

## **CHANGES IN COOPERATION ALONG THE HUNGARIAN AND SLOVAKIAN BORDER**

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### **The main characteristic features of the Hungarian and Slovakian border**

The present borders of Hungary were marked out in the peace negotiations of 1920. Since these borders were not drawn along the dividing line of the regions, they were the reason for a lot of difficulties both in a social and in an economic sense. To solve this contradictory situation, several attempts were made after 1990 and especially after the accession to the European Union in 2004.

With its length of 678 km, the Hungarian and Slovakian border is our longest border. Its western section is the Danube, in the east it spreads from the River Ipoly to the River Tisza. The bridge between Esztergom and Štúrovo was the last to be rebuilt of all the bridges destroyed in World War II, and what is more, in as late as 2001, which clearly symbolises the relations between the two countries.

Along both sides of the border there are areas of different stages of development. The most developed borderland area is that around Bratislava, which is a part of a region of European significance, that of Vienna–Bratislava–Győr. This region is becoming a real agglomeration area. The border here ensures more favourable possibilities for those seeking them and divides the tumult of blocks of flats and the residential areas of family houses. Slovakian citizens who want to get rid of the crowdedness of the expensive flats in Bratislava can find more convenience in the cheaper housing of Hungarian villages which also means a new lifestyle for them. They benefit from the differences in living standards and settlement structure that are due to the existence of the border.

The next section of the Danube divides the more industrialised Hungarian cities from the agricultural regions in Southern Slovakia. The available jobs in Hungarian towns attract thousands of commuters from the agricultural area of Slovakian Žitný ostrov. Those living in this region have much poorer living conditions than those coming from Bratislava.

The lifestyle of those living on the two sides of the border section from the River Ipoly to the River Tisza is very similar. These settlements have very few job opportunities and there is a high rate of unemployment. Towns and villages on neither side of the border can offer appropriate jobs to those living here. Of all the towns of the region along this part of the border, it is only Košice that is unique

concerning both its number of inhabitants and its high-level economy. Those living along this part of the border are waiting for new jobs to be created anywhere on either side of the border to make it possible for them to make a living without having to move, even if they have to commute every day.

Table 1 shows the census data of the five Slovak regions and the six Hungarian counties (Figure 1). The figures of Bratislava region and Pest County include the figures of the capitals, too.

Figure 1

*Counties and regions along the Hungarian and Slovak border*



Source: Edited by István Mezei, drawn by Máté Mány.

Table 1

*The main figures regarding regions and counties along the border*

| Region/county        | Agriculture | Industry | Services | Rate of employment | Secondary education | Higher education | Younger than 16 | Hungarian | Gypsy | Slovak |
|----------------------|-------------|----------|----------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------|-------|--------|
| Bratislava           | 7.34        | 26.42    | 66.24    | 55.32              | 29.80               | 17.04            | 16.09           | 4.58      | 0.13  | 91.26  |
| Trnava               | 6.12        | 29.01    | 64.87    | 51.20              | 24.01               | 6.04             | 18.79           | 23.73     | 0.57  | 73.91  |
| Nitra                | 7.62        | 27.56    | 64.82    | 50.59              | 24.00               | 6.47             | 18.30           | 27.56     | 0.66  | 70.05  |
| Banská Bystrica      | 7.34        | 26.42    | 66.24    | 50.11              | 25.77               | 7.01             | 19.36           | 11.75     | 2.34  | 83.65  |
| Košice               | 5.68        | 22.74    | 71.58    | 51.76              | 26.07               | 7.51             | 21.47           | 11.15     | 3.89  | 81.82  |
| 5 regions together   | 5.68        | 24.12    | 70.21    | 51.08              | 25.89               | 8.67             | 18.93           | 15.74     | 1.64  | 80.03  |
| Slovakia             | 5.38        | 27.54    | 67.08    | 51.08              | 25.62               | 7.87             | 20.07           | 9.68      | 1.67  | 85.79  |
| Győr-Moson-Sopron    | 5.77        | 39.50    | 54.73    | 42.08              | 17.84               | 6.68             | 21.98           | 95.61     | 0.38  | 0.04   |
| Komárom-Esztergom    | 4.39        | 45.33    | 50.28    | 39.16              | 19.86               | 8.60             | 18.67           | 94.12     | 0.84  | 1.61   |
| Pest                 | 1.50        | 25.18    | 73.32    | 40.63              | 17.77               | 7.25             | 19.03           | 92.40     | 0.93  | 0.46   |
| Nógrád               | 3.01        | 43.54    | 53.44    | 32.99              | 18.66               | 7.03             | 19.65           | 96.03     | 4.52  | 1.58   |
| Heves                | 5.60        | 38.71    | 55.69    | 33.78              | 17.10               | 5.77             | 19.27           | 95.95     | 3.88  | 0.22   |
| Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén | 3.88        | 34.32    | 61.79    | 28.12              | 24.21               | 14.35            | 16.93           | 96.58     | 6.26  | 0.30   |
| 6 counties together  | 2.68        | 30.47    | 66.85    | 37.96              | 21.75               | 11.35            | 18.27           | 95.01     | 2.75  | 0.64   |
| Hungary              | 5.50        | 32.86    | 61.64    | 36.19              | 19.12               | 9.16             | 19.19           | 94.40     | 2.02  | 0.38   |

