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# Does Growing Nationalism Trigger Transnational Cooperation Among Cosmopolitans? The Case of the German-Polish Border Towns Frankfurt (Oder) & Słubice

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## Abstract:

In a time characterised by growing nationalism, do cosmopolitans seek to counterbalance the growing opposition to cross-border cooperation by enhancing transnational cooperation? This will be elaborated at the micro level by assessing transborder conflict dynamics between cosmopolitan and nationalist local deputies from the German-Polish border towns Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice. Although the common urban area was divided in 1945, social interaction among the German and Polish community reawakened with the eastward enlargement of the EU in 2004 and the Schengen area in 2007. However, building up a common micro-cosmopolitan identity among German and Polish town citizens has also met significant scepticism and resistance on both sides of the border. This opposition is grounded on an exclusive national identity, historic traumas, uncertainties of post-socialist transition and unemployment, demographic change and fear of cross-border crime. In this respect, Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice can help to examine the struggle between cosmopolitans and nationalists on the micro-European level. The following paper documents the theoretical and methodological approach. Empirical tests of the hypotheses will follow in summer 2016.

Keywords: Cross-border cooperation, self-other relations, border towns, Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism

## 1. Introduction

In the last Brandenburg state elections in 2014, the Euro-sceptic and right-populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* - AfD (engl. Alternative for Germany) received 20% of the votes in the constituency of the German-Polish border town Frankfurt (Oder). The result was one of the best for AfD in Brandenburg with 8% above state average. Simultaneous local elections for the town council drew a similar outstanding picture, in which AfD gained 11.6% virtually right away. These results may indicate that transborder cooperation among the German-Polish border towns Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice is no sure-fire success, although local elites and various parts of civil society in both towns support cross-border partnership. The remarkable success of AfD shows that transborder cooperation is obviously met with resentment, fears and concerns of some local town citizens, although the common experience of post-socialist transition after 1990 and the peripheral location of both towns might be rational reasons in favour of such partnership. Furthermore, framework conditions for cross-border cooperation among both towns are as assured as never before since Poland joined the EU in 2004 and the Schengen area in 2007, thus transforming the German-Polish border into an exceptionally permeable internal EU border. While German and Polish citizens might be divided in regard to specific features under national law, town citizens on both sides of the river share basic rights such as free movements of persons, goods and services guaranteed by European Union citizenship. Everyday social mobility across the border is no longer obstructed by time consuming border controls. Consequently, town authorities of Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice present their commonly shared border not as an obstacle but as a bridge, a place for intercultural exchange. However, recent election results have shown that this process of micro-Europeanisation on the local level is not simply a success story but is met with reservation at least in some parts of local society. This seemingly contradictory development has the potential for transnational conflict, whose outcome inevitably affects cross-border cooperation. Consequently, the transformation of the former Eastern bloc and its implications for transborder cooperation and conflict, especially among the German-Polish border, have attracted a lot of attention from various disciplinary perspectives. (Lechevalier / Wielgohs 2013) This research began right after 1990, focussing on historical reassessment of cross-border cooperation of both local German and Polish communities during the Cold War period as well as the restart of relations shortly after 1990. (Schulz / Nothnagle 1999) Other works concentrated on transborder mobility of German and Polish citizens in border regions and their attitudes towards the neighbouring community after World War Two. (Jajeśniak-Quast 2000) During the EU Eastern enlargement negotiations, Waack (2000) elaborated on the supranational effects on transborder cooperation among border towns, including the German-Polish border towns Görlitz and Zgorzelec that were significantly affected by the fundamental changes initiated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc.

## 2. Why focus on transnational conflict dynamics among local deputies in border towns?

None of these above mentioned works pay particular attention to the attitudes and conflict dynamics of local deputies in border towns towards European affairs and transborder cooperation. Although local deputies have literally no influence on policy making, neither on European level nor national level, they do however make a difference on a local level, since local deputies of border towns operate in a highly Europeanised environment. This allows them to act

as micro architects of Europe, as border towns in particular function as laboratories of European integration, where developments of supranational Europeanisation solidify on the very concrete local level. However “decision-making is very long and complicated, because both municipalities and often both state authorities have to be involved.” (Schultz / Stokłosa / Jajeński-Quast 2003, 38-39) This creates a special responsibility to local deputies who act as both local legislator and mediator between municipality government and town population. The complicated decision-making regarding transborder cooperation may encourage local deputies to support or undermine cross-border projects via informal rather than formal channels since one can expect them to be very well integrated into local affairs due to their active engagement in various municipal committees and local associations of civil society. The geographical proximity of the two border towns Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice allows local deputies to very easily network with citizens, associations and organisations from the other national community.

