concessions from the EU side CSOs complain about lengthy and costly procedures at the consulates but also that the trend is towards securing borders rather their opening.

- Disputed Borders and Minorities

All case study areas have had tense, disputed or problematic relations with their direct neighbours that undoubtedly influence the dynamics of cross-border cooperation. The events happening across the borders have an impact on cross-border cooperation practices. For instance, the incident in April 2007 over the removal of monument to the soldier has damaging effect on the trust between CSOs in Estonia and Russia. The incidents at the borders such as the one in January 2008 when delegation from a Romanian county council was stopped by Moldavian border police also contribute to tensions and mistrust rather than to good cooperation practices.

As we have already indicated, minority/ethnic issues to great extent determine the nature of cross-border co-operation in Hungarian, Estonian or Finnish case studies¹⁷. But the effect of minorities along the state border can be ambiguous. On the one hand, minorities may serve as a cultural bridge across the state border which facilitates co-operation among CSOs and state agencies. On the other hand, if the border is disputed or minorities are regarded as pawns in a inter-state conflicts, the existence of border minorities can inhibit co-operation. Hence, they can have both enabling and constraining effects on cross-border practices among CSOs'. For instance, Estonian or Turkish CSOs are more involved in cross-border practice with 'European' partners rather than with their direct neighbours- mainly because of inter-state tensions around the minority's question.

- Inequality and Asymmetry

Asymmetric relationships between border regions is another important factor that determines the quality of cross-border activities in all case studies. Regional cross-border co-operation is most advanced in Finland/Russia: *'it can thus be (somewhat) exaggeratedly argued that it is the Russian interests, but the Finnish agenda, that dominates the cooperation.*¹⁸ Contacts are usually initiated by the 'stronger' or more developed side of border. For instance, Karelian CSOs acknowledge that the development agenda of women's CSOs are more advanced among their partners in Scandinavia. Many CSOs resist the privileging of partners' interests although interests and preferences may be modified according to donors' criteria. The strength of women's organisations among Finnish CSOs, and their integral role in the historical development of complementary relationships between the Finnish state and civil society, provides a model and opportunities for partnership with Russian CSOs in Karelia. Furthermore, co-operation over gender and social deprivation issues is not deemed to be politically sensitive by the Russian state.

IV. Inter-State Cooperation Practices

The international (or inter-state) level continues to be highly significant – for two reasons:

1. The variable relationships between states and civil societies are a critical influence on CSO activity. The historical legacy of relationships between states – the legacy of past conflicts, current tensions and potential future conflicts shape the potential for civil society co-operation.¹⁹

¹⁷ For an analysis of the relationship of ethno-national border conflicts with the project of European integration, see Diez, T., Albert, M. and Stetter, S., [eds] (2008) *The European Union and Border Conflicts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁸ Finnish-Russian Report (2008), p.29.

¹⁹ See, for example, B. Rumeli (2007) 'Transforming Conflicts on EU Borders: the case of Greek-Turkish Relations, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 45, pp.105-26. She alludes to tensions and conflicts between Greece-Turkey, Romania/Moldova, Poland/Ukraine and Spain/Morocco. To this could be added Estonian/Russian tensions over the ethnic Russian minority in Estonia.

2. State actors influence all levels of CSO cooperation and they are often the mediators or the implementers of funded programmes and projects initiated at the transnational level. Of course, some states are more entrepreneurial than others in promoting transnational and national civil society while others are more resistant to such ideas.

- Impact of inter-state tensions and disputes

All our case studies have a legacy of troubled history and disputed borders (e.g, Turkish-Greek; Romania-Moldova or Hungary-Ukraine) with immediate neighbours. Some of them have only recently concluded bilateral agreements of cooperation in order to normalise relations, particularly those looking for closer relations with the EU. A series of inter-governmental agreements (i.e., Hungary-Ukraine, Poland-Ukraine, Moldova-Romania) have been signed. For instance, there are around 20 inter-governmental agreements between Hungary and Ukraine. The inter-state relationships influence the funding, the activities of CSOs with their counterparts across the state borders. The formal international cooperation is often characterised by mistrust and ongoing tensions. The empirical evidence of our case studies demonstrates how the specificities of the inter-state or inter-governmental relations continue to have different impacts on civil society cooperation practices.

