International Regional Co-operation in Europe: Institutions, Programmes and the Reform of Polish Regions Prior to the Membership in the European Union.
Globalisation generally refers to a process whereby the politics, economics, and culture of one state or nation penetrate other states or nations. Globalisation is also seen as a force that can unite economic and political forces in the first instance at a regional level, as in regional blocs like the Single Market and EMU of the European Union, which may, in time lead to full globalisation by blocks such as EU, NAFTA and ASEAN act jointly. According to that view, expansion of the European Union by Central and Eastern European states is a step in the process of globalisation. The interaction, which is taking place between the European Union Member States and the applicant states, is an example and a part of a larger scale process of globalisation.

The aim of this paper is to introduce, on the basis of empirical research, the main trends in international co-operation at the regional level. With the specific case study of Poland, concerned specifically with the regional (sub-national) level, the positive impact of globalisation on regional co-operation will be presented. Also, with the example of Poland, this paper will show how Central and Eastern European states are adjusting to the process of integration with the European Union, where the regional aspect is concerned. In order to illustrate the thesis behind this paper, the interaction between Euroregions and the regions of the Central and Eastern Europe characterised by cross-border co-operation will be explained.

Increasing globalisation and competition have a positive impact on the process of co-operation. Through regional competitiveness regional structures are competing for opportunities to speed-up their development. The way a region functions and its structures have become the main strategic assets enabling it to gain an advantage over other regions and attract dynamic investors. It seems, however, that international co-operation between regions is the most rational way of transforming the competitiveness of regional structures into co-operation. (Arbolevskiy, 1997). It is important to create networks of regional systems able to compete with external competition. The European Union created such a network of Euroregions under the auspices of its regional policy. (European Commission, 1998b; Keating, 1995).

This paper aims to provide information on the present condition of Polish regions and contemplate on the future regional structures.

The structure of international co-operation at regional level is under pressures from globalisation, and competition. Other influences include the legal and institutional bases of international co-operation. The aims of international co-operation include integration, specialisation, and balanced development. These aims can be achieved through Euroregions, commissions and councils for cross-border co-operation, co-ordination studies of spatial management, international links between regional institutions and authorities, bilateral agreements and contacts between regions. (Malendowski and Ratajczak, 1998).
Furthermore, the creation of a decentralised, effective and broad partnership is a key factor in the success of international regional co-operation. (European Commission, 1999a).

The globalisation of economic links has been accompanied by a dual process, which consists in the renaissance of regionalisation. From the point of view of local and regional communities the region is becoming an important public good. (Leonardi, 1993). It can attract investors and innovators, depending on the attractiveness and competitiveness of its economic and social space and its natural environment. There is well-justified pressure on the part of society for the government to respect autonomy, localism, regionalism and the principle of solidarity. (Kuklinski, 1998).

In the case of Central European states undergoing intense transformation, joining on a wide scale the network of economic, cultural and social international links allows them to improve their essential development resources. Long-term co-operation can be a source of support for transformation processes. It can also contribute to the specialisation of Polish regions and increase inter-branch co-operation, and thus accelerate Poland’s inclusion in the highly complex network of the modern international division of labour.

Decentralising the decision-making process in matters of international co-operation in a unitary state, and at least partially assigning responsibility to regions, enables it to exploit its comparative advantages more effectively.

First, empowering regions, or at least increasing the decision-making prerogatives of regional authorities, allows policy-makers, when working out a regional development strategy to detect and develop comparative benefits which cannot always be seen from the central level. Activating a region’s development resources allows the central authorities to delegate tasks and responsibilities to the regional level. (Yuill, Allen and Hull, 1980).

Secondly, decentralisation and international openness allow border regions to develop at an accelerated rate. Intense international interaction is necessary for comparative benefits to appear. A lack or limited interaction means that such benefits remain no more than potential advantages. Regional co-operation can lead to fast and regular contacts and an increase in the economic power of regions. (Keating, 1998; Keating and Hooghe, 1996).

