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# ARGUMENTA OECONOMICA

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FOR OPENING THE ACADEMIC YEAR 1996/1997

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**INAUGURAL LECTURE  
FOR OPENING THE ACADEMIC YEAR 1996/1997**

*Zbigniew Przybyła\**

**EURO-REGIONALIZATION: PROCESSES IN POLAND  
AND THE ROLE OF THE WROCLAW UNIVERSITY  
OF ECONOMICS IN TRANSBORDER COOPERATION**

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The idea of so-called euro-regions was created in Western Europe at the end of the Second World War. It arose from the need to prevent the repetition in the future of such a damaging conflict and replacing hatred amongst nations with peaceful co-existence and mutual cooperation. Therefore the primary impulse in the creation of euro-regions was primarily of a political nature developing later into cultural links leading to better international contacts. It also fairly promptly turned out that euro-regions successfully met economic targets, solving the problems of the border territories, peripheral from the geographical and economic viewpoint and requiring restructuring.

As a result of the conscious and deliberate influence of the Council of Europe and the European Union from the beginning of the 1950's, the creation of over 90 associations of transborder cooperation took place, existing within the legal framework defined by:

– European Framework Convention on transborder cooperation between communities and local authorities (the so-called Madrid Convention of 21st May 1980).

– European Chart of Border Region as set by the Council of Europe on 19th November 1991.

– European Charter of Local Self-Government agreed by the Council of Europe on 15th October 1995.

The term euro-region requires a short explanation. Among many interpretations of this term we can accept one stating that a euro-region is a particular kind of so-called transborder region, that is an area situated on both sides of a state border. As a necessary feature, one has to assume the elimination or a low level of formalities at the state border, allowing "free flow" and opportunities for active cooperation. Often in practice some areas are

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geographically homogenous and constitute a cultural community based on historical factors.

Transborder regions as territorial units of border cooperation correspond in reality with different levels of territorial links existing at the state's borders. Among them can be local ties (contacts between towns and communes), regional ties (contacts of groups of communes, provinces, lands etc.), and interregional ties (contacts of groups of provinces, lands, cantons of various countries).

A euro-region as a specific kind of transborder region is characterized by a higher level of the institutionalization of transborder cooperation structures (for example creating specialized bi-lateral offices, councils of euro-regions, working groups, etc.) and more frequent contacts with specialized organs coordinating such cooperation within the European Union, especially the Association of European Border Regions.

The Madrid Convention and the European Charter of Territorial Self-Government state clearly that euro-regions as units do not have a legal identity and are not exempt from national jurisdiction, administration or control. Therefore the local self-government bodies within the euro-regions cannot in any case reach agreements on matters not arising within their legal competence.

One should also mention here the principles for transborder cooperation, such as:

- good neighbourliness amongst the inhabitants,
- voluntary cooperation in various forms of cooperation,
- partnership, equality of the sides involved,
- striving for symmetry and parity,
- the preservation of identity (national, state, regional) by cooperating units and communities,
  - consensus (searching for a common ground),
  - duty of cooperating in financing the activities of the euro-region.

The direct reason behind Poland joining the regionalizing process can be found in the changes in the political and economic system which started in 1989. Among the most important factors in creating euro-regions in our country were the following:

- the accepted structure of the system based on the principles of a market economy and democracy,
- new legal and institutional basis of international relations between Poland and her neighbouring countries,
  - new political shape of the western borders (which are also the EU borders) which in the context of association and expected membership of the European Union meant the need for the active participation in transborder cooperation and ratification of relevant documents,

– active participation of local and regional communities in initiating transborder cooperation, sometimes a continuation of existing links.

Expecting the benefits arising from border cooperation and a particular “fashion for euro-regions” during 1991 to 1995 a significant part of Poland’s borders were included in euro-regional structures. We have to distinguish here between:

– functioning euro-regions, that is such areas and institutions of transborder association where the organizational and legal procedures have been fully completed in relation to local and international law and

– euro-regions in the process of being organized, that is having formulated a declaration from both sides of future transborder cooperation.

Among the already functioning euro-regions in Poland belong:

– at the western border:

1. Euro-region ‘Nysa’ (December 1991).
2. Euro-region ‘Szprewa-Nysa-Bohr’ (September 1993).
3. Euro-region ‘Pro Europa Viadrina’ (December 1993).
4. Euro-region ‘Pomerania’ (December 1995).
5. Euro-region ‘Glacensis’.

– at the southern border:

1. Transborder region ‘Śląsk-Morawy’ (September 1992).
2. Euro-region ‘Tatry’ (August 1994).
3. Euro-region ‘Karpaty’ (February 1993).

– at the eastern border:

1. Euro-region ‘Bug’ (September 1995).

Among the euro-regions in the advanced phase of organization there is:

– in the north-east:

1. Euro-region ‘Niemen’.

One should stress here that euro-regions do not exhaust the beneficial and sometimes more effective possibilities of border cooperation. One could mention here various transborder agreements (unions, associations etc.) of which in recent years there have been signed a total of 12; for example the Bi-lateral Protected Area of Odra, “the green lungs of Europe” etc. Non-formalized agreements and contracts agreed by local authorities also play a significant role here.