While it is true that at first glance most issues on local politics may appear as rather bureaucratic or technical, normative and ideology-driven positions linked to the implications of increasingly porous internal EU borders can gain high relevance on the local level as the supranational changes demand adjustments in cross-border communal cooperation. Słubice was in fact once a district of Frankfurt called *Dammvorstadt* on the Eastern side of the Oder river that had developed during industrialisation and only later became the Polish town Słubice as a consequence of the Oder-Neiße-Border following the results of World War Two. Nowadays they are two separate towns, directly located at an internal EU border, and both share the huge potential for intercultural relations and mutual cross-border urban planning that would bring the separated yet historically connected urban areas back together. However, the highly symbolic character of the national frontier helps political players and town citizens to define two separate national identities and a strong feeling of belonging to either one or the other. In this regard, one could interpret the remarkable success of AfD in Frankfurt (Oder) as a statement for a stronger distinction against the Polish community and against European cross-border cooperation. In fact, AfD rallied support by fuelling xenophobic stereotypes of Polish criminals and portrayed the Polish border town as a rival to economic wealth of Frankfurt (Oder). (Kossack 2014) However, nationalist attitudes have regularly faced resistance of local deputies on both sides of the border river that are in favour of transborder cooperation. Local deputies should thus gain special attention as we can understand them as the democratically elected representatives of such attitudes. On one side of the political spectrum, the ideal type of a nationalist deputy might emphasise the value of the national frontier. It parts the urban area into two towns and demarks not only a state border but also a segregating line of different national cultures that should not be merged. On the other side of the political spectrum, the ideal type of a cosmopolitan deputy might seek closer cooperation and merging of both towns under a European umbrella. From a cosmopolitan point of view, the national frontier between the two towns does not function to segregate but to connect different nationalities and cultures. It serves as a bridge, not as an obstacle. Consequently, both ideal types of nationalist and cosmopolitan deputies might simply represent the various and conflicting local milieus existing in border towns. On the German side, pro-European milieus that support further communication and understanding with the Polish community only include local citizens with proper intercultural skills. Many other locals, however, have severe economic fears first and foremost and are concerned about Polish competitors on the labour market and therefore they lack intercultural skills and show no interest in cooperation. They experienced disillusionment during the post-socialist transition and tend to ethnicise daily contacts with the Polish community. A significant number share right extreme attitudes. On the Polish side, closer ties with the West have been met with both agreement and scepticism. Most milieus recognise and appreciate newly evolved possibilities but are concerned about a cultural and economical German “recolonisation” of Polish parts due to the EU common market. (Matthiesen / Bürkner 2002, 13)

Does this mean one can observe a transnational conflict between nationalists and cosmopolitan deputies in a somewhat Europeanised micro space of Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice? Does the political situation in both towns prove the existence of a transnational dividing line between nationalist and cosmopolitan deputies? And what might the possible existence of these two antagonising groups say about transnational dynamics within these two border towns? Following the electoral success of right-wing populists in Germany and Poland, this paper seeks to answer the specific question of whether cosmopolitan deputies from both towns perceive nationalist attitudes as a particular motive for enhanced local cross-border partnership with each other. From the cosmopolitan’s perspective, such partnership should help to counterbalance prejudice, xenophobia, fears and concerns on both sides of the river by creating practical cross-border projects to stop the alienation of some milieus from the integration process.

In the following section this paper refers to two contrary concepts about the essence of politics by Ulrich Beck and Chantal Mouffe, in order to measure various kinds of attitudes regarding both diffuse and specific dimensions concerning cross-border cooperation. Both approaches combined allow for an adequate systematisation of attitudes towards transborder cooperation among local deputies in Frankfurt (Oder) und Słubice. Whereas Mouffe emphasises the affective implications of collective identities for community building, Beck on the other hand, stresses the ability of collective identities to be transformed as a result of increasing transnational cooperation, which become necessary due to mutually shared risks of modernity. It remains unclear, however, if collective identities unavoidably solely depend on national identities or if the case of Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice can prove that new collective identities could co-exist alongside pre-existing national identities. To proof this, one needs evidence of a strong dividing line between nationalist and cosmopolitan deputies in both Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice. One must also investigate whether cosmopolitan deputies feel a stronger identity with their like-minded colleagues from the other national community rather than with their political counterparts from their common homeland.

