

# **THE EFFECTS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CROSS-BORDER TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE: THE EXAMPLE OF SLOVAK–POLISH BOUNDARY**

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## **Introduction**

European integration is one of the most important processes (phenomena) that have affected Europe, particularly fields like politics, law, economics, and also social and cultural fields during the last decades.

An important milestone in the process of European integration was the gradual integration of several former socialist countries into the EU. Since the establishment of independent Slovakia in 1993, EU accession has been one of its objectives. 27<sup>th</sup> June 1995 was the date when Slovakia submitted its application for EU membership. The most important date was the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2004 when 10 countries entered the EU (8 countries of Central and Eastern Europe: Estonia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia). Another important date was the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2007, when Slovakia entered the Schengen area.

The aim of this paper is the analysis of effects of the European integration on the development of cross-border transport infrastructure with special attention to the Slovak–Polish boundary. In other words, some examples of development of cross-border infrastructure on the Slovak–Polish border that use the EU funds will be presented.

## **EU integration and EU funds**

The main immediate assets for Slovakia and other states during the process of integration were the payments from the pre-accession funds and after their entry into the EU the payments from structural and cohesion funds. These funds enable to solve various structural problems and help the acceleration of economic growth.

The first pre-accession fund was the PHARE Programme, in 1999 the SAPARD and ISPA funds were added. The PHARE Programme for 2000–2006 had two priorities – to build-up institutions and investments into infrastructure. The pre-accession strategy based on the ISPA (Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession) was oriented to the adaptation of the candidate countries to the infra-

structure standards of the EU in the sphere of transport and environment. The special pre-accession SAPARD Programme (The Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development) should ease the transformation in agriculture and rural areas.

Part of the PHARE Programme was also PHARE CBC (cross-border cooperation), the programme with the aim to assist and develop cooperation between the Slovak Republic and neighbouring EU member countries or neighbouring associated countries. Since 2000, the PHARE CBC Programme has been implemented through bilateral programmes with Austria, Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary.

Since the accession of Slovakia to the EU, the possibility of spending the EU Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund has become open. The Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund are the financial instruments of European Union (EU) regional policy, which is intended to narrow the development disparities among regions and Member States with the goal of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Structural Funds are instruments of the European Union structural policy used to attain its objectives. The Structural Funds comprise of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). ERDF is targeted toward contributing to the development of the least developed regions in the European Union. ESF serves for assistance in the acquisition of objectives mainly in the fields of active employment policy and free movement of labour, as well as of fighting unemployment and discrimination of various groups in the labour market.

The Cohesion Fund is an EC financial instrument, designed for Member States whose per-capita GDP value measured as the parity of purchasing power and calculated from EC data in the last three calendar years' average is less than 90% of the European Communities average. The fund supports projects in transport infrastructure and environmental fields.

For detailed information concerning EU funds see e.g. <http://europa.eu>, MVRR (2003a), MVRR (2003b), DEK in the SR (2003), *Babitz–Havran* (2006).

One of priority areas that use EU funds is the development of transport infrastructure that allows movement of people and goods between the EU member states.

### **Trans-European transport networks in relation to Slovakia**

A number of projects to develop transport infrastructure at the European level was created gradually, such as Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) and Pan-European Transport Corridors (Crete Corridors "or" Helsinki Corridors).

Trans-European transport network (TEN-T) include road, rail, air and water transport networks and are planned and designed so as to cover the entire continent

of Europe in order to connect the national network, to connect peripheral regions to the centre and to improve quality and efficiency of transport networks.

There are also ten Pan-European corridors, which are paths between major urban centres and ports, mainly in Eastern Europe, which have been identified as requiring major investment. Four Pan-European corridors, IV, Va, VI, and VII pass through the territory of Slovakia.

Corridors IV, Va and VI in the road network of SR consist of the highway D2 (state border CZ/SK, Kúty–Malacky–Bratislava – the state border SR/HU, Rusovce), the highway D1 (Bratislava–Trnava–Žilina–Košice–state border SK/UA, Vyšné Nemecké) and the highway D3 (state border PL/SK, Skalité–Čadca–Žilina). Within the railway network in Slovakia, corridors IV, Va and VI consist of the following railway lines: the state border CZ/SK–Kúty–Bratislava–Nové Zámky–Štúrovo – the state border SK/HU, Bratislava–Žilina–Košice–Čierna nad Tisou–Čop – the state border SK/UA and state border, PL/SK – Skalité–Čadca–Žilina. Corridor VII is the watercourse of the River Danube.

By including Slovakia in these projects, transport infrastructure of Slovakia became part of the European transport network. Investments into the transport infrastructure in Slovakia were therefore a priority oriented to construction of highways and reconstruction of railways, which are parts of these corridors.

