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## INTRODUCTION

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Research on borders in geography, political science, sociology and related sciences are very well developed; however, the changing functions of borders and their perceptions engender a need to continue observation and reflection. Particularly intense border changes have been occurring since the fall of the iron curtain in Central and Eastern Europe. The situation in these countries was and still remains varied. After the shock of transformation, the countries of Central Europe quickly chose a direction of integration with Euro-Atlantic structures and NATO. Countries arising on the rubble of the USSR were in a more difficult situation. Before they became involved in integration processes, they had to undergo a period of building their own statehood and seek domestic and international recognition (C. Mądry and V. Sochircaelaborate on this problem in their article). A lack of or insufficient social and economic reforms hindered or prevented these processes. The more so the effort and the achieved effect in the so-called Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) should be appreciated.

The present issue of the *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society* is dedicated to issues related to borders, crossing them, building cross-border, or in a wider sense, international relationships (in different scales) and the problems that the development of such cooperation faces.

The issue starts with W. Szymańska's article, which examines the changing functions of political borders in Central and Eastern Europe. The author indicates the gradation of the permeability of borders from an almost full one as part of the Schengen area and between Belarus and Russia, through a partial one (within the EU but outside the Schengen area) to the heavily guarded and restrictive ones, e.g. between Ukraine and its rebellious or annexed territories.

The issue of barriers (bottlenecks) to cooperation is also discussed by E. Vodichev, I. Glazyrina, and B. Krasnoyarova. Based on the example of the timber industry, they discuss cross-border cooperation in the East of Russia. The authors point to the fiat in decision-making on cooperation and other issues that prevent the emergence and functioning of cross-border regions, especially on the border with China. They also recommend benefitting from international experience and the institutional strengthening of cross-border cooperation.

The necessity of cooperation in the field of management and environmental protection, especially in the near-Arctic territories, characterised by a slow recovery process, is postulated by G. Khartimova, T. Alieva and L. Ivanova. Functioning already 22 years project Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR), which includes synchronisation of actions at the administrative, scientific, NGO and residents' level, is

the exemplification of a successful form of not only cooperation but also integration activities described by them. However, the authors point out a dependence of the smooth functioning of the program on political decisions, including various sanctions.

The diversity of approaches to cross-border cooperation within one country is presented by J. Smutek and P. Łonyszyn in their paper. The authors also point to the political conditions of integration and disintegration processes by illustrating them with two mesoregions: Western and Eastern Poland. Cooperation on the western border of Poland goes in the direction of integration of cross-border areas, although the authors call for greater involvement of the scientific community. On the eastern border of Poland collaboration encounters barriers of the political (belonging to different political organizations), the infrastructural (particularly deficiencies in the transport network) and the institutional nature.

Still another type of cross-border relations is described in the paper by J. Bruneckienė, I. Zykiene and V. Stankevičius. Based on the example of two towns on both sides of the Lithuanian-Polish border (Alytus and Elk), they analyse their investment attractiveness from the point of view of businessmen and youth. The authors list the factors that enhance this assessment in both groups as well as those that constitute a barrier. They note that for the former of the studied groups, in addition to the infrastructural issues, the business environment, etc., personal contacts are also important. For the latter of the studied groups not so much the quality of life is important as, above all, educational and then work and career opportunities. The authors point out that educational and economic factors are essential to stop the adverse trends of migration from these areas.

The next two articles are devoted to economic issues of international cooperation. C. Mądry and V. Sochirca focus on trade and investment links in Moldova. They show the importance of natural and historical factors as determinants of the commodity structure in foreign trade. Shaped already in the Tsarist, and especially in the Soviet times, the country's economy is characterised mainly by exporting farm produce and low-tech commodities. The changes that occur in the structure of commodity of exports indicate a certain role of foreign capital in its diversity; however, the gap separating Moldova from other European countries is still very wide. The authors also show the sensitivity of Moldova's economy to external political factors, especially to links with the Russian and Ukrainian markets.

The importance of Russia for investment processes in the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia)

is also discussed by A. Pestich. In the article, trade links are only a backdrop for a discussion on Russian investment in these countries. Russia is not the biggest investor in those countries, and the structure of investment varies in particular countries. However, as the Author concludes, in recent years, targeting Russian investment at energy, finances and distribution has been increasing. The particular role is assigned to the development of control of Gazprom over gas distribution networks in these countries.

Authors of articles in this issue come from ten different scientific centres in the four countries. The issues presented in particular papers, however, go beyond borders of those countries. The editor would like to thank the Authors for their articles, and Reviewers for their work, and at the same time he hopes that the presented topics will arouse readers' interest.

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