

Developing a cross-border governance framework for the EU and Turkish border regions

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Abstract

State borders have been transforming from physical lines into integrated regions constructed with cross-border cooperation. The increase of flows between both sides of the border causes a change in socio-economic relations and makes the border region an area of social practice, involving multidimensional relations of local, regional, national and supranational actors. These relationships necessitate the emergence of new governance practices specific to these regions and multidimensional, complex institutional structures framed by common settings of the countries on either side of the border. This study aims to propose a governance framework by considering the dynamics of border regions in different socio-economic and institutional structures and practices. Within this context, a governance framework for the EU and Turkish border region is discussed in two dimensions: distinctive socio-spatial and structural characteristics of the border region and governance approach including the actors, processes and practices. It is concluded that different structural characteristics and level of relationships effect the governance practices and policies among countries although they are part of the same supranational structure (EU).

Keywords: border regions, cross border relations, governance, the EU, Turkey

Introduction

Transformation of state borders from a physical lines into integrated regions has gained considerable attention in the last decade. Political and economic interaction of states at regional, national and supranational levels have highly increased the flows between both sides of the border, causing the appearance of new social and institutional practices among local, regional, national and supranational actors in ‘nested hierarchies’ (Ostrom, 1990; Howlett, 2009).

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In contrast to the increasing relationships, the dominance of security-oriented policies, social and economic polarization and the existence of social sensitivities of the countries have simultaneously created a fragile environment in border regions (Reinke, 2017). These conflicting dynamics necessitate the emergence of cross-border governance practices specific to these regions that have different histories, social and institutional arrangements as well as different socio-spatial dynamics, cultural identities and political visions (Anderson and O'Dowd, 1999; Lundquist and Tripl, 2013). Cross-border governance practices reduce the barrier characteristics of the borders by developing social, economic and political relationships (Popescu, 2012). Besides, in cross-border governance, border regions are considered as units, which can complement each other on local and regional scales in contrast as separate areas.

As being multi-actor spaces, coordination, cooperation and joint activities in the border regions depend entirely on successful models and processes of governance (Scherer and Zumbusch, 2011). The border region governance approach differs from the governance approaches at the national level, as it embodies different level actors of each country with their complex social and administrative structures. The governance structures in border regions can be subject to comparisons with indicators such as self-organization, coordination, interaction, and openness to strategic intelligence and learning. For this reason, the method to be developed for each region to realize its own cooperation and good governance should be comprehensive and originally designed to include the internal dynamics such as human and administrative capacity, cultural and geographical conditions, economic activities, and social and political relations of the region.

This paper aims to develop a conceptual governance framework that will include different types of governance mechanisms for a fragile and complex border region environment and then to study the proposed framework for the EU and Turkish border region. The paper will deal with the following research questions:

- How can a governance model be identified in a conceptual way for a fragile and complex environment like border regions that have different socio-economic and institutional structures?
- What is the role of socio-economic and administrative structures of the border region in shaping a mutually agreed governance framework?

Within this context, after the introduction, the first part discusses cross-border governance framework utilizing the border and governance literature. Examining different approaches to governance, the paper will have the opportunity to describe a mutually agreed governance framework. In the second part, the methodology of the empirical study on the EU and Turkish border region is given and different socio-economic and administrative characteristics of two border regions are presented. In the third part, findings of the empirical study and the governance framework is exhibited. Case study findings concerning distinctive socio-economic and structural characteristics of the border region and governance approach including the actors,

processes and practices expand the discussion to a new dimension. Finally, in the conclusion part, key arguments on border regions' different institutional structures and governmental practices at all levels are summarized and some conclusions and policy recommendations are given.

1. Cross-border governance framework

Border in its lexical meaning is “the line that separates one country, state, province, etc., from another”¹ or “the dividing line or frontier between political or geographic regions”². Located in the geographical margins of their political units, borders act as physical and psychological dividers. However, borders can not only be perceived as dividers; they separate, but also at the same time they mediate contacts between states and localities (Berg, 2000). From this point of view, borders lose their linearity and transform into networked regions (Popescu, 2012), where local/regional actors interact to overcome the disadvantages of being at the periphery. Actors use cross-border networks that are connected to local, regional, national and supranational levels. Balibar (2004) argues that the classical cross-border relations become independent of space with the concept of networked borders. With the idea that the border has transformed into a network structure, the rigidity of the borderlines has been broken. Instead, the concept of border region, an associated region of state borders (Anderson and O’Dowd, 1999), appears as a dynamic concept, which defines a space through the borderline and consists of cross-border interactions within this space.

Border regions are heterogeneous in terms of size, geographical conditions, culture and socio-economic conditions. They can be very extensive and stretch over several regions or they can only include two neighbouring regions in the geographic and economic periphery of the nation far away from core markets (Lundquist and Trippel, 2013). Managing these interaction spaces by considering the increasing economic, political, social and cultural processes, crossing the border does not coincide accurately with the viewpoints of nation states (Popescu, 2008). Also, the significance and the general understanding of the methods of improving cross-border interaction among related actors with conflicting goals and asymmetric power relations are unclear (Johnson, 2009). These conflicts and uncertainties have brought about the search for new governance practices special to border regions. In terms of border regions, governance has emerged as an alternative to nation-states that differ not only in administrative terms but also in socio-economic development and interests (Scherer *et al.*, 2015; Vrňáková, 2018). According to Rhodes (1997),

¹ Border (n.d.), Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary (retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/border>).

² Border (n.d.), Collins English Dictionary (retrieved from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/border>).

governance is defined as the change of the meaning of the government and the emergence of different managerial processes. The process of governance, which involves the interaction of actors affecting each other, causes the strict lines to soften.