Source: Census, 2001. KSH, Štatistický úrad SR.

Table 1

*Selected statistical data concerning the economic development of the commune of Dobra Szczecińska against the background of Poland*

| Feature  | Dobra Szczecińska | Mean in rural communes | Feature   | Dobra Szczecińska | Mean in rural communes |
|--|-------------------|------------------------|---|-------------------|------------------------|
| Area (km <sup>2</sup> )                                | 110.3             | 199 474                | Average area of a dwelling (m <sup>2</sup> )                            | 110.3             | 86                     |
| Population   | 11 455            | 10 763 576             | Dwelling area per person (m <sup>2</sup> )                              | 36.1              | 24.5                   |
| Population density (persons/km <sup>2</sup> )          | 103.9             | 54                     | Share of dwellings with bathroom (%)                                    | 97                | 84.6                   |
| Share of population in productive age <sup>1</sup> (%) | 80.9              | 66.1                   | Share of dwellings with municipal or own water supply (%)               | 99.5              | 87.8                   |
| Share of population using water supply network (%)     | 97.5              | 71.6                   | NGOs per 1,000 inhabitants  | 1.6               | 1.8                    |
| Share of population using sewage network (%)           | 82.3              | 20.5                   | Private businesses per 1,000 inhabitants in productive age <sup>2</sup> | 211.3             | 91.9                   |
| Population number per pharmacy                         | 5946              | 6756                   | Own revenues of communal budget per inhabitant (PLN)                    | 1410              | 656                    |
| Population number per library                          | 2973              | 2552                   | Expenditures of communes per inhabitant (PLN)                           | 1438              | 1837                   |

Note: <sup>1</sup>Males: 15–64 years of age, females: 15–59 years of age; <sup>2</sup>Males: 18–64 years of age, females: 18–59 years of age. Danych..., 2006.

The whole of Slovakia is less industrialised than Hungary, and its southern regions together with the comparatively high number of agricultural districts along the Hungarian border show lower values. Those employed in services represent a high rate in both countries but it is mostly due to the two capitals. Slovakia shows a considerable advantage in the rate of employment within the whole population. As for schooling, there are more people having a certificate of secondary education in Slovakia; in the northern counties of Hungary, however, the rate of graduates is higher. Slovakian regions have a younger population than the neighbouring Hungarian counties. Both countries have ethnic minorities, but Hungary is more homogeneous, the rate of the majority is higher. The Hungarian and, respectively, the Slovak population, as the dominant nationalities, make up the majority in the counties and regions of both countries. There is a high number of Hungarians in the regions along the Danube, but the continuous Hungarian zone is broken in the area to the east of the River Ipoly. On the Hungarian side the Slovak ethnic minority lives sporadically. The figures show that, in our northern counties, to the east of the River Ipoly there is a higher rate of Gypsy ethnic minority compared with the national average. Similarly, their number is the highest in the long Košice and the large Banská Bystrica regions on the Slovak side. Their number is much lower on the two banks of the Danube.

### **The typical forms of cross-border cooperation**

#### *Construction of highways*

Compared to the settlements inside the country, those along the border are all in a more disadvantageous situation. This can especially be seen in the fact that their transport infrastructure is limited. Transport is all the more important because it makes the development of economic relations possible, i.e. provides a living for the inhabitants of the settlement. The existence of the border usually makes transport, and, with it, economic life more difficult, therefore discussions about cross-border cooperation usually focus on transport.