In addition to efforts to integrate transport infrastructure at the European level, there was also an effort to build infrastructure between the neighbouring countries. This article focuses attention on the development of cross-border transport infrastructure on the Slovak–Polish state border.

### **Development of the Slovak–Polish cross-border transport infrastructure after 1989**

The Slovak–Polish boundary runs along the Carpathians and divides this territory into two parts. The Slovak–Polish borderland has a very attractive natural environment – mountainous area with three cross-border national parks (Tatras, Pieniny, Poloniny–Bieszczady) and two international Biosphere Reserves (Tatras, Eastern Carpathians). Mountainous relief creates favourable conditions for hiking and biking in summer and skiing in winter. Besides attractive natural environment of the borderland there are also numerous cultural monuments (e.g. wooden churches, castles, manor houses, folk architecture). We can say that, the Slovak–Polish borderland boasts a very high tourist potential.

On the other side the state border is a barrier for the development of the territory (natural – relief and waters, environmental). Before 1989, the Slovak–Polish border was also a political, legal, and economic barrier. In 1990 there were only 5 border crossings (Trstená–Chyžne, Tatranská Javorina–Łysa Polana, Lysá nad Dunajcom –Niedzica, Mníšek nad Popradom–Piwniczna and Vyšný Komárnik–Barwinek).

The new political and socio-economic situation in Eastern and Central Europe after 1989 changed this unfavourable status. The function of borders and the character of cross-border relationships radically changed (Więckowski, 2009). The increasing cross-border movement of people and goods required the opening of new border crossings and the construction of new cross-border transport infrastructure. After the accession of Slovakia to the Schengen Zone, the Slovak–Polish border was fully opened. Więckowski (2004, 2010) conducted detailed research concerning the Slovak–Polish borderland with specific regard to the development of tourism.

In the first stage of changes concerning the cross-border linkages after 1989, the following border crossings were opened: Suchá Hora–Chochołów (1991), Podspády–Jurgów, Becherov–Koniczna (1994), Oravská Polhora–Korbielów (1995) a Skalité–Zwardoń–Myto (1995). Later came Čirč–Leluchów (1997), Novot’–Ujsoły (2001), Bobrov–Winiarczykówka (2002), Kurov–Muszynka a Palota–Radoszyce (2003). Many of them served first for the local border traffic and gradually changed their status to international border crossings. Some of them used the already existing transport infrastructure (e.g Suchá Hora–Chochołów), but in some cases a new cross-border transport infrastructure had to be built.

Examples of construction of the new border cross-border road infrastructure where the EU Funds were used include the border crossings of Čirč–Leluchów and Palota–Radoszyce.

The road border crossing Čirč–Leluchów (see *Figure 1*) is located in the district of Stará Ľubovňa in the immediate vicinity of the railway border-crossing Plaveč–Muszynka and near the locality where the River Poprad leaves the territory of Slovakia. There local border traffic existed since 1997. In 1999 it was opened as a border crossing for tourists from 35 countries. The old bridge was destroyed by flood and there was a need to build a new one. The project of construction of the new bridge (Visegrad Bridge) was supported by the PHARE CBC Programme. Total cost amounted to 4.5 mill. EUR and the PHARE CBC Programme contribution was 1.65 mill. EUR. The Visegrad Bridge was opened in September 2003 (Korzár, 2003). However, financial resources were used ineffectively. The capacity of the bridge is oversized (see *Figure 1*) and money could be used for another project.

The road border crossing Palota–Radoszyce (*Figure 2*) lies in the eastern part of the Slovak–Polish borderland (district Medzilaborce) in the mountainous area of Nízke Beskydy. At present, it is the easternmost road border crossing to Poland. The border crossing was opened in November 2003. The reconstruction of road in Slovakia (6 km) and the construction of a new road in Poland (5.1 km) was supported by the PHARE CBC Programme. The total cost in Slovakia was 200 mill. Sk (4.8 mill. EUR in 2003). The contribution of the PHARE CBC Programme was 2 mill. EUR in Slovakia and 2 mill. EUR in Poland (SITA 2003).

Figure 1

*Visegrad bridge – border crossing Čirč–Leluchów*

Photo by D. Michniak.

Figure 2

*The road border crossing of Palota–Radoszyce*

Photo by D. Michniak.

Concerning the pre-accession funds, the PHARE CBC Programme played the main role in building the Slovak-Polish cross-border transport infrastructure. In case of Structural Funds it is mainly ERDF under the INTERREG IIIA – SK-PL Programme 2004–2006 and the Cross-border Co-operation Operational Programme Republic of Poland–Slovak Republic 2007–2013. Examples of using Structural Funds are projects for reconstruction of roads leading to the Polish border financed from the INTERREG IIIA – SK-PL Programme 2004–2006: road no. III/544 Kurov – border with Poland (5.0 km), road no. II/545 Zborov – border with Poland (5.3 km) and road No. III/557 24 Nižná Polianka – border with Poland (0.51 km). Examples of successful projects on the Polish side of borderland include modernisation of the road no. 958 and no. 959 – Zakopane – Chocholów – state border and modernisation of the road No. 945 – Jeleśnia – border crossing Korbielów.