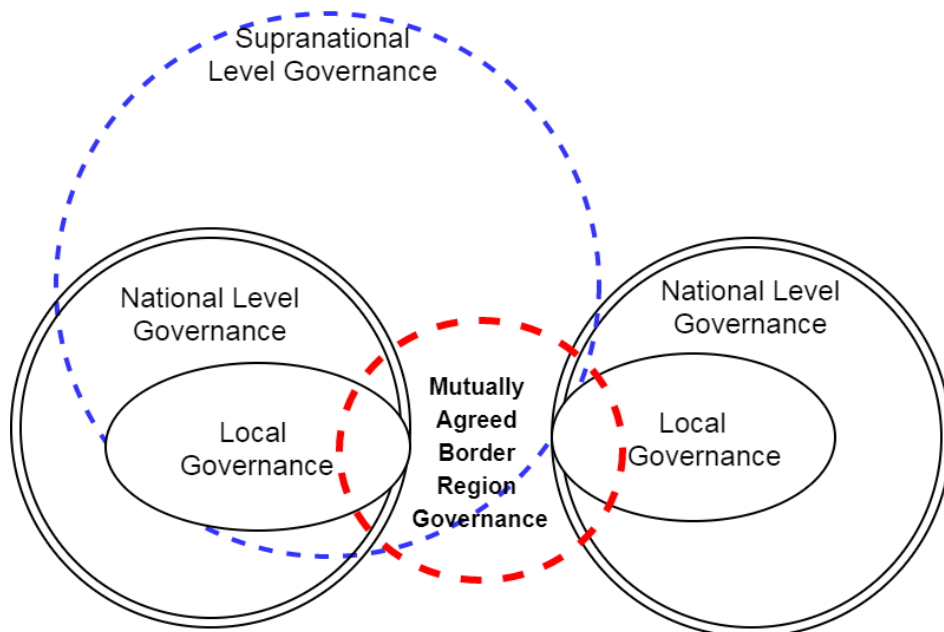
The conceptual approach to governance, related with regional science, is prevalently dealt with by academia and international organizations. In this process, the meaning of the word ‘management’, representing the formal and hierarchical state organization of the public sector and bureaucratic processes, has been transferred into the notion of governance, involving new actors and partnerships in complex and interactive relationships and decision-making processes (Painter and Goodwin, 1995). The concept of governance emerged as a new mode of organization, differentiating itself from the concept of management after the 1980s (Jessop, 1995). Together with the changing needs and the increasing cross-border interactions, the management structure of the border regions has become a subject of change and the traditional solid administrative border structures have evolved into complex and fuzzy structures. The cross-border region and the concept of governance have found their extensions within the framework of cross-border complexity, multidimensionality and ambiguity (Davoudi *et al.*, 2008).

Cross-border governance is mainly used for areas where there is no single-centre administration but a multi-level administrative structure. The concept of multi-level governances (European Commission, 2011a, p. 85) expresses a systematic integration and participation within the framework of the principles of subsidiarity, in a balanced and coordinated manner of different actors, such as governments and regional authorities. In the multi-level governance discussions, it is emphasized that the nation-state has entered into a process of change within the context of global networks and relations, and that the international system, which leaves its sovereignty to social arrangements, has emerged as a new focus to study on (Hirst and Thompson, 2008; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2019). The new approach considers a multi-centred and complex network of governance-spaces. Here, the subject is not a single state but a multi-actor border region governance.

Contrary to the claims of some governance theorists (Rhodes, 1997; Hirst, 1994), the transition from management to governance has not been homogenous for the border regions. The strict border controls, unequal visa regimes and restrictions on the movement of goods affect border regions negatively (Venesaar and Pihlak, 2012). In border regions, management and governance coincide for supranational entities such as the EU, whose external borders are shiftable and formed by mutually agreed actors and processes. In addition to supranational entities, there are national, regional and local structures acting at different levels of the political system for the same region. At this point, cross-border governance framework addresses a multi-level governance approach for considering all the related actors in the region. Thus, cross-border governance appears in a ‘grey zone’ with the emergence of informal and formal interactions among diverse organizations and actors.

The complex structure of cross-border governance should be discussed by considering the networked relationships shaped by the diverseness of historical, institutional and political environments of different actors at different levels. It is difficult to establish effective institutions to ensure that the inhabitants of the border regions have an effective democratic strategy with greater decision-making power. (Kramsch, 2002). In this sense, there is a fragile structure in border regions, shaped by fuzzy functions and constantly redefined processes with the problems that arise in practice. To build up a multi-level governance framework, prerequisites like common goals, top-level political support and long-term commitment, available expertise, capable local and regional governments for effective international cooperation and collaboration are required. During the process, fragilities of the region like: being aware of the priorities and the complexities of the region, the constraints for building up relations, and the different institutional practices have to be defined. In this process, the interaction and communication are necessary for decision-making mechanisms based on consensus (Knodt, 2004). This structure determines the backbone of the governance framework that could be proposed for the border regions.

Figure 1. Relations and intersections of administrative levels



Source: authors' representation

Figure. 1 shows the relationships with various administrative levels as well as the effects of different decision-making mechanisms at different levels independent from each other. From this point of view, defining a mutually agreed governance for all levels of actors taking part in the governance process is proposed for a cross-border governance framework.

2. Methodology

This study analyses the border region of the EU (Bulgaria and Greece) and Turkey covering an area of almost 480 kilometres length and 50 kilometres depth from the borderline. The findings presented and discussed are primarily the outcome of the empirical study conducted in this border region. The empirical study aims to define the socio-economic and administrative characteristics of the region for developing a cross-border governance framework.