Polish regions have a chance to play an increasing role and win greater benefits in those international structures associated with the international co-operation of regions. The most important goal is to secure political influence on the development of co-operation in Europe, as the positions of West and East European regions in the international community are not equally strong. Poland, therefore, seeks to gain influence in the Council of Europe, and even more so in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLARE) and the Association of European Regions (ARE) based in Strasbourg. Poland considers also adoption of such measures on European co-operation as will eliminate the regional disparities appearing in the
economic positions of different Polish regions. Polish regions try to influence international organisations (such as the EU or the Council of Europe) to undertake a step in increasing international co-operation between regions, particularly with respect to countries, regions and cross-border areas in Eastern Europe.

Polish regions understand and recognise the important role of the European Parliament as an influential political and opinion-forming body. Poland, through formal and informal channels, seeks ways of presenting issues connected with the international co-operation of regions that affect Polish interests to the Inter-Parliamentary Commission of the European Parliament and the Polish Sejm. It is vital for Poland to have a part in the development of new programmes, for instance, those concerned with pre-accession procedures.

Although Polish regions are not members of the Committee of Regions, the association agreement does allow them to take part in the Committee’s proceedings in the role of observers. (Council and Commission, 1993; European Commission 1993). An information and lobbying office serving the interests of Polish regions are being set up in Brussels. A large number of European regions have established offices for the purpose of informing regional authorities about the EU’s policies and initiatives. (McCarthy, 1997).

International co-operation between Euro-regions and regions of Central and Eastern European States hinges crucially on co-operation with Directorate General XVI and the INTERREG IIC programme, the aim of which is to stimulate international co-operation among regions bordering European Union Member States. (European Union, 1999; Kwiecinski, 1995).

Poland with its geographical, political and economic characteristics is well equipped to play a role in the international co-operation of regions along the East-West axis. In order to accomplish such role it is necessary to establish and stimulate Euroregions along Poland’s Eastern and Southern borders. (Malendowski and Ratajczak, 1998; Dziedzic, 1996).

Similarly important for strengthening the position of Polish regions in relation to their European partners would be active participation in the European Border Region Association (EBRA) and the Baltic Sub-Regional Conference. Better co-ordination of the activities of Poland’s representatives in these bodies is indispensable.

Polish government policy paves a way for enabling regional authorities to compete and co-operate with other regions in Europe as part of wider plan of European development. This process takes place through further developments in the field of regional policy.

With regard to the interests of international co-operation development of a network of Central European cities is needed, which may play an important role in creating a coherent European spatial structure. One relevant example of this is the co-operation between Baltic cities within the Union of Baltic Cities, which is having a significant impact on the European Union institutions in Brussels. (Gorzelak, 1995).
Polish regional development agencies and foundations organised within the National Association of Regional Development Agencies (NARDA) association, have in recent years established many important contacts and carried out many joint undertakings with foreign partners from various regions of Europe. (Regulski, 1998). An example for those undertakings is the PSPR, or the Polish-Swiss Regional Programme. This extensive and effective network of European co-operation is used by public institutions engaged in international co-operation at the regional level, and various levels of administration systematically support its future development. (Szlachta, 1996).

There are numerous inter-governmental agreements signed since the early 1990’s that have played a significant role in facilitating the international co-operation of regions. (For details see Appendix I). Those agreements provide the groundwork for a number of bilateral intergovernmental committees and councils for cross-border and inter-regional co-operation. (Borkowski, 1998; Sejm, 1995).

A fundamental shift from the centrally planned administration to the open, decentralised one began in Poland in the early 1990’s. Transformation of the administration and social system called for thorough structural changes in virtually all aspects of life. The transition period influenced the country’s regional development through four main processes. The first can be described as changes of the ownership structure by privatisation and the development of the private sector. The second was the foreign investment. The third lay in the development of business-environment institutions. Finally, the fourth comprised of changes on the labour market and unemployment. These four processes increase the constantly growing disparities between the Polish regions. New disparities have replaced redistribution mechanisms functioning under the centrally planned mechanisms.