At the turn of 2007 and 2008, right after opening the border, the inhabitants of the villages close to the border began to clean and renew crossing points. These minor roads ease the isolation of the local people and drive them back to the centuries-long coexistence. There are roads that connect towns. After the Eszkáros road is built, the distance from Sátoraljaújhely to Košice and to Košice airport will be halved; i.e. it will only be 45 km.

Rebuilding the bridges over the river Ipoly would play a similar role, because they would mostly be small-scale investments. Building paths between villages, bridges connecting minor roads would be necessary.

The joint activity involves a lot of new phenomena. In a political sense it is a novelty that those participating in the cooperation do not act upon superior orders or a central party decision. The joint work was organized by local government representatives and mayors. Village people, who agreed with them, also took part in the work. Voluntary activity involves civil cooperation because local governments have neither the necessary budget, nor the competencies to reconstruct or build roads between settlements. It is a sign of a wide joining of social forces that workers of the neighbouring gravel and stone pits and cement factories, as well as those living in the area, took part in the road-construction work.

The opposite national feeling can also be experienced along the opened border: defying the European Union, the mayor of the part of the town which used to belong to Sátoraljaújhely but is a Slovak settlement called Slovenské Novo Mesto today, is not willing to remove the concrete flower-boxes from the road so as to make transport impossible there.

### *Revival of traditions*

The cooperation of the settlements that are close to each other focuses on the revival of traditions, which is quite understandable after the long separation. The local governments examine what traditions they have in the fields of built heritage, landscape or human activities (e.g. folk or town customs, cultural values). They write projects concerning traditional crafts and famous products. However, these traditions will be transformed and modernised gradually. Modernisation of traditions means that the individual and common values that have been rediscovered are made suitable for being sold on the markets of tourism and will become a new means of subsistence. This is how wine tourism goes together with the world of spas and aqua parks, offering specialities together with hiking tours or sports (cycling, rowing, and rock-climbing), etc. This is how the Danube has once again become a link and an opportunity for future development. The *Eurovelo 6* international cycle track on the bank of the river, as well as the ports and infrastructure necessary for water tourism, are also being planned.

As an example, we would like to describe the relations between the Hídverő (Bridge Building) settlements in the estuary of the River Žitava. This association was set up by the Rákóczi Alliance at the end of the 90s. The main idea was that the former historical interdependence had to be revived and, in an abstract sense, bridges had to be built between the settlements on the two sides of the Danube, as a result of which cooperation may be easier in the future, and the microregions emerging in this way will be more powerful before the different forums.

Association membership significantly contributed to the development of the settlement Neszmély, a village organizing the cooperation. It can utilize the infra-

structure necessary for the organization of the Bridge Building Days, (e.g. community area made of wood, cooking facilities for several thousand people on the bank of the Danube), on other occasions as well. Organised by an American travel agency, a boat cruise always stops on a regular basis at the village, where a wide range of programmes awaits tourists. The utilisation of the facilities of tourism is of great importance for the other river bank, as well. It is a plan of theirs to build a 'Europe' village in the territory of the two villages opposite each other, where the traditional village architecture of the member states of the Union would be exhibited. Visitors will be admitted to the exhibitions on both sides of the border, and their visit will only be complete by having seen both.

Parallel facilities can also contribute to the relations of two settlements. The thermal water supply on both banks of the Danube is exploited in a similar way. The smaller Slovakian settlements having a spa join the colourful programme facilities of the bigger Hungarian towns. The baths that are close to each other are complementary because in most cases aqua parks have been built in the neighbourhood of spas.

The motivation to build new roads and to revive traditions was national sympathy, which was then replaced by planned, project-based cooperation.

### **Planned cooperation**

#### ***Project-based cooperation of the tender market***

A typical feature of project-based cooperation is that it focuses on some kind of joint investment. The investment usually requires joining forces for one particular purpose, which, as shown by the above mentioned examples, can be organized as voluntary work, i.e. with their own resources. However, to carry out large-scale tasks, a larger sum of money is needed, but due to tight resources, the backward situation and the compulsion of money acquisition, they can only carry them out by applying for tenders. This is how human demands will lead to projects. Since it is in most cases good luck and not just needs that determine which settlement may get into the favourable position of applying for a tender successfully, writing tenders has become an everyday activity, whereas winning a tender is really unique.