Data about actors, processes and practices were gathered through 400 face-to-face surveys conducted with border region residents. The sampling method was to select the residents crossing the border and living within a 50 km buffer from both sides of the borderline. Thus, the questionnaires were applied at the border gates; 200 samples in Bulgaria-Turkey border region and 200 samples in Greece-Turkey border region were interviewed. Surveys consisted of structured and open-end questions on economic, social, administrative and spatial cross-border relations. In addition to face-to-face surveys with residents, in-depth interviews were conducted with 76 local and central government officials, representatives from the civil society organizations, and businessmen on both sides of the border, in order to obtain explanatory information about the socio-economic characteristics and behavioural approaches of the actors. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with central and local institutions and organizations were built on to investigate the current situation, institutional sensitivities and future policies for cross-border relationships. Interviews with civil society and private sector representatives aimed to reveal the working structures, economic and social partnerships, problems in building partnerships, satisfaction and expectations of the actors in cross-border cooperation. Via in-depth interviews, information was collected not only about formal relations and soft projects, but also about informal relations such as the way and ease of transport of goods across borders, the efforts of attracting foreign investors and the role of local actors in relations, the commitment of economic mobility to central government decisions.

The surveys and in-depth interviews conducted in the EU-Turkish border region aimed to find out the economic, social and mostly administrative fragility and complex structure of the region. The complex socio-economic and administrative characteristics of the border region were reinterpreted to develop the cross-border governance framework.

3. Findings from the EU and Turkish Border Region Case for developing a governance framework

Considering the related literature and the findings of the empirical study, the results are discussed in two dimensions: distinctive socio-economic and administrative characteristics of the border region and probable governance framework for the EU and Turkish border region including the actors, processes and practices.

3.1. Socio-economic and administrative characteristics of the region

Border regions of the two EU member states, Bulgaria, Greece and then Turkey are evaluated separately due to differences in historical, socio-economic, administrative characteristics, and cross-border relationships.

Turkey-Bulgaria Border Region

The borderline between Turkey and Bulgaria, of nearly 240 km, is located at the crossroads between Europe and Asia continents. On the Bulgarian side of the border there are two regions, namely South Central and South-East. These areas comprised three districts at NUTs II level. On the Turkish side, Edirne and Kırklareli are the provincial administrations at NUTs III level. The border region functions as a bridge between Europe and Asia. The geographic situation of this border increases the border region's economic significance in terms of international transport, regional trade and tourism. Thus, regarding these sectors, both sides of the border are defined as mutually dependent.

From the administrative point of view, until 1990, Bulgaria was under communist rule, which had effects on social and economic relations between the two neighbouring countries. Cross-border relations between the two countries were formed on security and international policy bases during this time. In this process, relations were established to provide basic needs such as basic transportation infrastructure and some public service activities. Bulgaria's membership to the EU in 2007 and the common use of the EU structural funds for the border region were the breaking points for the increasing cross-border relationships with Turkey, especially in economic and social terms.

Currently, there are three border gates (Kapıkule, Hamzabeyli, Derekoy) between the two neighbouring countries. However, unilateral visa arrangements prevent reciprocal border crossings, as Bulgaria being an EU member demands visas for Turkish citizens, while Bulgarian citizens enter Turkey without a visa. Although Turkey has apparent cultural, economic, and political connections depending on the historically located Turkish-Muslim minority with Bulgaria, visa restrictions limit the border passages from the Turkish side.

In the field survey, one of the migrated Turkish-Muslim minority emphasizes the restrictions as; *“The ones with dual citizenships have the freedom to cross the border. However, many of the others having relatives on the other side of the border cannot go and visit their relatives as they don’t have dual citizenships. Bulgaria permits dual citizenship only for native-born citizens”*.

Similarly, the Head of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Haskovo-Bulgaria expressed: *“We have built a cross-border business cooperation between the chambers and the companies on both sides of the border using IPA funds. For Bulgarians there are not any visa restrictions to enter Turkey, so crossing the border is not an issue. However, it might sometimes be a problem for our Turkish partners to make business visits to Bulgaria”*.

In the transition period, it has been difficult for Bulgaria to adapt to market economy, as for other communist economies. During the 1990s, GDP per capita was almost similar for two countries, 7537 \$ for Bulgaria and 8518 \$ for Turkey (World Bank World, 2019). Although the unemployment rate in Bulgaria was lower (1.7%) than in Turkey (8%) in the 1990s, the privatization policies caused the incrementation of unemployment. The adaptation was to be eased by using formal and informal ways of cross-border trade. In the early 2000s, Bulgaria’s primary export destinations included mainly the EU countries, as well as Turkey. Currently, cross-border trade with Turkey maintains formally by registered import-export relations and informally by daily suitcase trading of the citizens. Today, the GDP per capita of Bulgaria and Turkey have raised up to 24.561 \$ and 27.875 \$ and the unemployment rates have increased to 4.2% and 13.7%, respectively (World Bank World, 2019).

Depending on the results of the survey, the content of local trade in the border region is mostly shaped by daily needs and alcoholic beverages. The products bought by the participants are mostly food (75%), alcohol (42.6%) and clothing (40.2%). While most of the Turkish citizens prefer to buy alcohol from Bulgaria, Bulgarian citizens prefer to buy food and clothing from Turkey. This shows the different demands of the residents in each side of the borderline. On the other hand, the survey reveals that in addition to cross-border crossings for local trade, there are touristic and health-related crossings as well. In Bulgaria, following the collapse of communism, reforms in medical care and social welfare have not adequately responded to the requirements of the citizens (WHO, 2007). Emphasizing the inadequate health services, in the interview, one of the local representatives from Lesovo-Bulgaria says *“In spite of the highly educated medical personnel, a high number of the Bulgarian citizens living in the border region prefers to get health service from the Turkish side, because of the deterioration of the quality of medical care and inadequate services”*.