### 3. Theoretical background: cosmopolitan and anti-cosmopolitan understandings of the political

Interstate cooperation between Germany and Poland and supranational legislation on EU level directly affect the two border towns Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice. To exploit the political dimension of this process on the local level, this paper uses two contrary conceptions of the political, which commonly can be described as cosmopolitan and anti-cosmopolitan. In his cosmopolitan approach, Ulrich Beck stresses the mutual risks that political communities share despite national demarcation. (Beck 1992) Referring to Frankfurt (Oder) und Słubice, these risks consist of floods, cross-border criminality and economic crises that would directly affect the local economy of the neighbouring town. Because the impact of these risks cannot be limited within the national frontier, risk-involved communities should develop a political setting that allows all members to extend policy-making outside the frontiers of each community's territory. On the other hand, each community acting alone would not be able to tackle such risks. For this purpose, communities have a rational interest in cross-border cooperation and consensus with other involved communities. Consequently, shared risks and mutual cooperation among communities undermine classical conceptions of the inside-outside dichotomy. Fixed national identities lose importance as a result of Europeanisation and individualisation within European societies. Since the impact of ideologies and collective identities decline, political antagonisms are more likely to be pacified. New formations of social organisation evolve and remodel the fixed character of collective identities into fluid rather than fixed identities. Beck's cosmopolitan approach rejects concepts of national uniformity and understands democratically organised diversity as a prerequisite for European cooperation. (Beck 2007) This moderate understanding of the political explains cross-border cooperation between the both peripheral towns Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice despite the traumatic past between Germany and Poland. Although the urban area is divided by a national frontier, one can expect cross-border cooperation to occur due to similar challenges that both communities face. These challenges are due to the periphery location as well as the fundamental economic transitions that both towns went through twice within one century following the events of 1945 and 1989. Moreover, border towns located at long established internal EU frontiers prove Beck's argument that national identity could be supplemented by a fluid local identity shared by both national communities within border towns. As the examples Irún/Hondarribia and Hendaye at the French-Spanish border, Valença and Tui at the Spanish-Portuguese border and Herzogenrath-Kerkade at the German-Dutch border show, cross-border cooperation does not depend on external support from EU programs solely but follows an internal dynamic shared by both national communities in one mutual urban area. (Schultz 2002, 9-13)

However, Beck's description of cooperation among communities with increasingly fluid identities has been met with harsh criticism from Chantal Mouffe (2007), who emphasises the conflicting conditioning between collective identities. Contradicting interests are essential to societies, thus they have the potential to become antagonistic political conflicts. While these diverging interests cannot find an outlet in consent and cooperation, she emphasises the affective dimensions of the political and the sometimes irrational passions that mobilise people to participate in political activity. This inevitably leads to the demarcation of collective identities. Instead of seeking consent and cooperation among these collective groups, the real issue at stake is to find an institutional arrangement that allows for the peaceful expression of these opposing interests. The dividing line between collective identities, however, is not fixed. Mouffe even stresses the relevance of regional identities and their claim for autonomy within the nation state and the European Union that, so far, have not been taken into consideration adequately to adjust the relationship between diverging collective identities. (Mouffe 2014, 85-90) In fact, Mouffe emphasises the possibility of potential change in collective identities following the events of fundamental political transitions. Such changes appeared recently at the German-Polish border in 1989 after the end of the Cold War and in 2004 after Poland's accession into the EU. However, she clearly believes that the concept of nationality will remain the guiding principle for community building. In this regard, Mouffe's understanding of the political can help to explain both the nationalistic attitudes against the neighbouring local border community and the – at least theoretically possible – potential for transnational modifications of conflict lines within border regions. While it might be true that election results for AfD indicate strong resilience of nationalist attitudes against the Polish border community and opposition to cross-border cooperation with Słubice, the flexibility of opposing collective identities makes the creation of new transnational collective identities theoretically possible. On the local level these transnational identities would be located horizontally towards both national collectives. One group may define the national border between the two towns as essential for distinguishing both national collectives, whereas the other group may redefine the border as a space for intercultural connection. If we understand the value and practical implications of the national frontier for cross-border cooperation between Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice as the main point of political contention, we can assume that nationalist local deputies may seek to preserve the practical and symbolic value of the national border, whereas cosmopolitan local deputies may seek to overcome the national border's segregating impact on social life within the common urban area. The first hypothesis seeks to prove the parallel yet opposing existence of these two opposing groups, assuming that they are also represented by the elected local deputies:

H1: A nucleus for a transnational cosmopolitan identity in border towns may exist among local deputies but is challenged by German and Polish nationalism.