From the experience of the European Union Member States it has been proved that certain regional issues are addressed as priority. In the current situation of Poland these of outmost importance include the monitoring of already existing differences between, creation of new jobs is as well as introduction of new modern technologies.

Changes in the political system introduced after 1989 initiated the process of accelerated polarisation of regions. At the extreme, there are the backward agricultural regions of Eastern and Northern Poland as well as centres of outdated and traditional industry, primary in the regions of Silesia and the still defence and para-defence industry dominated regions of South-eastern Poland. The regional and county income from taxes (PIT from individuals and CIT from companies) is the measure of the wealth of the new Polish regions. The richest county of the capital city of Warsaw earns from each inhabitant (through the PIT) a sum of 19.78 PLN (roughly 4.65 Euro), while the poorest counties earns from each inhabitant between 2.33 PLN (0.55 Euro) in the Eastern Poland and 2.63 PLN (0.62 Euro) in the North
Unemployment in the North and East regions of Poland is also higher than in other parts of the country. In the North-eastern region ‘warmińsko-mazurski’ unemployment rates are between 17 and 25%, in region ‘podkarpacki’ the rate is between 14 and 17% while in Warsaw, or the ‘wielkopolski’ region unemployment is no higher than 5%. (GUC, end of December 1998).

The reform of the administration and the territorial organisation of the state started on January 1, 1999. (Sejm, Legislation number 137, point 887, 13 October 1998). It led to removal of the centralist system of public authority; it also enhanced the social and economic transformation processes. The first principle of the administrative and territorial reform is the decentralisation of power by delegating competence and resources to the territorial self-government bodies. (Sejm, Legislation number 91, point 578, 5 June 1998). The second principle is that of deconcentration of state administration through strengthening the regional structure at the expense of the departmental structure. (Sejm, Legislation number 91, point 577, 5 June 1998). The third principle is using the principle of subsidiarity, of the state central authorities towards the local authorities, in place of centralised distribution of developmental resources. (Sejm, Legislation number 91, point 576, 5 June 1998).
The new administrative and territorial organisation of the state comprises of 16 regions, 308 counties and 65 towns with county status, and 2489 municipalities. (Sejm, Legislation number 96, point 603, 24 July 1998). The elected, self-governmental public authorities function at the levels of municipalities. At the regional level the head of the region (voivod) continues to represent state authority, with the speaker of the self-government as representative of the elected body. (Map 1).

Until 1989, the government’s regional policy was focused on reducing inter-regional differences in the consumption level, disregarding the effectiveness of investments. After 1989 the regions received government support directed at changes in the economic structure. Those instruments aimed at supporting regions through allocating grants for investment projects, temporary exemption from tax for domestic investors creating jobs in their regions as well as credit guarantees.

Under- or little-developed border areas are a leftover from centralised system of the real socialism period. Euroregions development programmes initiated by the local authorities and supported by the governments of the neighbouring European Union Member States cover border regions. (European Commission, 1999b; Bochniarz and Krajewski, 1997). These programmes foster the development of regions and stimulate establishing institutional co-operation. Cross-border co-operation with Germany has been the most successful so far, while co-operation with other neighbouring countries has been conducted on a smaller scale. The CROSSBORDER programme of the European Union supports a number of regional co-operation initiatives. A criterion for establishing the intensity of foreign co-operation is by classifying the foreign partners of Polish regions and counting the number of agreements signed between a given country and those regions. Polish regions signed the most agreements with Germany (55), Russia (36), France, (31), Ukraine (31), Italy (30), Denmark (12) as well as lesser numbers with the Netherlands, UK, Sweden, Portugal, Belgium, Austria, Spain or Greece. (GUC, 1997).

With a view accelerating the creation of modern regional development institutions, the government laid out aid programmes allowing establishing institutions, which will operate in compliance with the European Union standards and will reinforce regional international co-operation. Those institutions, drawing on local initiatives and co-operation, may influence the development of SMS enterprises. In 1993 Government of the Republic of Poland in order to support regional development set up, as a State Treasury foundation, the Polish Agency for Regional Development. This agency implements and administers European Union’s programmes, as well as other European programmes.