The demographic structure in the border region shows that the population is rather homogeneous in Bulgaria. Ethnically, Bulgaria’s largest minority, the Turks, comprise about one-tenth of the citizenry. They live in some regions of the northeast

and the eastern Rhodope Mountains region, closer to the border. During the Communist Regime, there were intensive conflicts with the ethnic Turkish population and the authorities. In 1989, just before the collapse of communism, Turkish government offered to accept refugees from Bulgaria; thus, more than 300,000 ethnic Turks migrated to Turkey. Today, it is not explicit, but the lived ethnic issues still have the potential to cause fragility unless policies are developed over fragilities.

The Bulgarian part of the border region is one of the most depopulated areas, because of the gradual abandoning of the countryside. This has caused the rapidly ageing population, the deterioration of living conditions and unemployment in the region, which has led the region to lay behind the other regions of the country (Eurostat, 2000). In fact, the ageing and decreasing population is likewise the national trend in Bulgaria. The main reason for this is the immigration of the young and qualified labour force, especially from border regions, to the developed cities of the EU to find jobs. Between 2015-2019, while there has been a decrease in the population of Yambol, Haskovo and Burgas, the population of Plovdiv and Kardzali has increased (Eurostat, 2020). In contrast to the Bulgarian side, the population is much younger and has been increasing at a slower pace than the national average on the Turkish side. In fact, the proximity to Istanbul, which hosts almost 20% of the country's population affects the increase in population on the Turkish border side. Being close to Istanbul also affects the cross-border relationships. In this context, 50% of the crossings from Bulgaria aim to go to Istanbul for socio-economic purposes. Thus, the border region stands out as a sub-regional centre. On the one hand, this region has been used by the immigrants from Syria as a gateway to the EU, as well.

Table 1. summarizes the general socio-economic and administrative characteristics of the Turkish-Bulgarian border region that aims to develop a governance framework for the border region.

According to the information obtained from in-depth interviews, communication, interaction and mutual benefit in cross-border cooperation have gained momentum with the EU structural funds. However, some historical, political and bureaucratic issues and visa restrictions for Turkish citizens have been mentioned as the main obstacles for the cooperation between the two countries. While the common culture and history between the two countries facilitate communication, there is a widespread belief that the cooperation culture in the border region is not at the desired level. Both sides believe that increasing cooperation will only be possible with the provision of new funds.

Table 1. Socio-economic and administrative characteristics of Bulgarian and Turkish border region

	Bulgaria	Turkey
Administrative	Supranational (EU), National (Central Government), Local Governments IPA Funds for border regions No visa restrictions for Bulgarian (EU) citizens for entry to Turkey	National (Central Government), Local Governments Limited use of structural funds Visa restrictions for Turkish citizens for entry to Bulgaria
Economic	Transition economy Rising unemployment Local trade and daily suitcase trade Touristic and health related crossings	Developing economy Rising unemployment Positive economic effects of relations with İstanbul Touristic and social related crossings
Social	Aging population Migration of qualified labour	Younger and dynamic population Bridge for international migration

Source: authors' representation

The priority areas of the EU cross-border cooperation program that covered the cities of Burgas, Yambol and Haskovo from Bulgaria, Edirne and Kirklareli from Turkey has changed since 2004. For the 2004-2006 period, the priority areas were environmental management, small-budget and infrastructure projects; for the 2007-2013 period, they were sustainable social and economic development, quality of life and technical support and for the 2014-2020 period, they were environment and sustainable tourism (Keep.eu, 2020)³. While there were five border cooperation program projects carried out between 2004-2006, the number increased to 69 in the 2007-2013 period where local governments were the most active actors. During the 2014-2020 period, the number of projects reached 78, local administrations/municipalities and non-governmental organizations being the key actors (Bulgaria-Turkey IPA Cross-Border Programme, 2020). Although the project processes that started and successfully completed using EU funds have positive results on both sides, the lack of institutionalization of the cooperation culture and the lack of social capacity makes these actors - soft actors.

The survey results show that 76.8% of the participants believe that national level policies have positive effects on cross-border relations between Bulgaria and Turkey. On the other hand, 75% think that supranational decisions considerably affect cross-border relations and 97.4% consider the municipality, governorate and official institutions as the most important actors in the border region. Almost all

³ EU Interreg project and programme database, (retrieved from: <https://keep.eu/programmes/10/>)

participants underline the influence of local actors in building up cross-border relations, a fact that shows that in establishing a common governance framework for such regions, the local level should carefully be taken into consideration.

Turkey-Greece Border Region

The borderline between Turkey and Greece is of nearly 200 km. On the Greek side of the border, there are three administrative units at NUTs III level: Xanthi, Rhodope and Evros provinces. On the Turkish side, Edirne is the provincial administration at NUTs III level. Turkey-Greece cross-border relationships follow a historical development path regarding pre- and post-nation-state periods. With the dissolution of the administrative structure of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the new nation-state of Turkish Republic, the new and sharply drawn borderline defined the sovereignty of the two nation-states. Drawing a sharp borderline between Greece and Turkey fragmented the border region economically and spatially. Historically, relations between Turkey and Greece have undergone several fluctuations. During the period of non-communication, because of the prominent security specific policies and the Cyprus problem, border regions transferred into economically and socially marginalized regions. However, after the 2000s, a more communicative era has started in Turkish-Greek relations, with the creation of several dialog systems at national level.