What could be possible explanations according to Mouffe and Beck for the emergence of such cosmopolitan deputies in opposition to German and Polish nationalism? Although Mouffe argues against the cosmopolitan interpretation of modern society as described by Beck, she agrees with the possible emergence of new collective identities. For the sake of simplicity, this potentially new collective identity will be called cosmopolitan. This identity, however, can only be in opposition to another antagonising identity. Thus, a potentially new cosmopolitan collective identity in Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice must be inevitably positioned against the existing nationalist identities on both sides of the border river. In this view, German and Polish nationalists and German-Polish cosmopolitans would be two sides of the same point of contention. An increase in nationalism as the election results of AfD indicate may thus induce a stronger mobilisation of cosmopolitans. Following Beck's argument of the causality between shared risks and transborder cooperation, it is literally the spread of nationalist attitudes in particular that may potentially undermine cross-border partnership between both towns. Consequently, cosmopolitan-minded political players seek to cooperate transnationally to counterbalance the risks linked to nationalist thoughts in both towns, resulting in an even more grounded cosmopolitan identity. The second hypotheses seek to prove this causality in regard to transborder networking of cosmopolitan deputies.

H2: Growing nationalism results in stronger transborder networking of cosmopolitan deputies.

## 4. Methodology

To test the two hypotheses this paper firstly seeks to find out in a standardised questionnaire what attitudes local deputies in Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice have in regard to cross-border cooperation. This will also help to test whether there are two antagonising camps between nationalist and cosmopolitan local deputies in both border towns. Secondly, episodic interviews will be held with selected supporters with outstanding approval ratings for cross-border cooperation, in order to explore the effects of perceived nationalist attitudes on the motivation for transborder cooperation among cosmopolitan deputies in both towns.

### 4.1. Standardised questionnaire and qualitative content analysis

To test the H1 hypothesis, the 46 German and 15 Polish local deputies of the both local parliaments (*Stadtverordnetenversammlung* in Frankfurt (Oder) and *Rada Miejska* in Słubice) are invited to answer a standardised questionnaire in the German and Polish languages respectively to systemise their attitudes towards cross-border cooperation into four different types. In order to categorise the attitudes, this paper refers to Kopecký's and Mudde's (2002) distinction of specific and diffuse support for European integration. However, questions refer to local aspects of Europeanisation of both local communities only. Both dimensions of specific and diffuse support help to reflect the two understandings of the political by Beck and Mouffe in a balanced way. On the dimension of specific support, one can measure approval ratings of deputies for mutual problem analysis and problem solving strategies as stressed by Beck that should then be materialised in concrete inter-communal projects (such as organising mutual disaster management programmes). Questions about specific support also include approval ratings for concrete projects to support the development of a local and fluid cross-border identity among the citizens of both towns. Such projects could supplement the two German and Polish national identities (for example joint town sport leagues or German-Polish kindergartens). On the dimension for diffuse support, normative ideas and values on transborder cooperation as well as mechanisms on the inside-outside dichotomy can be measured according to the affective features of the political as stressed by Mouffe. For example, nationalist resentments or fears of the neighbouring nationality could undermine consent-seeking approaches for cross-border cooperation between both towns. Rational bargaining would be replaced by irrational segregation.

The questions regarding diffuse and specific support allow for a positive or negative answer that local deputies should formulate in their own words. In the following quantitative analysis of the deputy's responses, answers in favour of transborder cooperation are valued as +1, and answers against transborder cooperation are valued as -1. A response that does not show any clear answer in either direction will be measured as 0. Deputies with the highest support for cross-border cooperation will reach a maximum value of +1 on both dimensions for specific and diffuse support. Deputies with the strongest opposition towards cross-border cooperation will reach a maximum value of -1 on both dimensions. One cannot expect deputies to reach the maximum position in either direction; instead deputies will be located within the range of +/-1. Furthermore, one can expect that deputies with high support for cross-border cooperation are more likely to respond to the questionnaire than deputies with low support for cross-border cooperation. This could be explained by the research objective itself, considering that cosmopolitan deputies have a higher interest in the research of transborder conflict dynamics than their nationalist counterparts.

Attitudes of the local deputies can be grouped into four different types referring to Kopecký / Mudde (2002, 300-304). As mentioned above, these attitudes are limited to local cross-border cooperation. The two dimensions allow the local deputy's attitudes towards cooperation to be differentiated between enthusiastic, pragmatic, sceptical and hostile.

