

Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and the new EU outline border: an introduction to 'Borderland III'

The enlargement of the European Union is still not complete. Bulgaria and Romania, two important states in the eastern Balkans, joined in 2007, but further countries, such as Albania, Kosovo, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Moldova and Turkey, are still looking towards the prospect of being integrated into Europe which, to them, promises a prosperous future. Belarus and Ukraine also have to be mentioned, even though their prospect of joining the EU remains vague. It seems improbable that the EU should grant concessions to Lukashenka, the 'last dictator' (in the words of Condoleezza Rice), despite the regime's attempts to come to better terms with Europe.

Ukraine is a different story. Since the 'orange revolution' took place, at least the majority of the political elite have been seeking to join the EU and NATO. The comment of Yulia Tymoshenko, Prime Minister of Ukraine, on that subject in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 10 February was quite typical:

What is important for us is the European integration of Ukraine. That is not only the strategic goal of Ukrainian foreign policy but it also has priority among the people. Particularly because there is still a certain mental divide between East and West Ukraine, the idea of being integrated into Europe is of great significance for us. And Ukrainians believe in it. I fully understand that there are quite a few difficulties with the enlargement of the EU at the moment. We respect that. But we walk this path confidently. Ukraine is currently negotiating an association treaty with Brussels. If these negotiations could be concluded successfully that would already mean we are making great progress. What we do not need now is slogans: We want to join the EU! We have to make sure that we meet all the requirements for joining and we must come closer and closer to this goal.

Concerning the desired membership of NATO, she added that the population had considerable reservations. However, both EU and NATO membership are uncertain for the time being, due to the complicated geo-political background. Besides structural domestic problems (corruption, democratic deficits and a polarised political culture), the reservations held by individual EU and NATO member states, but also the Russian *nyet!*, are a hindrance to rapid harmonisation with the west.

Russia sees no reason at all to support Ukraine, the second-largest state of Europe, on its course. The constant skirmishes over whether Russian gas should be sold at a world market price instead of at a special price for friends, Ukraine's outstanding payments and the question of 'gas theft' show that there is sufficient potential for conflict to escalate at anytime. The question of what will happen in 2017, when the Russo-Ukrainian Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation runs out, is also quite explosive. The Treaty includes a lease to station the Russian Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula, which Nikita Khrushchev transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954.

The Russian doctrine not to tolerate any NATO troops right on its doorstep has already been broken in the case of the Baltic states. Even so, the Russia-Georgia conflict demonstrates that Moscow wanted to create a precedent to make Russian security interests clear to pro-western governments ‘in neighbouring countries’ which are understood to lie within the Russian sphere of influence. It is an irony in current world politics that Georgia’s President Saakashvili, in a fit of megalomania and with subtle American support, thought he could challenge the Russian Bear. The same could be said of Ukraine, whose unstable governments and democratic elite are torn. In the predominantly pro-Russian east of the country, which is characterised by heavy industry, there are considerable reservations against the pro-western course of President Yushchenko, whose Prime Minister is, in contrast, rather more pragmatic.

Moldova lies in the shadow of Russia and Ukraine, but it remains almost unnoticed by world opinion. Yet, its relations with Russia are difficult, not least due to the war between Moldova and the secessionist republic of Transnistria, which took around 1 500 lives in 1992 but which, in comparison with the Yugoslav wars of dissolution, was hardly noticed in the media. The former Moldovan province of Transnistria, Moldova’s industrial backbone, became an instrument for Russia’s security and energy interests. This Russian trump card leaves Moldovan governments (and their Communist presidents) which are pro-European, at least according to their rhetoric, with a severely restricted room for manoeuvre. Relations between Brussels and Chișinău are, accordingly, troubled: similarly with Turkey, Moldova has no concrete prospect of joining the EU. Instead, the EU is running support programmes that, however, are barely able to stop the ‘brain drain’ of young people.¹

In contrast, a democratic system and a working market economy have been consolidated in Romania and these have helped the country gain the hoped-for EU membership. Despite constant corruption scandals, a polarised political culture and the intransigent dualism of president and parliamentary majority, Romania is recovering from hitting rock-bottom during the long post-Communist predominance of President Iliescu. Romanian workers in the EU contribute considerably to domestic consumption.