Some countries have with very limited cooperation with counterparts in their immediate neighbourhood. For instance, Turkish civil society has very little or no direct cooperation practices with CSOs in Greece and they are mainly engaged in projects with European (EU) partners. An exception is the growth of co-operation between some Greek islands and the coastal Turkey. Some representatives of Turkish civil society, however, argue that cross-border cooperation is neither always the ‘desire’ of the local actors nor their immediate priority. Another organisation from Turkey:

‘The EU forces NGOs to work with their neighbours through cooperation, communication, and organization of joint events. EU encourages cross-border cooperation but it is not interested in Turkey’s eastern neighbours’²⁰.

In similar way, any aggravation of tense inter-governmental relations between Estonian and Russia has an effect on civil society. For instance, the removal of the Bronze Soviet Soldier Monument from the Tallinn city centre to the Tallinn military cemetery in April 2007, disrupted contacts between Estonian and Russian CSOs. It is not surprising that, in general, Estonian CSOs are more interested in sharing their knowledge and best practices with ex-Soviet republics such Ukraine, Belarus and in the South Caucasus. These attempts to escape Russian influence are not always welcomed by Russia which still keeps an eye in its Near Abroad.

In cases of Hungary-Ukraine and Romania-Moldova, inter-governmental relations have for a long time been dominated by questions of dual citizenship, ethnic issues or unrecognised borders. Under such circumstances of disputed or tense inter-state relations civil society has been often directed from above and its activities have reflected agendas

²⁰ Turkey-Case Study Report (2008), p.30.

and interests of high-politics rather than bottom-up concerns of citizens. The national state agencies have had a strong impact on the development and promotion of cross-border practices where the strategies are defined and coordinated by state or regional authorities. For instance, most of the Hungarian-Ukrainian cross-border activities have been initiated by Hungarian CSOs or funded by the Hungarian government to support the activities linking ethnic Hungarians across the borders.

Despite the troubled history between Moldova and Romania, international cooperation has intensified in the economic areas where both sides find common interests. Reflecting on 60% increase in bilateral trade and economic exchanges between Romania and Moldova, a Romanian Ambassador in Moldova observed in February 2008: *'Beyond any formal, outward aspect, I believe that we should rely on those aspects revealing the positive value of relationships, the value that says that, whenever talking about the concrete realm, the realm that is indeed interesting rather than discourse elements, bilateral relations go very well'*.²¹

- State-civil society relations

The development of more constructive relations between the states and their respective civil societies in some post-communist countries has had beneficial results. For example, it has allowed Estonian CSOs to be involved in international projects and to share their best practices and expertise. Involving Russian partners, however, has proved more problematical, because of the subordination of civil society to the Russian state.

High degrees of centralisation serve to limit the autonomy of civil society and enhance the importance of inter-state relationships. In the Ukraine, most important decisions are made in Kiev; counties and districts as territorial administrative units have minimal competencies. CSO activity in the Hungary/Ukraine case study also has a rather specific characteristic in that it is entangled with ethnic minority issues. The latter are more important for Hungary, however. Ukraine with a highly centralised state system prioritises closer relations with the EU and is less focused on cross-border issues involving ethnic Hungarians.

The promotion of economic development is a very important focus of the Hungarian government's foreign policy, and shapes the attitude of Hungarian state organizations towards NGOs. Hungary is also the biggest importer of electricity from Ukraine. The Hungarian-Ukrainian Joint Action Plan attaches primary importance to the issues of cooperation in the energy sector, in the process stimulating civil society activity in this area.