<b>Diffuse dimension support for cross-border cooperation</b>	Max. -1 Europhobe local deputies - strong opposition to the idea of local cross-border cooperation	Max. +1 Europhile local deputies - strong support for the idea of local cross-border cooperation
<b>Specific dimension support for cross-border cooperation</b>		
Max. -1 Pessimist local deputies - strong opposition to practical cross-border cooperation	<b>Hostile local deputies</b> → <b>nationalist</b> - opposition to cross-border cooperation due to practical and normative concerns	<b>Sceptical local deputies</b> - in favour of normative value of cross-border cooperation but opposition to practical cross-border cooperation
Max +1 Optimist local deputies - strong support for practical cross-border cooperation	<b>Pragmatic local deputies</b> - opposition to normative value of cross-border cooperation but utilitarian position on current practical cross-border cooperation	<b>Enthusiastic local deputies</b> → <b>cosmopolitan</b> - in favour of cross border-cooperation due to practical and normative concerns

## 4.2. Episodic interviews

After categorising local deputy's positions, episodic interviews with selected local deputies will be held from both towns to test the H2 hypothesis. These deputies show an outstandingly high agreement on both diffuse and specific dimensions in the questionnaire. Consequently, they have the theoretically highest political distance to nationalist positions which reject cross-border cooperation due to practical and normative concerns. It is, however, theoretically possible that no relevant share of deputies oppose cross-border cooperation. Nevertheless, cosmopolitan deputies could define themselves as opponents to nationalist attitudes within their local society. As long as deputies perceive nationalism as a risk to cross-border cooperation following the argument of Beck, this risk perception could potentially evolve into further transnational activities of such deputies. According to Mouffe, the fear of nationalism fosters the creation of an opposing identity, which could be considered to be cosmopolitan.

Through episodic interviews, the assumed causality between nationalistic attitudes and the formation of transnational cooperation of cosmopolitan deputies will be elaborated on. The guiding questions in these interviews focus on the deputy's experiences with nationalism, whether they perceive nationalist attitudes to be growing and whether these concerns have led to stronger transnational links among cosmopolitan-minded deputies. Of special interest will be the question of whether cosmopolitan deputies from one of the two towns tend to feel a stronger identity with their like-minded deputies from the other national community rather than with their nationalist counterparts from the same homeland. If this is the case, one could conclude that a transnational identity in favour of cooperation and partnership exists among cosmopolitan deputies and that this identity is located horizontally towards the national dimension.

## 5. Thematic outlook

Proving causality between growing nationalism and stronger transnational cooperation among cosmopolitans might show that the politicisation of transborder issues can help to mobilise cross-border cooperation among European citizens. This may indicate that the point of contention between nationalists and cosmopolitans could function as the nucleus for a transnational deliberating process, which could then help to stop the alienation of citizens in the integration process, by then identifying with either cosmopolitan or nationalist groups and becoming politically active. Since Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice as border towns are located in a very concrete area of cross-border relations, the results of this paper refer to specific developments on the micro-European level only. Therefore, any possible outcome of the hypotheses cannot be generalised as conclusions regarding broader transnational conflict dynamics between nationalist and cosmopolitan political players in the European Union. However, several parallels between the specific developments in Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice and the general developments within the broader context of the European Union exist. These parallels should be taken into account to draw conclusions for transborder networking against nationalist attitudes. Firstly, despite the traumatic and war-torn history, different national communities were able to transform their conflicting relationship into cooperation and partnership at both micro and macro levels. It is this pacified relationship that constitutes the setting to deliberate contemporary policy issues related to cross-border cooperation and identity. Secondly, Europeanisation at micro and macro levels has not been a one-dimensional process towards further partnership. Instead, both border towns and recent developments within the European Union illustrate that integration and cooperation is challenged by significant nationalist counter forces. Thirdly, the far-reaching

integration steps after the end of the Cold War at the European level simultaneously came into effect with the renewal of local partnership between the German-Polish border towns Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice. In fact, outcomes on the supranational level have had a direct impact on the daily lives of German and Polish border town citizens. Fourthly, in both cases, civil society undergoes ongoing learning processes on how to be actively involved in approaching transnational relationships among Europeans from the bottom up, despite the language barrier that marks a significant obstacle for transborder cooperation. In this regard, cosmopolitan-minded political players in the European Union should have an interest in studying how cosmopolitan local deputies in border towns counter the challenge of growing nationalism, and should also be mindful of the concrete difficulties they meet.

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