The national level is the most critical administrative level for organizing the progress of relationships of the two countries, being related to the historical context and the vulnerability of the relationships. The supranational or the local level is not as decisive and politically effective as the national level. Although there are various EU funding instruments (Interreg-CBC, IPA-CBC and ENI/ENPI CBC) to support administrative, social and economic reforms, as well as regional and cross-border cooperation between neighbouring countries, these funds could not be used effectively because of the decision-making mechanisms at national levels. Since the IPA-CBC program, which is open to the participation of local actors, is coordinated by central governments, local institutions can benefit from funds only if they succeed in the partner selection of the central government (Sezgin and Erkut, 2014).

Socio-economic relations between Turkey and Greece show diversity at local and national levels. Despite the unilateral visa arrangements like Bulgaria's, border crossings are more intensive at Greece border. Cross-border relations are established via two border gates (Pazarkule, İpsala), which are specially used for local trade and tourism. The geographic location of these gates also increases the economic significance of the border region in terms of regional trade and tourism but not as strong as Bulgaria border region. Cross-border passages are maintained at the local level especially by daily trips for shopping. The residents of close border settlements like Orestiada, Rizia, Kastanies and NeaVyssa often visit Edirne for shopping. The content of local trade is different from Bulgaria-Turkey border region, hence Greek

citizens cross the border for buying products for suitable prices. The products bought by visitors on the other side of the border are mostly food (70.8 %), alcohol (41.1 %) and clothing (59.4 %). In addition, related to the spatial proximity of Istanbul to the border, 11% of the Greek side crossings is for the socio-cultural visit of Istanbul.

Greece's border region has been faced with severe regional disparities, as well as a considerable development gap with the entire country regarding the EU average (European Commission, 2011b). Although some efforts have been made to eliminate the regional disparities between regions, the convergence between the Greek regions was below the European average during the period of 1995-2005 (Tsiomas, Sakkas and Baltas, 2014). The level of regional GDP per capita in the richest region of Attica (28.500 \$) is twice as high as the Anatoliki Makedonia region (14.600 \$), which has the lowest GDP per capita in the country (Eurostat, 2016). Because of significant migration to more developed areas in Greece and to the other EU countries since the 1990s, the population at the Greek part of the border region has declined at slow pace. The population change between 2009-2019 for Xanthi, Rhodope and Evros provinces is % -0.76, where the current total population is 369.487 (Eurostat, 2019). Low birth rates in the region have also resulted in an increasing number of an ageing population. On the other side, the population of Edirne increased by 4.28% between 2009-2019 (Eurostat, 2020). Edirne, as one of the biggest cities in the region, with 411.528 inhabitants in 2019, acts as a regional centre when compared to the comparatively small cities of Greek border region. The ageing population, the high unemployment rate among young graduates and the immigration of qualified labour force on the Greek side, and the relatively increasing population and employment potentials on the Turkish side create an unequal balance between the border regions of the neighbouring countries. In addition, weak linkages among national governments increase the fragility of the border region.

Survey results show that the characteristics of border crossings in Greece's border region are different from Bulgaria's. A relatively higher level of economic welfare in Greece border region is observed from the survey results when compared to Bulgaria. The lack of dual citizenship with Greece, unlike Bulgaria, and the EU visa regulations make the younger population less likely to cross the border. Therefore, border crossings from Turkey to Greece under the age of 30 is quite low. The reason of cross-border relations is mainly touristic, followed by cultural, social and educational reasons. There is a significant number of Turkish minorities from Greece who prefer to build cross-border relations with Turkey for educational purposes. The facts that the dissatisfaction of education in minority schools and the higher quality of schools in Turkey are the main reasons for the border crossings for educational purposes.

Table 2. summarizes the general socio-economic and administrative characteristics of the border region of Greece and Turkey.

Table 2. Socio-economic and administrative characteristics of Greek and Turkish border region

	Greece	Turkey
Administrative	Supranational (EU), National (Central Government), Local Governments Political constraints in the use of structural funds No visa restrictions for Greek (EU citizens) for entry to Turkey	National (Central Government), Local Governments Political constraints in the use of structural funds Visa restrictions for Turkish citizens for entry to Greece
Economic	Austerity policies for the economic crises Regional disparities compared to other regions	Developing economy and investment capacity Relatively balanced regional development
Social	Aging population Moderate migration Social relations with İstanbul	Younger and dynamic population Limited migration Spatial closeness to İstanbul

Source: authors' representation

For the Turkey-Greece border region, national actors are the main determinants of cross-border relationships. Cross-border cooperation practices of the EU to support the integration within the union, could not be realized because of the decisions of national actors. During the 2004-2006 period, under Interreg III, nearly 66 million Euro were activated for cooperation, economic development, quality of life, environment, culture and technical assistance for the region. However, since 2006, because of some political reasons, the use of EU funds has been paused, so the common structural projects and the production of concrete interaction among the institutions and organizations at the local level have slowed down. Although a special network named Cross-Border Cooperation Network of Border Prefectures was built among Turkey's, Greece's and Bulgaria's border Governorships to take precautions against natural disasters and infectious diseases in 2003, the Network could not prepare any common projects (Özerdem, 2011, p. 36).