Restructuring of the Polish administration definitely proved the necessity to undertake initiatives aimed at counteracting the excessive increase of disparities between the regions. One of the substantial measures in this respect is the support for creation of regional agencies,
which aim at stimulating the development of regions. The first such agency called Regional Development Agency (RDA), originated in 1991. (For details see Appendix II). Currently about 70 RDAs are in operation throughout the territory of Poland. Very often RDAs are the most important non-governmental organisations at the local level, focusing on international co-operation of regions. (Kropiwnicki and Szewczyk, 1998).

The international co-operation of Polish regions has developed as a response to rapidly developing contacts and the various joint activities in Europe. Such co-operation has developed rapidly over the period of last decade. The rapidity of development of the international co-operation can be measured in terms of the number of contacts, programmes and joint projects or the amount of resources assigned to this aim by regions, governments and the European Union.

Since the 1980’s an accelerating process of institutionalisation has been taking place. The process of institutionalisation could be seen in the systematic development of the international co-operation of regions and the increasing representation of regional interests at the European level. These processes have primarily concerned the regions and local authorities of the European Union Member States. Poland is currently taking the first steps towards ensuring the representation of her interests at various European forums. (Kieres, 1998; Szlachta, 1997).

Polish local authorities are becoming more active at the European level and are organising their efforts more effectively. They are active in various local-government organisations such as the National Assembly of Local Authorities and in various associations of large urban metropolises, cities, towns, etc. (Kuklinski, 1998).

However, a lot remains to be done if Poland wants to make its presence felt and influence the various European institutions that are today laying down the rules and principles of future European structures.

One point worth emphasising is the competitiveness shown by Polish regions in the struggle for influence and representation not only with the regions of the other countries preparing for European Union membership but also with the regions of European Union Member States themselves. Poland must become acquainted with European institutions, organisations and programmes and carefully choose its partners and allies for the purpose of joint activities and projects.

The next part of the presentation contains a brief description of the most important European organisations and programmes in the sphere of regional co-operation as well as their importance and significance.

CLARE, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities operating within the framework of the Council of Europe, aims at supporting the political, administrative and financial autonomy
of local and regional authorities. The Congress ensures an active role for local and regional structures in the development of European unity. It was also established to support new democracies in their efforts to establish effective local authorities. CLARE takes part in the introduction of incentives aimed at bringing local and regional democracy closer to the people. The Congress promotes the idea of regions where local and regional authorities enjoy prerogatives under appropriate national legislation, which enable them to manage their own affairs and interests in their own right. The Congress has also helped in developing the situation of new Member States from Central and Eastern Europe. (Council of Europe, WWWa).

The Managing Committee of Local and Regional Authorities, also within the framework of the Council of Europe, is a forum for co-operation between government representatives. The Managing Committee provides governments with the chance to exchange experiences and to discuss problems existing between the central government and local as well as regional communities. The Managing Committee attempts to approach the same problems as CLARE does and seek solutions to those problems from the perspective of the central authorities. (Council of Europe, WWWb).

The Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Local Government, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, organises regular conferences for ministers responsible for local governments. These conferences are organised every 2 years. Their aim is to provide ministers with knowledge of local government problems in individual countries, to create a forum for exchanging experiences, and tackle important problems linked to local government. The conferences are also intended to provide ministers with a general picture of the international co-operation of regions and to inform them about the network of contacts emerging as a result. (Council of Europe, WWWc).

The Committee of Regions is an advisory organ of the Council of Ministers and the European Commission, which emerged out of the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty (Article 198a-c) in 1994. When performing its advisory functions, the Council of Ministers or the European Commission consults with the Committee of Regions on an optional or obligatory basis according to the article of Treaty. Efforts to institutionalise the impact of local structures on the Community’s activities has proved quite successful. Nevertheless, the Committee of Regions is still dependent on each state’s domestic authorities, which are responsible for nominating its delegates. (European Commission, 1996).