Civil society plays an important role particularly when other actors have difficulties in establishing contacts and networks with their counterparts on the other side of border. For instance, Finnish businesses find it difficult to operate in an unpredictable environment in Russia but CSOs have been less restricted in their contacts across the borders. As we

²¹ Romania-Republic of Moldova Report (2008), p.4

have already mentioned cross-border activities here focus primarily on health and social issues that are not perhaps seen as a direct threat to the state.

The opposite trend can be identified in Finland. Despite its troubled history with Russia, Karelia is a target region of Finnish foreign policy. Instead of reproducing confrontation or isolation Finnish partners have succeeded in establishing good contacts with their Russian counterparts. A long land border with Russia has contributed to cross-border interactions with Russian civil society but also Russia remains the biggest trading partner of Finland. The intensive collaboration practices with the Finnish CSO have led to proliferation of women's organizations in Russia. The main objectives of Finland's cooperation agenda is stabilisation and support for economic and social development, the rule of law and reforms. Around 98 percent of 'neighbouring area cooperation' funds are allocated to Russia which is perceived as an important target region to fulfil Finnish national objectives and interests. On the Russian side, many CSOs actors showed a great interest in establishing contacts with partners from countries other than traditional partner countries like Finland or Sweden.

To conclude this section, all case studies studied by EUDimensions have demonstrated the degree to which inter-state or inter-governmental cooperation shapes the dynamics and the nature of civil society. In some instances, it re-directs the activities of CSOs from its immediate neighbours (as in Estonia or Turkey). In other cases, the states indicate what kind activities are desirable or welcome such as ethnic/minority issues (Romania/Moldova; Hungary-Ukraine). Overall, the strategic interests of states still determine the cooperation practices with their neighbours. For example, mutual interdependency (in the field energy) and the maintaining of geo-political stability (as in the case of Russia) continue to be a both key motivation for cooperation while also setting limits to that cooperation. Furthermore, the history and structure of state-civil society relationships influence the possibilities of cooperation not only between states but also between their respective civil societies.

V. Conclusions

The findings of the research teams point to the overriding importance of the transnational level in stimulating civil society activity and co-operation in the European Neighbourhood. This level, comprised of EU institutions and programmes, transnational civil society organisations and some state agencies, provides a structure of opportunity for CSOs in the study area. From this level emanates the bulk of the funding which supports and drives CSO activity and cross-border co-operation. The EU enlargement, Neighbourhood policy and the promotion of 'common values' by North American and western European foundations have been the levers for enhancing the work of CSOs.

EUDimensions research, however, reveals that there is enormous variation in the capacity of CSOs to access opportunities evident at the transnational level. Similarly, there is considerable variation in their capacity to implement programmes and initiatives across a wide range of national and regional/local contexts.

The key factors which determine the capacity to access and implement civil society initiatives include:

1. The differentiated approach of the EU to states in the region even under the common umbrella of the European Neighbourhood policy.
2. the great variation in state-civil society relationships ranging from the benign and complementary in the case of Finland to the case of post-communist countries, including Russia, where civil society is subordinate to, or lacks autonomy from, the state.
3. The status of inter-state relationships in the region arising from the legacy of past or current disputes.
4. The asymmetric relationships between states in the region based on size, level of economic development and differential relationship to the EU.
5. The particular configuration of regional/local issues associated with proximity to state borders.
6. The often unanticipated effect of transnational intervention on civil society activity in particular countries in terms of professionalising parts of the sector and marginalising other sectors. Pressure to follow transnational agendas may distort or supplant the context-specific priorities of existing CSOs. The bureaucratic structure, rationales and agendas of transnational networks inhibit as well as sustain civil society activity in the areas studied.

Future specialised reports will deal with three specific dimensions of civil society activity NGOs, gender and the promotion of economic activity. These will further clarify the emergent themes of civil society activity identified in this report.