Among the several institutions involved in the process of transborder cooperation is the Wrocław University of Economics, particularly the Department of Regional Economy and Tourism in Jelenia Góra which plays an important role. The staff and students of this department are well-placed in the areas adjacent to the border and at the same time take a direct part in the process of forming, organizing and functioning of the structures in (the first in central Europe) the ‘Nysa’ euro-region. These links are confirmed by the

membership of the Jelenia Góra department to the Association of Polish Communes in the 'Nysa' euro-region.

There are a few levels of involvement and influence on the part of the staff of the Wrocław University of Economics with transborder cooperation:

- initiating and organizing – through participating in the conference of the three sides involved in creating the 'Nysa' euro-region (Żytawa, 23-25 May 1991) and in the activities of many working groups, commissions and sections of the euro-region (especially in those of the Centre of Coordinating Academic Research of the Euro-region) and work connected with protecting the natural environment;

- academic and publishing cooperation – mainly through the work of the above-mentioned Centre as a result of an agreement signed in November 1991 by the Technical University of Liberec, the High School of Technology, Economy and Social Affairs in Żytawa, the branch of the Wrocław Polytechnic in Jelenia Góra and the Department of Regional Tourism of the Wrocław University of Economics. The Centre coordinates the work of over 100 academic staff active in eleven joint research sections connected with the subject matter of the working groups functioning in the euro-region, like for example sections of environmental protection, tourism, social policies, production, and economy to name but a few. On this basis the Centre in 1995 saw the creation of the 'Science' working group which is widely considered to be one of the most dynamic and effective organizations in the structures of the 'Nysa' euro-region.

Among the examples of academic cooperation in which the Wrocław University of Economics participates is included:

- co-organizing conferences and meetings, for example: "The Theory and Practice of Regional and Local Economy", "Ecological Problems of the 'Nysa' Euro-region" etc., some of these were organized together with the Centre of Local Self-Government in Jelenia Góra financed by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Together in 1994-96 they organized three student seminars devoted to cooperation and development of the 'Nysa' euro-region;

- publishing by the Centre of the biannual *Prace Naukowe* (Research Papers), a professional publication devoted to the theoretical and practical aspects of socio-economic life in the euro-region, written by the academic staff and students of the euro-region. Here one should mention that the first scientific monographs on the subject of the 'Nysa' euro-region appeared mainly through the initiative of the staff of the Wrocław University of Economics, among them are: *Euro-region 'Nysa' – Three Years of Experience* (Warsaw 1994), *Transborder Cooperation in Poland – the Results and Possibilities of Polish Cooperation as Seen in 'Euro-region' 'Neisse' – 'Nisa' – Nysa* (Jelenia Góra 1996), and also doctoral and magisterial theses. Among the important

enterprises in the academic cooperation there are bilateral agreements between the Wrocław University of Economics and other institutions like Higher School of Technology, Economy & Social Affairs in Żytawa. Of special mention is the joint research undertaken by both these bodies since 1993 as part of the DAAD programme, where the results are presented during yearly conferences. Apart from the staff from the Jelenia Góra branch, academic staff from other departments of the Wrocław University of Economics are also involved; among their achievements are joint publications – for example the *German – Polish Business Dictionary*. An especially valuable form of cooperation is the exchange of postgraduate students and the organization of courses in learning Polish and German for both the academic staff and students, and the participation of the Polish language teachers in specialist conferences organized by the German side;

- didactic cooperation – mainly through the International Institute of High Schools in Żytawa. The Institute was created in February 1993 on a model of a European University, and according to the principles created by the Wrocław University of Economics it should constitute one of the most important forms of academic cooperation. Within a three year period, the Institute will educate specialists who “will understand the economic and social realities of the Czech Republic, Germany and Poland”. The basic conditions of entry is a lower grade diploma for German students, and completion of at least four academic semesters by Czech and Polish students. In the academic year 1993/94, the Institute initiated a course in Environmental Engineering. The following year the programme was extended with two additional courses: Economic Engineering and Enterprise Economics. The Wrocław University of Economics participates mainly through being part of the decision-making bodies (for example the International Board of the Institute), commissions qualifying in recruitment of academic staff and the yearly dispatch of a group of Polish students who also have the option of graduating in Wrocław. In the academic year 1996/97, there are 50 Wrocław University of Economics students studying at the Institute.

At this point I would underline the particular input of the academic staff from Wrocław in the creation of the basis of Polish transborder policies – especially Professor Bolesław Winiarski, whose research and expertise are particularly valued in Poland and abroad.

In conclusion, my opinion on the chances of the development of the euro-regionalization process in Poland is that it mainly depends on the prospects of its benefits as seen by the local communities from transborder cooperation and the changing attitudes towards the citizens of neighbouring countries. Here a major role should be played by the contacts between academic staff and the students and it seems that we play this role not too badly.