Had Romania not been integrated into the EU, gained freedom of movement for employees and achieved simplifications for trade and financial transfers, it would still be Europe’s pauper – a role it has handed over, in particular, to neighbouring Moldova.

Diverse infrastructure projects financed by the EU have brought European standards to Romania, which are important both for investors and tourists. The new external border of the EU (Moldova, Ukraine and Serbia) is safeguarded meticulously – or at least it seems as if that is the case. EU interests are treated as Romanian interests. Both have in common, among other things, the attempt to reduce and control migration to the Schengen states. ‘Fortress Europe’ – which, by the way, is not impenetrable – can be viewed not only as a metaphor for isolation but also as an institutional arrangement to stop illegal forms of migration based on a coherent European migration and refugee

1 See Victoria Reinhardt (2008) *Fördermittel statt Beitrittsperspektive. Brüssel und Chișinău seit der Auflösung der Sowjetunion (Subsidies but No Membership Prospects. Brussels and Chișinău Since the Dissolution of the Soviet Union)* Baden Baden.

policy, bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries, the border security agency Frontex, and the setting up of a common border regime.²

All this leads us to ‘Borderland III’, which deals with the new external borders of the EU. ‘Borderland I’ concerned itself with the external EU border between Greece, Albania and Macedonia (*SEER* Vol. 7 No. 1) while ‘Borderland II’ (*SEER* Vol. 9 No. 3) moved in the direction of Eurasia, covering Bulgaria and Turkey. The focus was laid primarily on the two border cities of Plovdiv and Edirne, but included excursions to Ankara, Sofia and Istanbul, so that the political and economic dimensions of relations between Bulgaria and Turkey, as well as the complex interests represented by the EU, could be analysed more precisely. ‘Borderland III’ is moving towards new shores. By extending in the direction of the Black Sea, it covers a region that will become more important in the next few years. The war between Russia and Georgia, according to the crisis over South Ossetia that took place in August 2008:

Highlights the volatility of the Black Sea region as a new flashpoint in the common neighbourhood between Russia and the EU.

The authors of these lines, Daniel Grotzky and Mirela Isic, assume in their background paper written for the Bertelsmann Foundation:

That the incidence of this conflict has repercussions throughout a region that is marked by a plethora of challenges to political stability and democratic consolidations – factors that directly affect European security and wealth.³

In order for ‘Borderland III’ to be as vivid and varied as both of its predecessors, the ETUI sent the co-ordinators of this issue, Jens Becker and Achim Engelberg, on an investigative journey to the region where Moldova, Ukraine and Romania meet. The internationally-unrecognised Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (Transnistria) was also included since – as is the case with Ukraine – the Russian influence is of great significance for the region.

The bureaucratic border regime that burdens relations not only between Moldova and Romania, but also between Romania and Ukraine, is one of the subjects of ‘Borderland III’. It is a terrible nuisance to the local population since it severely interrupts small-scale traffic and trade across the border (see the articles by Mihaela Arambaşa,

- 2 An excellent overview of ‘New perspectives on migration in the border areas of Europe’ is given in the volume *The Turbulent Fringe (Turbulente Ränder)*, edited by the Transit Migration team (Bielefeld, 2007). It also contains the definition of a migration and border regime provided by Giuseppe Sciortino: ‘It is rather a mix of implicit conceptual waves of “quick fixes” to emergencies, triggered by changing political constellations of actors. The notion of a migrant regime allows room for gaps, ambiguities and outright strains.’ This definition allows the viewing of migrants, state control agencies and other actors as well as their actions in a wider context. *ibid.* pp. 13-14.
- 3 Daniel Grotzky and Mirela Isic (2008) *The Black Sea Region: Clashing Identities and Risks to European Stability* CAP Policy Analysis No. 4, October, p. 4.