The use of EU structural funds in border regions has initially created a revival in cross-border relations, yet a new fund has not been used jointly since 2006 by Greece and Turkey. Starting from the 2007-2013 period, although the importance of supporting integration within the EU has been emphasized in one of the three main objectives of the EU cohesion policy, the border region has not sufficiently benefited from cross-border cooperation practices. With the available funds, only "micro" border collaborations (Perkmann, 2003) such as bicycle races, festivals, sister cities and sightseeing tours could be realized under the leadership of local actors. These micro-level cross-border collaborations and small-scale projects help to overcome

the bureaucratic obstacles, lack of mutual trust, language barriers and limited project development abilities between the local actors.

A clear majority of the research respondents (91,1%) desire to increase the economic relations between Greece and Turkey. In relation to this, 65,7% of them think that the decisions for cross-border relations are mostly given by supranational level actors, and 90.3% of the respondents consider that the most active actors in the border region are the municipality, governorate and local official institutions.

3.2. Governance framework: actors, common norms and constraints

From the in-depth interviews and survey results, it is revealed that both regions have different dynamics in economic, social and institutional terms. Considering the field survey and the related literature, the study proposes a specific governance framework that takes into consideration the rapidly changing internal and external dynamics of the border region regardless of the political decision-making mechanisms. The governance structure in the border region differs from the governance at national level due to the argument of keeping the diverse social and institutional systems and stakeholders together. As coordination, cooperation and joint activities in border regions depend entirely on successful governance models and processes (Scherer and Zumbusch, 2011), the proposed governance framework mainly consists of four components; actors and decision-making mechanisms, including institutions and organizations at all levels and citizens of the region, common norms, constraints, and governance capacity among neighbouring countries that altogether help to form the unique governance framework for the EU and Turkish border region.

Actors and decision-making mechanisms: institutions, organizations and citizens

Various administrative scales and different decision-making mechanisms make it impossible to control and administer the border region by a single authority. Relationships arising from the partnerships among actors at any political level perform an outstanding function for border regions, even if there are spontaneous local interactions behind the scene. Despite the protection of national borders strictly for security-oriented concerns, the social, economic and administrative relationships, especially emerging at the local level, constitute fuzzy borders for a mutually agreed governance framework. This framework can vary due to the specific national, regional and local characteristics of the border region. At this point, the governance framework to be constructed from top to bottom or bottom to top is proposed by using the characteristics of the neighbouring countries that will coincide with the agreed governance mechanisms in the region.

The actors in border regions can be evaluated in terms of administrative, economic and socio-cultural aspects (Varol and Soylemez, 2018). In this context, the administrative actors are defined as supranational entities, central and local governments and international organizations acting as promoters. Economic actors are comprised of chambers, businessmen and firms acting as catalysts in limited action spaces. Finally, socio-cultural actors are composed of qualified local governments seeking mutual benefits of the region, but overshadowed by national sensitivities, universities, non-governmental organizations, and citizens. Socio-cultural actors act as mediators, since local level cross-border actions, which are incompatible with the policies of central governments are maintained informally by civil society organizations and citizens. Occasionally, in some national level political conflicts, when central governments decide to stop their cross-border relations, socio-cultural actors can slow down rather than stop their relations. This brings a key role to local actors, who have relatively less political power compared to national level actors for the maintenance of the relations at the border.

In developing a cross-border governance framework defining the existing or proposed institutions, which are open to collaboration, and presenting the tools they use are crucial facts. For the EU and Turkish border region, the main problem is the institutional counterpart, where on the Bulgarian and Greek side there is an engagement to a supranational entity (EU) and on the Turkish side there is only the nation-state. In the EU multilevel governance model, as inter and trans-governmental negotiations operate under a hierarchical system (Börzel, 2010), supranational bodies of the EU can have legally binding decisions that the member states follow. Thus, the two sides of the border region cannot act on the same ground, which creates unevenness. Since the external borderlines of the EU are considered as a barrier for non-EU members, national level decision mechanisms of the non-member neighbouring countries are becoming the main means for international relations. Nevertheless, the use of EU regional development funds as an instrument to support cross-border visions, governance and actions helps to overcome the problem of unequal level institutional counterparts and helps in establishing the governance framework of border region.

For the Turkey-Bulgaria border region, municipalities are the most active actors at the level of producing concrete actions and projects in the border region. The successfully completed EU project processes have positive results for both sides. It is revealed that cross-border cooperation is essential to increase mutual benefit, communication and interaction between Turkey and Bulgaria. However, the main obstacles for cross-border cooperation are the lack of institutionalization of the cooperation culture, the lack of social capacity that causes the actors to leave the projects incomplete, the occasional historical and current political conflicts, bureaucracy and visas restrictions for Turkish citizens.

The vice president of Pınarhisar Municipality-Turkey emphasizes the obstacles of cross-border cooperation as *“The lack of personnel caused the previous*

two projects to be left unfinished. On the other hand, the change of institutional priorities in newly elected local administrations, the weak institutional memory, and finding the right address at the right time cause problems for cross-border cooperation, even if we are open to cross-border cooperation”.

