

10 Border crossing in the Carpathian area

State borders are „scars” on the cheeks of the Earth. They are obstacles for spatial movement of commodities, services, people, ideas and information. Therefore, compared to other regions border regions are – usually – in disadvantageous situation. Borders always represent a kind of division, but this dividedness can be of very different scale. Some borders are very easy to cross, some others represent a very serious obstacle of movement. This dividing role depends on:

- the number, type, capacity, distance and spatial distribution of border crossings;
- the frequency of cross-border public transport (trains, buses, ships);
- the length and nature of administrative border-crossing procedures (Passport control and customs).

The Carpathian region is one of the European areas with the densest network of state borders. It is a continental area, with relatively small states and long land borders. The length of borders in the region is nearly 5,000 km. In addition, these borders belonged to the most guarded borders of Europe during the former “socialist” period. A small part of them (the border of Austria to Czechoslovakia and Hungary) was part of the Iron Curtain, but other borders – especially the borders to the former Soviet Union – were not less strictly guarded. The number of border crossings between the individual regions was not more than 2–3. Permission, to cross the borders was a rare privilege for ordinary people.

The situation changed substantially after the change of the political and economic system in 1989–1991. Gradually, more and more border-crossings were opened, the administrative procedures of crossing the border were substantially simplified and accelerated. Nevertheless, on some borders the number and density of border crossings is still insufficient, and crossing the border still takes a long time.

The *table 18* below show the border-crossing situation on the borders in the Carpathian region.

There are 147 road border crossings in the Carpathian region. However, only 55 – one third – out of the 147 can be used for border crossing without any limitations. Some are open only for passenger traffic, or even only for citizens of the two neighbouring countries. Others are not crossbar for buses. Some are not crossbar in the evening and at night. Some border-crossings – not listed in the table – are open only on special holidays. Considering these restrictions and limitations, the density of border crossings on some borders is still very low, the average distance between them is 150–180 km and there are only 2–6 crossings on long borders. (Only as a reminder: the borders of France, after the Schengen agreement can be crossed on 4,000 places!)

Table 18

Road border-crossings (2005)

Border section	Length of the border (km)	Number of road border crossings	Average distance between border crossings, (km)	International crossings without any limitations	Their average distance	Crossings only for passenger traffic (also buses)	Crossings only for passenger traffic (no buses)	Crossings only for citizens of the neighbouring countries	Crossings with limited opening hours
Poland–Slovakia	541	16	34	3	180	8	7	7	–
Poland–Czech Republic	770	28	28	10	77	11	7	2	2
Czech Republic–Slovakia	252	16	16	6	42	n/a	1	–	–
Slovakia–Hungary	677	16	42	7	96	2	2	n/a	6
Slovakia–Austria	91	4	22	2	44	1	–	–	2
Slovakia–Ukraine	97	2	49	1	97	–	–	–	–
Hungary–Ukraine	103	5	21	2	52	3	n/a	2	2
Hungary–Romania	443	10	44	3	147	5	–	2	1
Czech Republic–Austria	466	16	34	7	67	–	–	–	9
Hungary–Austria	366	12	31	6	62	5	n/a	2	7
Romania–Ukraine	531	9	59	3	177	–	–	–	–
Romania–Serbia	476	8	60	3	159	4	4	4	n/a
Hungary–Serbia	151	5	30	2	75	3	n/a	2	2
Total	4,964	147	34	55	90	42	21	21	31

Source: Author's construction.

The situation is not better in the case of railway border-crossings either (*Table 19*).

The number of railway border crossings is 64 in the region. But again, only one third (22) can be regarded as “normal” international border crossings. In 19, there are only one or two 3 train pairs per day (there are crossings where the frequency is one train pair per week!). There are crossings that are limited only to passenger traffic, or to freight transport. Finally, there are 19 crossings that are closed for the time being: there is no traffic at all. The average distance between “all service” rail border crossings in the region is 226 km, but there are border sections, where this average distance is more than 500 km!

This situation is hardly understandable, because even the present poor infrastructure would allow the establishment of more crossings without any significant investment. 100 years ago borders were different, regions that are now divided by a border, constituted single economic regions with relatively dense road and railway networks. According to the estimations, about half of those roads and railway lines that were constructed before World War I. and cross actual borders now are not used for border crossing. Many of them were fully dismantled, others are closed for traffic. No doubt, economic relations between the regions, now on the two sides of the border became less intensive and therefore the operation of trains became uneconomical. Railway lines were dismantled also inside the countries. But the accession of most Carpathian countries to the EU will certainly enhance economic relations and some of the old border-crossing lines could be reconstructed

Table 19

Rail border-crossings (2005)

Border section	Length of the border (km)	Number of rail border crossings	Average distance between border crossings, (km)	International crossings with more than two train pairs per day	Their average distance	Low (less than 3) trains per day	No passenger traffic	No freight transport	Closed lines
Poland–Slovakia	541	3	180	1	541	1	1	n/a	0
Poland–Czech Republic	770	5	154	1	770	1	3	n/a	8
Czech Republic–Slovakia	252	7	36	6	42	1	n/a	3	0
Slovakia–Hungary	677	9	75	3	226	4	2	n/a	0
Slovakia–Austria	91	3	30	2	46	n/a	n/a	n/a	1
Slovakia–Ukraine	97	2	49	1	97	n/a	1	n/a	n/a
Hungary–Ukraine	103	2	52	1	103	n/a	1	n/a	0
Hungary–Romania	443	7	63	1	443	4	n/a	n/a	2
Czech Republic–Austria	466	5	93	2	233	2	n/a	n/a	1
Hungary–Austria	366	7	52	1	366	3	n/a	n/a	1
Romania–Ukraine	531	5	106	1	531	1	2	n/a	1
Romania–Serbia	476	7	68	1	476	1	n/a	n/a	5
Hungary–Serbia	151	2	76	1	151	1	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	4964	64	78	22	226	19	10	3	19

Source: Author's composition.