The Association of European Regions (ARE) evolved out of the experiences of nine international organisations and 47 regions in international co-operation. The ARE realises three basic aims: it consolidates the influence of regions on European institutions, promotes co-operation between regions and promotes the idea of regionalism and federalism in Europe.
The European Border Region Association is a registered association, whose membership is made up of regions from individual countries together with Euroregions and separate entities, which are already forming the structures of cross-border co-operation. In this paper three kinds of European institutions have been considered of utmost importance: those operating within the structure of the Council of Europe, those existing within the structures of the European Union and those that can be called independent international organisations. Their functions and range of activities differ, but from the Polish perspective especially the first two kinds are very important. It should not be forgotten that both structures have overlapping memberships. Due to a state’s membership in both structures it is often that the same institutions, and even people, are responsible for co-operating with both the Council of Europe and the European Union, where the regional aspect is concerned.

Since early 1990’s many inter-regional and cross-border co-operation programmes, between Western and Eastern Europe, have been established. Those instruments have the specific purpose of supporting activities of international regional co-operation. The number of those programmes is still growing and in order to illustrate the co-operation between the East and the West of Europe some of them need to be described (Szewczyk, 1999).

INTERREG II is a European Union initiative pertaining to border regions, cross-border co-operation and the development of the power network in these areas. It evolved from the INTERREG programme and concerns European Union Member States. The greatest assistance provided under this programme was granted to regions located on the EU’s eastern border, i.e. mainly the new German Lander. The programme is a good opportunity to change the situation of Poland’s Western borders, develop the infrastructure and link up with the trans-European and energy networks. Unfortunately, Poland is not eligible for the INTERREG funding, however the European Commission is in the process of launching a new programme to complement the effects of INTERREG on the eastern part of the EU’s border, that is the PHARE CBC Poland-Germany.

The PHARE programme was created in December 1989 as a reflection of European Union support for systemic and economic reform in Poland and Hungary. The programme is implemented by DG1 of the European Commission. The countries themselves specify the areas, which are most important for them and which require PHARE funds the most. In Poland priority was given to developing economically neglected regions. The implementation of particular aims of PHARE takes place within the scope of special programmes such as cross-border co-operation programmes, launched to support the development of cross-border co-operation. Examples of PHARE are the mentioned CBC Poland-Germany programme, as well as PHARE RAPID, PHARE INRED or PHARE STRUDER (I and II). PHARE RAPID stands for Rural Areas Programme for Infrastructure and Development; PHARE INRED is an
Integrated Programme for Regional Development, while PHARE STRUDER is a Programme for Structural Development in Selected Regions.

ECOS-Ouverture is a European Commission programme that supports international inter-regional co-operation. It promotes co-operation between regions and cities of the European Union and their counterparts in Central Europe as well as in the former Republics of the USSR and Mediterranean countries. The Commission as a result of a proposal forwarded by local and regional authorities created ECOS and Ouverture in 1991. They were also a response to dramatic political and economic changes in the countries of the former Eastern Block. In 1995, they were combined to form a single project.

PACTE is a special programme realised by the DGXVI of the European Commission in co-operation with the ARE and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions. The programme is mainly concerned with financing freshly initiated grassroots co-operation, which arises from regional and local authorities’ priorities. The PACTE programme was launched as an instrument for supporting initial contacts and exchanges of experiences between regions and cities interested in participating in inter-regional co-operation.

CENTURIO is an East-West training programme for regional officials and decision-makers in Central and Eastern Europe. The programme is run under auspices of ARE. It includes a series of theoretical and practical training sessions in the departments of the participating regions of European Union Member States.

EURODYSSEY is another East-West programme through which the exchange of young people starting out in their professional careers takes place. The programme provides 18-30 year olds with the opportunity to gain their first professional experiences in companies operating in participating regions.

Another example of an East-West co-operation programme is ENTO. It is a European network of training organisations working for the benefit of local and regional authorities in the Member States of the Council of Europe. Its aim is to improve the standards of personnel at the local and regional level.