Besides municipalities, business associations and several NGOs also develop cross-border projects. The projects carried out within the framework of EU financial funds are a channel to strengthen the institutional dialogue and to build up new cooperation environments for creating common benefits for both sides. Unfortunately, when the projects are completed, not both parties can achieve an institutional memory to maintain cooperation and to overcome the barriers for sustainable interaction. The head of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Haskovo-Bulgaria describes the barriers and the ways to overcome them: *“The cross-border investments are limited due to the administrative barriers. The closeness of Turkish cities allows us for easier planning and carrying out of joint initiatives. For long-time partnership, we create non-business/social relationships with our partners across the border; otherwise, by the end of the project, the partnerships generally end.”*

In the case of Turkey-Greece border region, due to the unstable political situation, an appropriate environment for increasing cross-border relationships has not been created by EU cross-border programs. Since 2006, cross-border funds have not been utilized, due to the political conflicts and national sensitivities of both sides. Although the budget of the 2014-2020 INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria cross-border cooperation program was defined as 123 million Euros (Keep.eu), a joint program was planned for Turkey-Greece border. This incapability to use EU funds slows down the common structural projects and the production of concrete interaction among the institutions and organizations at the local level. In addition, it disrupts the dynamic environment for NGOs at the border and weakens their acting. As a result, there is a drawback for local governments to maintain formal communication and interaction with the other side of the border. The main determinant here is the political uncertainty and reluctance at the national level. In this case, all local interaction is made through soft actors, like NGOs and citizens. A bicycle tournament with international participation envisaging three countries planned at local level by NGOs in the countries can be given as an example to local cross-border interaction. However, there can be some obstacles for such a bicycle tour regarding bureaucratic and visa issues.

To sum up, despite the similarities of the implementation tools for the neighbouring countries in the border region, completely different results can emerge. The critical reason for this is the level of effectiveness in the practices of national and local actors. The establishment of common decision-making mechanisms for maintaining the processes which are not based on strict rules but on common norms related to border regions is important for the development of cross-border relationships. Local governments and participatory approaches in the process are more prominent than implementing the requirements of the central governments.

Common norms

The shared objectives, democracy and mutual benefit that will be developed together with the values specific to the border region are significant in terms of the initiation and sustainability of governance. In the governance approaches discussed for the border regions, the consideration of democracy is not the same as the national level practices due to the inequality created by the border. For this reason, the governance approaches for border regions is desired to contribute to the development of a common democracy culture (Hirst, 1994; Fung and Wright, 2003). Here, within the framework of the basic rules and norms, the boundaries of democracy have to be drawn by dialogue and negotiation with the local actors and citizens of the region affected by the decisions. Therefore, the governance of the border region can be democratic, to the extent that it is maintained by democratically elected politicians. Thus, it is possible to reduce the effects of national differences, ongoing in the border region. Border regions are often associated with the term „cultural proximity”. In this respect, countries should be able to utilize cultural proximity in border regions (Felbermayr and Toubal, 2010) to mobilize the potential of interaction.

For the Turkey-Bulgaria border region, the common culture and history between the two countries make it easier to communicate, although the language appears to be a barrier. Language problems can be solved if common goals are established. In addition, it is widely believed that the culture of cooperation in the region is not at the desired level and is open for further development, which can be achieved through the provision of new funds.

For the Turkey-Greece border region, rather than the national culture of democracy, the most fundamental issue is to initiate a common business culture to be created with efforts on both sides. The development of common norms for different nations in the border region is important for the continuation of communication rather than the integration of these regions. These norms need to be determined commonly at the local and national levels.

Constraints

For developing an effective governance framework for the border region, national sensitivities/constraints emerge as a critical issue to deal with. National sensitivities constitute limitations to be considered because of their psychological effects. On the other hand, since these sensitivities contain various fragilities, they should be regarded by decision-makers in the context of their impact on the border region governance. The fragilities can also harm economic relations. In such cases, the main constraints can be handled by local actors by considering the national sensitivities/fragilities.

Turkey-Bulgaria cross-border relations have constraints on the limited use of EU funds (only 6,5 million Euro for 2014-2020) for cross-border projects and lack

of awareness for building a sustainable institutional capacity after completing the projects. In addition, by handling the national and ethnic minority fragilities, it is crucial to develop social and human capacity to sustain the reconciliatory environment at the local level. In terms of the common governance framework, the issues that are lacking arise as economic, social, cultural and political relations, respectively. In the survey, respondents emphasize that improvement of social, economic and political relations is necessary and most of them (90.2%) think that visa restrictions are the main constraint to realize this. In addition, 91.9% of the respondents think that reducing bureaucratic restrictions at border crossings and facilitating border crossings would influence relations positively.

For the Turkey-Greece border region, national sensitivities and fragilities are the main obstacles. It is unlikely that an effective governance mechanism can work for the region through supportive policies for the fragilities and psychological effects in both countries. In addition, there are administrative and visa restrictions and limited communication among government agencies of each side that limits the development of the cross-border relationships. An important number of the participants (80.5%) agree that the reduction of visa restrictions for border crossings would have a beneficial impact on their relations. On the other hand, the rate of those who think that religious, language and cultural differences are barriers between the two countries is only 9.7%. To sum up, in establishing a common governance framework, policies, strategies and actions aimed to overcome the vulnerabilities via the leadership of national governments are required for the Turkish-Greece border region.

Governance capacity

Governance capacity reflects the situation related to the necessary skills and resources in the governance space (Brusis, 2003). It should be evaluated before developing a governance framework in the border regions. It is more difficult to establish and maintain the governance capacity built on commitment, efficiency, management, consensus building and cooperation (Brusis, 2003) in border regions than on national scales.

The decision-making mechanisms related with governance capacity affect the relevant processes in the governance of border region. These mechanisms are established through networks between local and central levels. Creating and maintaining a common process in decision-making by considering the characteristics of the border regions is an important step in the institutionalization of governance. However, this is a challenging step in terms of its implementation in the border region governance.

