



**Tatiana Zhurzhenko**

## Politics of border making and (cross-)border identities

*Introduction*

Have borders become irrelevant with the project of a united Europe, which is supposed to overcome the historical divisions of the continent and the political isolation of its East? No, just the opposite. In a focal point guest-edited by Tatiana Zhurzhenko, essayists and researchers look at the dilemmas of border building and cross-border cooperation in the EU and its neighbourhood.

At the end of the twentieth century, the dream of a "borderless Europe" finally came true. In the eyes of EU citizens, it certainly represents a crucial milestone of the European integration project. But have borders become irrelevant with the project of a united Europe which is supposed to overcome the historical divisions of the continent and the political isolation of its East?

Just the opposite. The new borders of the European Union are expected to provide security and to control labour migration to EU countries, and thus inevitably create new regional divisions and obstacles for the free cross-border movement of people — one of the main achievements of the 1989 revolutions in eastern Europe. "Borderless Europe" therefore presupposes a "Fortress Europe": the EU assumes the functions of the traditional nation-state to defend its citizens against the threats of criminality and terrorism, to protect them against competition on the labour markets, and to secure their social rights.

In the "other Europe", the relevance of state borders even grew with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. In the New Independent States as well as in other eastern and southern European countries, the question of symbolic and real control over national borders has become crucial for state-building and regaining sovereignty. Concerned about criminality and illegal migration, the EU supports the ongoing processes of a final "border making" in the post-Soviet space. The issues of national security in these countries are in constant tension with the emerging projects of regional cross-border cooperation. The question remains open if these regional integration projects (such as the Russia-led Single Economic Space) contradict or complement the EU integration processes, and if Euroregions outside the EU can be viable.

Inside the European Union, where the international borders seem to disappear, traces of the old divisions, conflicts, and hostilities still persist in people's memories and identities. Fifteen years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, neighbouring countries still do not have much interest in each other. It seems that European identity cannot be developed only "from above" as an attachment to the political institutions of the EU, but that it has also to deal with the "borders in mind" in order to change the imaginary geography of the continent.

The articles in this focal point analyze dilemmas of border building and cross-border cooperation in the EU and its "neighbourhood", politics of bordering the EU, and transformations of (cross-)border identities, related to the recent political and social changes. Even though most of these issues are closely connected, and it is difficult to discuss one without also referring to the others, the texts presented here certainly have their own specific perspectives and could be organized according to their main focuses:

### **The new symbolic geography of Europe**

The first section contains articles dealing with the mental map of the new Europe that has emerged with the eastern enlargement. The essay by Karl Schlögel, German historian and expert on eastern Europe, celebrates the tremendous geopolitical changes of the continent, which dismissed the old fortified borders and dividing lines. The new Europe, which is "a phenomenon of the mind, of the collective memory, of national traumas and longings" is still in the making. Europe needs time to adapt to its new borders (which do not coincide with the borders of the EU), to accept that not only Warsaw and Prague, but also Moscow, Kiev, and Istanbul are on the European map. The Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Hrytsak discusses the issue of the "new eastern Europe" as consisting of losers like Ukraine and Belarus, which failed to get an invitation to join the EU. The arguments of the historian help to understand the ambiguous status of these countries on the European map. According to Hrytsak, "Eastern Europe is a normal, but second-hand Europe." Its societies share values which they have not created themselves. Alexei Miller, a Russian historian, offers a different approach to the same issue of the eastern borders of Europe. From his point of view, the new symbolic map of Europe should not exclude Russia as the Other but accept it as a part of Europe. The competition for the eastern European borderlands between Russia and the EU, which is a "zero sum game", is not productive. Needless to say, this discussion has become even more interesting in the light of Ukraine's "Orange Revolution".

### **Crossing borders, controlling borders**

A second cluster of articles discusses the common issue of cross-border mobility and border control in the European Union. Timothy Snyder addresses the state policies in Europe (and North America) that seek to control the movement of people across borders. As the military and economic functions of borders lose some of their significance, the traditional police function of borders has been reasserted. The EU, like a traditional nation-state, has to have its own border control policy. Henk van Houtum and Roos Pijpers, from the Nijmegen Center for Border Studies, argue that the moral panic on immigration and migration policy in various member states of the European Union follows a geo-strategic logic which resembles the management of a "Gated Community" much more than a "Fortress". Closing borders for the overwhelming majority, the EU provides selective access for desirable immigrants. Andrea Komlosy, social historian from Vienna, addresses the issue of cross-border mobility in a comparative historical perspective. She compares cross-border movements of people in the European Union and in the Habsburg monarchy, which sheds new light on our contemporary situation. The contribution by Marko Bojcun focuses on the EU politics towards the Ukrainian-Russian border and shows that the Union's geopolitical strategies reach far beyond the Schengen borders. Its interest in the Ukrainian-Russian border is motivated by the fact that this is a strategically important crossing point for east-west migration and Bojcun proposes a common agenda on this issue for Ukraine, Russia, and the EU.

## Abyssees and bridges

Further texts deal with the new dividing lines emerging from the re-bordering of Europe: the borders between insiders and outsiders, EU members and EU neighbors, between rich and poor countries. Vladimir Kolossov (forthcoming), a leading Russian political geographer, writes about the new Russian–EU border and the problems it poses. German sociologist Georg Vobruba analyzes the mechanism of mutual reinforcement between the processes of European integration and European enlargement. In order to overcome the "poverty gap" at its external frontiers, the EU encourages political and economic reforms in the neighbouring states, in this way creating new potential candidates for membership. Katarzyna Stoklosa addresses the new geopolitical role of Poland as a mediator between EU and non–EU eastern Europe using an example of cross-border cooperation between Poland on the one hand and Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia on the other.

## Borders and identities: us and the others

Finally, the focal point includes several articles addressing national borders and cultural boundaries as a factor of personal and collective identity formation. These texts also show that gender, ethnicity, memory, neighbourhood, and religion are important dimensions of any border (un-)making process. Stefanie Schüler–Springorum shows how the Basque conflict turned into a purely political one, where an artificially created "ethnic" divide serves specific political interests. She analyzes the mechanisms of the social construction of ethnic identity and the role that terrorist violence plays in this process. The article by Rada Ivekovic, a Serbian philosopher living in France, is a feminist contribution to the discussion on borders. Ivekovic reflects on translation as "the original mother tongue of humankind" ("transborder translating" as she calls it). The border is a state of exception that is today becoming the rule, she concludes, and goes on to look at gender and border making in the Balkan context.

## External links

### EXLINEA

Lines of Exclusion as Arenas of Cooperation: Reconfiguring the External Boundaries of Europe. Policies, Practices and Perceptions  
[www.exlinea.org/?sd=3664ac4271a44dc5d92d676f56fc7aa6](http://www.exlinea.org/?sd=3664ac4271a44dc5d92d676f56fc7aa6)

### EU Border Identities

Border Discourse: Changing Identities, Changing Nations, Changing Stories in European Border Communities  
[www.borderidentities.com/](http://www.borderidentities.com/)

**The European Union and Border Conflicts** [www.euborderconf.bham.ac.uk/](http://www.euborderconf.bham.ac.uk/)

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