Achim Engelberg, and Andrei Avram and Dietmar Müller) and it unnecessarily complicates some of the close relations between Moldova and Romania.

A description of the area around the Danube Delta, which the co-ordinators have covered coming from the direction of Moldova, passing the Danube city of Galați, give some impressions of Romania. It also illustrates the relations between Romania and Ukraine. The dispute over Snake Island threatened to become a serious problem until a judgment was passed by the International Court of Justice in The Hague in February 2009. It is binding under international law and both sides can agree with it. Romania has gained the right to use almost 80 per cent of the continental shelf, which is around 12 000 sq. km. in size, including exploitation of the gas and oil resources. In return, Snake Island now officially belongs to Ukraine.

In the near future, the Danube Delta, with its rare bird species and natural landscapes, will become part of the transnational oil-processing complex, despite the protests of the local population. Achim Engelberg's article touches upon these matters, including also the Ukrainian part of former Bessarabia. The latter is the name of the province of Tsarist Russia whose successor states are the subject of this issue. In 'Germans in Bessarabia: historical background and present relations,' Ute Schmidt investigates the traces of Bessarabia's dynamic history, which has left its mark on the country and its people. It was, not least of all, Germans who had an influence on this region, for better and for worse. There are still many efforts today to recall the role of the German minority in shaping the region as it is today.

The part of Ukraine which tends towards a pro-western position is prospering, managing to attract foreign investors (at least, until the global financial and economic catastrophe broke out). In particular, the Black Sea city of Odessa is one of the winners in the Ukrainian transformation and boom period, as Natalie Koranda shows in detail on the basis of how investment has developed. There are positive signs for Odessa and its environs and, according to Koranda, these are not restricted to the sectors of energy, finance and redevelopment where massive investments have been made:

An analysis of the single industries of the country has shown that some sectors are already exhibiting enormous growth, for example the construction and telecommunications industries. In some building material sectors, the market is booming, with increases in sales of 20 % per year.

Things look very different in parts of Moldova. One emphasis lies on the relations between Moldova, Romania and the EU. Questions of perception and identity, expectations concerning the future of the Moldovan population, and the role of the EU are a big concern, as is the border regime of Romania which has changed everyday life due to the need for visas and inspections at the border. Mihaela Arambaşa presents a study on this question of:

How has the everyday life of Moldovans and Romanians living on the border been affected during the period from the EU accession of Romania until today? This question shall be treated by analysing the relations between the Moldovan population and the Romanian population in border areas.

A total of 560 people participated in the study, resulting in a variety of impressions. These are supplemented by Igor Munteanu's article 'Moldova looks westward, and wins?', which is based on a representative survey carried out in Moldova in 2008. Munteanu inquired into popular attitudes concerning the EU, NATO, certain aspects of security policy (Transnistria) and respondents' trust in institutions. The article gives an insight into the subjective dimension of:

The implementation of the Action Plan in Moldova, as well as its lessons and drawbacks and a critical analysis of the feelings that citizens read into EU demands and offers.

Finally, Andrei Avram and Dietmar Müller give a description of the situation and its political implications. They are able to show that:

The border between the Republic of Moldova and Romania has been a source of continuous tension in relations between the two countries, involving all pillars of modern statehood: a territory defined by international accepted borders; a stable and well-defined citizenry; and political authority over both the territorial and membership spaces. The political philosophy underlying the European Union requires co-operation, mutual understanding and similar soft approaches all tending to an increasingly non-national mode of thinking and acting when coming to terms with globalisation and Europeanisation; in contrast, Romanian-Moldovan relations seem to be stuck in an agenda topped by issues that reflect rather the interests of nations than the interests of citizens.

'Borderland III' could encourage further efforts to investigate historical and present contexts that have shaped, and continue to shape, the former Bessarabia beyond the worn-out path of looking at economic growth, financial transfers, speculation, border regimes and political conflict.