In the beginning, cross-border cooperation was supported by the PHARE CBC programme. Regarding the Hungarian and Slovakian border, two restrictions have to be mentioned. On the one hand, it was only in 1999 that the possibility of a joint tender became accessible for this section of the border, because formerly there had been two attempts with the Austrians. The other restriction is that, although this is the longest part of the border viewed from Hungary, it was granted the least support, i.e. 2 million euros, which remained unchanged year by year. There was a

change only in spending it, i.e. those who won tenders could carry out their tasks to an ever increasing extent (*Table 2*).

In the course of the procedure the authorities modified the original practice, because, owing to the high number of demands, they divided the sum of money meant for large-scale tenders into several parts in the last two rounds. If the money that can be distributed is tight, then at least more people should be supported with it. In case of small sum grants the conclusion can be drawn that the rate of the tender activity of the towns was higher, and more applications were submitted from the counties to the east of the Danube. The large difference between the applied and the actually spent sum underlines the former remark that it was good luck that played the most important part in who would be the winner from among several good applications (*Mezei, 2004*). Local governments, in both their domestic and international activities, could experience the poor choice of the tender market. They are forced to participate by the tight municipality incomes. A thorough examination of the incomes could only provide exact information about the income structure of the individual local governments, among them that of local governments in the borderland, the proportion of tender money within their incomes and about whether the tender incomes of local governments in the borderland has increased so that they can ease their backward situation, and whether the proportion of the grants allocated to them has been increased or not.

Table 2

*PHARE CBC programmes along the Hungarian and Slovak border*

|      | Approved support | Contracted | Completion of the programme | Supported projects |       |
|------|------------------|------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------|
|      |                  |            |                             | large              | small |
| 1995 | 1,500,000        | 723,116    | 1999.07.31                  | 4                  | –     |
| 1996 | 1,500,000        | 1,498,580  | 2000.12.31                  | 4                  | 20    |
| 1999 | 2,000,000        | 1,793,815  | 2002.12.31                  | 1                  | 11    |
| 2000 | 2,000,000        | 1,969,670  | 2003.12.31                  | 1                  | 11    |
| 2001 | 2,000,000        | 1,998,659  | 2004.11.30                  | 1                  | 9     |
| 2002 | 2,000,000        | 1,998,659  | 2005.11.30                  | 15                 | 11    |
| 2003 | 2,000,000        | 1,953,459  | 2006.11.30                  | 18                 | 5     |

Source: Váti Kht.

### **Consequences of cooperation**

Revealing the actual conditions and the analysis of the situation have to precede the preparation of common plans. On this basis plans can be drawn up. Situation analysis is based on an increasingly thorough expertise, sometimes with the contribution of researchers, sometimes by involving local experts. Analyses are the results of thorough statistical, data collecting work. They analyse the conditions of settlements or those of a region, and on this basis try to outline the development that can be expected or planned. While planning the cooperation, they have to survey geographical space, population, employment, education, economic environment and transport infrastructure. Therefore, it can be assumed that more and more principles of sciences, i.e. those of geography, sociology and economy will be used by the general public. Several trades are represented by those involved in the planning process. Besides the representatives and experts of local governments, the experts of administration, actors of the business sector and entrepreneurial interest protection, and civil organizations are also involved.

The structure of the institutional system of planning or the method of its operation is still not complete. The subject of development also keeps changing. In the beginning, governments were forced to develop backward regions, i.e. large regions, and then regional units, i.e. microregions around cities became privileged. In recent times, with the growth pole programme, national centres have become privileged; nowadays, however, the development of cities gains increasing importance.

It is the English language that could be used to overcome language difficulties, but neither party is really prepared for that, and besides, local people do not really think it would be a natural way of communication. The young generation still at school is expected to be able to use English as a mediatory language, but in real life it is still not known which will be the language used to maintain relations. As a result of opening the border, Hungarian language proficiency has gained appreciation. Today there is a need for educated young people who can speak Hungarian, Slovak and English, especially in settlement and regional development, as well as in the business sector.