The last mentioned project in Slovakia also continues under the Cross-border Co-operation Operational Programme The Republic of Poland – Slovak Republic 2007–2013 and finally it will lead to the construction of the new cross-border road Nižná Polianka – Oženna.

In total 13 projects of reconstruction and building of road infrastructure in the Slovak-Polish borderland are financed under the ongoing Cross-border Co-operation Operational Programme The Republic of Poland – Slovak Republic 2007–2013. The amount of co-financing of these projects from ERDF is almost 38 mil. €.

Not every project of building the cross-border transport infrastructure was successful. The project of modernisation and enlargement of the road Oščadnica-Vreščovka – Bór under the INTERREG 2004–2006 Programme has been concluded with the construction of the road in the Slovak territory (see *Figure 3*). The Polish side spent money in reconstruction of the road within the municipality. However, finances to build the road as far as the border were missing. This project will continue under The Republic of Poland–Slovak Republic Cross-border Co-operation Operational Programme 2007–2013.

## Conclusions

European integration is one of the most important processes (phenomena) that affected Europe during the last decades. The process of European integration influenced many fields, and one of them is the development of transport infrastructure. This paper focuses on evaluation of the influence of EU funds on the development of cross-border transport infrastructure between Slovakia and Poland. Regarding the pre-accession funds, the PHARE CBC Programme played the main role in building the cross-border transport infrastructure. Structural funds were rep-

resented mainly by the ERDF under INTERREG IIIA – SK-PL Programme 2004–2006 and Cross-border Co-operation Operational Programme the Republic of Poland–Slovak Republic 2007–2013.

Figure 3

*The road Oščadnica-Vreščovka – Bór in 2010*



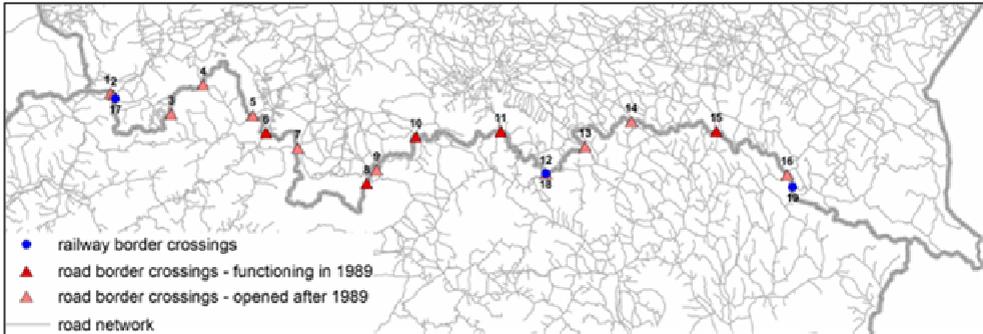
Photo by B. Chrenka.

The projects financed by the EU funds helped to build new roads and open a new border crossing between Slovakia and Poland (e.g. Palota–Radosyzce, Čirč – Leluchów), and to reconstruct existing roads (e.g. Kurov – border with Poland, Zborov – border with Poland). Now there are 16 cross-border roads running across the Slovak-Polish border (see *Figure 4*). The road border crossings Nižná Polianka–Oženna and Oščadnica-Vreščovka–Bór are under construction. There is also potential for the reconstruction of other roads in the Slovak–Polish borderland (e.g. Čertižné–Jašliska).

We can conclude that the new cross-border transport infrastructure helps to improve trans-border accessibility and enables to use the existing tourist potential. Strictly protected areas such as National Parks and Nature Reserves represent important barriers for cross-border movement and development of cross-border transport infrastructure.

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Figure 4

*Border crossings between Slovakia and Poland*

Key: Road border crossings: 1 – Skalité–Zwardoń–Myto; 2 – Skalité–Zwardoń; 3 –Novoť–Ujsoly; 4 – Oravská Polhora–Korbielów; 5 – Bobrov–Winiarczykówka; 6 –Trstená–Chyžne; 7 – Suchá Hora–Chochołów; 8 – Tatranská Javorina–Łysa Polana; 9 – Podspády–Jurgów; 10 – Lysá nad Dunajcom–Niedzica; 11 – Mníšek nad Popradom–Piwniczna; 12 Čirč–Leluchów; 13 – Kurov–Muszynka; 14 – Becherov–Konieczna; 15 – Vyšný Komárnik–Barwinek; 16 – Palota–Radoszyce. Railway border crossings: 17 – Skalité–Zwardoń; 18 – Plaveč–Muszynka; 19 –Palota – Łupków.

Source: Author's construction.

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