The above outlined programmes are examples of co-operation between the Central and Eastern European Countries and the European Union. There is also a number of initiatives covering regional and cross-border co-operation under the guidelines of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe assistance programmes include the Demosthenes programmes, which are a structure developed for regional institution building within the new democracies. The LODE programme was designed in order to develop and support local democracy and the Themis was developed to train judges, prosecutors, notaries and lawyers. The various beneficiary governments register each of the Council of Europe’s co-operation programmes every year. The Council however allocates grants only to governmental
organisations and therefore only the regional and local (municipal) authorities are eligible for the latter. (Council of Europe, WWWd).

In conclusion to this paper, it is worth noting that overall globalisation has a positive impact on regional co-operation. Through one of the processes of globalisation, i.e. the expansion of the European Union to the East, regions take the initiative of mutual co-operation. It is worth noting that just a decade ago, when the accession of the Central and Eastern European states into the structures of the Western organisations was still ambiguous or even unthinkable, no programmes of international regional co-operation between the Western and Eastern bloc existed. Since the process of integration has started so has started the emergence and development of various inter-regional programmes. These programmes prepare both sides to the future even closer co-operation as well as to the prospect of shared membership within the same European structures. The West learns to work with the East, and the East gains experience and acquire knowledge in the workings of the Western organisations. The programmes of international regional co-operation are mainly concerned with the development of regions lagging behind in their economic and social structures. It is up to the applicant states to create the regions accordingly to the Western standards and to give them similar political and administrative powers. The growing number of the programmes illustrates the fact that regions of Central and Eastern Europe are ready to co-operate, the growing number is also a visible and quantifiable step towards further globalisation.

Apart from the programmes of regional co-operation, there are also the mentioned institutions that help to integrate the continent of Europe. It is worth remembering that these institutions are based on voluntary membership, yet they are very popular among the states of Europe. Regions are gaining more power than they have ever enjoyed, they act as legal international actors, sign bi- and multi-lateral agreements and co-operate with their counterparts throughout Europe. On one hand, this co-operation is possible due to the process of globalisation. On the other hand, however, the process of globalisation is sped up by the international co-operation of regions.
APPENDIX I
This list provides a number of examples of the early 1990’s agreements concerning international regional co-operation signed between the Republic of Poland and other European States as well as a number of bilateral intergovernmental committees and councils established with the purpose of developing cross-border and inter-regional co-operation.

5. The Polish and German Inter-governmental Committee for Regional and Cross-border Co-operation.
6. The Polish and Czech Inter-governmental Committee for Cross-border Co-operation.
7. The Polish and Slovak Inter-governmental Committee for Cross-border Co-operation.
8. The Polish and Ukrainian Inter-governmental Co-ordination Council for Cross-border Co-operation.
APPENDIX II

The list provides examples of the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) established in Poland since 1989. The list is limited to the most important agencies, whose information can be also found on the Internet. A list of all other RDAs is also available on request.

Region ‘dolnoslaski’ (Lower-Silesia):

Region ‘kujawsko-pomorski’:
1. Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biała; http://www.um.bielsko.pl/arr

Region ‘lodzki’:

Region ‘malopolski’:
1. Regional Development Agency Ziemia Chrzanowska, Ltd; http://www.arzch.oten.net.pl

Region ‘mazowiecki’:
1. Regional Development Agency Ostroleka; http://free.polbox.pl/a/arrost
2. Warsaw Foundation for Regional Development

Region ‘pomorski’:
1. Regional Development Agency Pomorska; http://wwwparr.slupsk.pl

Region ‘slaski’ (Silesia):
1. Regional Development Agency Jastrzebska; http://www.jastrzebie.pl/japir/index

Region ‘warminsko-mazurski’:
1. Regional Development Agency Warminsko-Mazurska; http://www.wmarr.olsztyn.pl
BIBLIOGRAPHY/ REFERENCES


Council of Europe (WWWa) Http://www.coe.fr/cplre/eng/index.htm

Council of Europe (WWWb) Http://www.coe.fr/eng/act-e/edemloc.htm

Council of Europe (WWWc) Http://www.coe.fr/eng/act-e/ecoop.htm

Council of Europe (WWWc) Http://www.coe.fr/ADACS/indexEN.htm