### ***Plans to organize joint services***

The most complete form of communications is when, disregarding the border, services are combined to fulfil human and marked demands. This is the most practical form of cooperation, which is mostly backed up by institutions, e.g. the communal service provider, school, health care or social provision as services meeting human needs, as well as actors of the economy that observe market needs so as to earn

profits. The role of the mediator is played by county municipalities. They want to find the actors that carry out similar tasks and the parties that are entitled to take part in talks (state, local government, business and civil representatives) and they make them start negotiations. They provide the necessary administrative, office and legal experience to help provide combined services.

The institutions involved in providing the service in a direct way (hospitals, medical services, ambulance, primary and secondary schools, social institutions, communal service providers, etc.) inform each other about their strengths, free capacity, as well as their weaknesses or capacity needs.

Urgent health provision is accepted and regulated by international agreements. However, in the case of programmed, planned and controllable health care depending on the condition of the patients, social security systems should agree concerning the expenses of health care. Health care is rather costly and needs a lot of medical instruments. Therefore the possibilities of a fairer distribution of burden have to be examined. They have to find out who and in what field has something to offer to the other party in return for something else. The first step to be taken is to survey specialist health care, followed by the examination of settlement systems. Costs of treatments are different in different countries, there is a considerable difference in prices between the individual countries. Slovakian insurers do not think it is worth making the more expensive services in Hungarian hospitals available for patients of Slovakian citizenship. Developing relations with the units on the other side of the border is made all the more difficult by the fact that Hungarian health care conditions have been unpredictable for years.

Regarding education, social provision and every other service, agreement has to be reached about covering the state or local government costs of the provided service. In education national solidarity has solved the emerging problems so far. In the secondary schools of the towns close to the border there are a comparatively high number of students who are not of the Hungarian nationality, but there are a lot of maintainers who share their costs. For example, in the town Sátoraljaújhely, there are secondary schools maintained by the county, the town and the church, too, or in 2007 the maintenance rights of the Slovakian-Hungarian bilingual primary school were taken over by the Local Government of the National Slovak Minority. In this way the costs of the about 100 students studying in the town are borne by several maintainers.

The joint organization of the services means that both countries have to harmonise their laws and regulations.

### *The multiplier effect of cross-border relations*

Hungarian and Slovakian relations provide several examples for the multiplier effect, i.e. the launched development persuades the decision-makers of the two countries for further cooperation to an increasing extent.

The people living in the borderland need transport on fast and short roads. Besides the direct and small-scale connections, roads are also needed to make possible the development of relations between countries, or even large regions including several countries possible. An example for this is the new bridge between Esztergom and Štúrovo, and after it had been built, further plans appeared. Mária Valéria Bridge, which was inaugurated in 2001, symbolized the end of World War II, because this had been the last bridge ruined in the war in Europe. In real life it provides the opportunity for the two countries to develop actual, everyday relations. However, after transport had been started on the bridge, new problems arose. Commercial relations between the towns and regions on the two banks of the river turned out to be developing at such a quick rate that the bridge connecting city centres soon became too narrow. Another, bigger bridge has to be built not far from the town to meet the increased needs of cargo transportation.

This demand, which the mayors of the two cities also mentioned, leads to a question concerning Europe: where should the new north-south direction European transport corridor be located, where should the Helsinki corridor signed V/C be? Two regions are competing: the Ipoly Valley (Nógrád County) and the Esztergom–Štúrovo region (Komárom-Esztergom County). Both refer to Budapest, the most dynamic centre of the Carpathian Basin being close, when they want to emphasize their own significance. When making a decision, the European Union will also take a stand while taking the interests of several countries into consideration, since the plan will affect the north-south connection of Eastern-Central Europe. Hungarian planning affects the transport problem of the whole of Europe, i.e. that it is mostly the east-west transport lines that have been built, but north-south transport lines would also be necessary. The needs of the two towns have coincided with the ideas of those who would like to build a transport network of Europe.

Similarly, the development of the international transport of the eastern part of the country is also very complicated and important. The border was drawn in a way that now the railway junction belongs to Ukraine. Getting there is only possible from Hungarian Záhony and Slovakian Čierna. Roads have also been adjusted to this triangle, excluding both Hungary and Slovakia from the usage of this important communication junction. In this case, it is not a third country, but Ukraine that is the third party in the ambition to restore the natural gravitation areas. Therefore, to avoid the problems with Ukraine, a new communication corridor seems to be developing from Finland, via the Baltic countries, Poland, Košice in Slovakia and Miskolc in Hungary to the south (*Molnár, 2007*).

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