The major constraints for building the governance capacity of the Turkey-EU border region are the asymmetric structure of the region, quickly changing cross-border relations and the limited use of regional funds. Socio-economic inequalities,

migration flows, minority issues and visa restrictions applied to Turkish citizens are the main reasons for the asymmetric structure of the region. All of these create a kind of filtering for the differences between economic, social, administrative and spatial dimensions of border permeability (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of actors, common norms, constraints and governance capacity of border regions

	Turkey-Bulgaria	Turkey-Greece
Actors	Different administrative systems Dominant central government policies Strong local governments and NGOs	Different administrative systems Dominant central government policies Weak local governments, moderate NGOs
Common Norms	More kinship relations Maintaining relations with minorities Dynamic and younger Turkish population / aging Bulgarian population Common objectives in social, economic and cultural bases mostly build by local actors and NGOs	Less kinship relations Minority problems Dynamic and younger Turkish population / aging Greek population Compulsory common objectives mostly related with environmental issues such as flood or pollution prevention
Constraints	Asymmetric visa regulations Limited use of EU CB funds Bureaucratic restrictions	Asymmetric visa regulations Problems to use EU funds Bureaucratic restrictions
Governance Capacity	Lack of institutionalization and weak institutional memory Cooperation culture on EU funds Problem of efficacy at different levels	Potential for local level actors Low level of formal communication

Source: authors' representation

As a result, the governance framework to be drawn for the border regions is not independent of historical contexts, social ties, stakeholder willingness, administrative constraints and governance capacity. Border regions have special dynamics and consist of different decision-making levels from supranational to local, in which various actors interact. The framework from political to operational level created by each administrative unit (supranational, national and local) requires specific evaluation of the border regions. Constraints that may occur at each level should not be ignored, and historical and cultural connections should be utilized in favour of the local interaction in border regions.

As the two EU countries (Greece and Bulgaria) have different socio-spatial structures and various types of cross-border relations with Turkey (Varol and Soylemez, 2019), different administrative systems and dominant national governments stand out as basic elements that make up the differences in the border regions. For border regions, governance processes may be interrupted by the sensitivities and fragilities that can be experienced especially at the national level. At this point, supporting the soft actions of NGOs together with local actors, who know the border area more than anyone else, will help the border regions to get out of the locked-in situation. Regardless of their legal status, the fact that the relevant local actors in the border region governance process and the platforms that will bring these actors together will be able to produce faster solutions than the restrictive perspectives of the national actors. It is important to define specific common norms according to the dynamics of the countries; decreasing the constraints among neighbouring countries and increasing the governance capacity will help the development of cross-border relations and the formation of cooperation culture.

Conclusions

There are advantages and disadvantages of being at the border regions. Traditionally security-oriented policies and the marginalization of social and economic life in border regions have caused these regions to become peripheries for the countries. However, with the effect of globalization, the increasing relationships of any type by the neighbouring countries have transferred the border regions into interaction and activity spaces, which have created the potentials to develop effective governance frameworks. In this study, governance of the EU and Turkey's cross-border region was evaluated under two dimensions by the analyses obtained from the field studies: the socio-economic and administrative structure of the border region and the proposal for the governance framework.

In organizing unique governance frameworks for different border regions, it is crucial to analyse socio-economic and administrative characteristics of the neighbouring countries. Analysing the socio-economic and administrative structures of the neighbouring countries helps to understand the differences in each side that assist in shaping a mutually agreed governance framework. Such a mutually agreed governance framework will respond more effectively to fragile and complex environments like border regions.

The cross-border regions of the study consist of multi-layered administrative structures, which have different institutional structures and practices for each side. Although supranational level policies play a crucial role for cross-border relations via EU structural funds, national governments are mostly effective in building the content of interaction and in regional decision-making. However, national-level decision-making mechanisms cannot develop strategic approaches to utilize the potentials of the region and lose this opportunity under the shadow of national

sensitivities. In light of these findings, it is revealed that political decisions given under national sensitivities affect border regions negatively and prevent the socio-spatial development of border regions. On the other hand, the formal and informal relations, which are critical for increasing the interaction on both sides, are formed by the mobility of local level actors among countries. Social networks among local organizations and citizens may act as bridges to maintain the cross-border relations. Regardless of their legal and decisive status, the fact that these local actors and the platforms that bring both sides together may create more effective and rapid results for increasing the interactions on both sides.

Findings obtained from field studies show that the EU funds create an economic dynamism for both border regions, but a sustainable impact cannot be achieved since the project priorities mostly do not match the priorities of the border region. In this framework, the priorities of EU funds determined at supranational and national level might better be determined by local actors at the local level for creating a common goal. It is explored from the case that to propose a governance framework in the border region, it is necessary to provide a minimum level of consensus, considering different institutional structures and priorities, as well as regional fragilities. Then, for achieving a shared vision and objectives for the border region, high level political support and long-term commitments come into play. As stated by Housen-Couriel (1994) local governments should have the capacity to build an effective governance capacity by considering international relations and by cooperating with different levels of actors. A broad scope of governance is created by providing more flexible and comprehensive recommendations for the implementation of the policies related to the fragility of border regions.

The presence of national sensitivities in different dimensions and the lack of coordination and cooperation appear as obstacles for facilitating the governance framework. The establishment of different platforms for bringing together actors from both sides of the border region will help to eliminate the problems arising from the differences in practices in the region and will enable to increase the governance capacity of the region.

As a result, the conceptual framework suggested in this paper could constitute a useful theoretical background, guiding systematic and comparative empirical work for the development of cross-border governance approach in different regional and national contexts. In this context, the governance framework and policy recommendations that will increase the interaction and adaptation among neighbouring countries may highlight the regions where mutual interaction and adaptation will provide the potential for development. In addition, the proposed governance framework provides essential foundations for more tailor-made policy approaches which may directly affect the success of these collaborations.

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