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Emerging Conflict or Deepening Cooperation? - The Case of the Hungarian Border Regions

1 Introduction

Border related issues and transboundary cooperation are of particular significance to Hungary. In a sense, the whole country can be considered a "borderlands society". Out of Hungary's 19 counties, only five do not share borders with a neighboring state. Even the capital city, Budapest, with a population of 2 million, is located only 50 kilometers from the present-day Hungarian-Slovakian border.

The preservation, and, in some cases, establishment of relatively open state borders has been and remains a question of national political importance. It is especially important for the survival of those Hungarian minorities who found themselves citizens of foreign countries after the signing of the Trianon Peace Treaty and the subsequent dissolution of Hungary's historical borders in 1920. Since Trianon, transboundary cooperation between Hungary and its neighbors has been rather slow to develop. Throughout the period of state socialism (1949-1989), bilateral frontier cooperation was generally not very intensive. Concepts for trilateral border development on the Hungarian-Czechoslovak-Soviet and Hungarian-Czechoslovak-Austrian borders, proposed with the aim of deepening socialist territorial integration or as a gesture of goodwill and détente, could not be implemented due to the stubborn insularity of socialist economic and planning policy.

The changes since 1989 as well as Hungary's intention to join the European Union make necessary new approaches to transboundary cooperation in this part of Europe. Along with the other former socialist countries, Hungary must solve her historical problems as well as clarify the status of national minorities and find new and peaceful forms of coexistence with her neighbors.

2 Geopolitics and Hungary's State Borders: the Historical Tumults of the 20th Century

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Generally speaking, Hungary's borders were, from the establishment of the Christian kingdom in 996 until the end of World War I, relatively stable. These borders, defined by the natural barrier of the Carpathian mountains were, in fact, among the most permanent in Europe. This permanence is still embedded in Hungary's collective consciousness: the concept of the "Thousand Year Border" has consequently formed an important part of national policy. By contrast, the most characteristic features of 20th century Hungarian history have been frequent and radical changes in national boundaries. For this reason, border-related issues have become a crucial element of Hungarian domestic and foreign policy, as well as of social and political geography.

The present Hungarian state borders have only a short history. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was one of the powers suffering defeat in World War I and was literally torn asunder in compliance with the interests of the great powers. At the same time that the Empire ceased to exist, Hungary recovered her independence, but only about one-third of her original territory. Ultimately, six states received a share of the former Hungary: Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Italy, and Romania. Of the 325,411 km² once occupied by Hungary, only 92,833 square km² remained within Hungarian sovereignty after 1920. Similarly, the number of inhabitants decreased from 20,886,387 to only 7,606,971.

The multiethnic Hungarian state was split up in such a way that the new post-Empire states (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia) and Romania also became multinational. As a consequence, the characteristics of Hungary's borders changed fundamentally. The historical Hungarian state, largely delimited by natural boundaries, had after 1920 only two physical boundaries, the Danube and Drava rivers. The entire length of the Hungarian-Romanian border, for instance, was politically and thus artificially determined (Palotás 1990). With

regard to ethnography, only the Hungarian-Austrian state border coincided entirely with natural linguistic borders; about 60% of Hungary's borders (that is, virtually all of the Hungarian-Slovak, four-fifths of the Hungarian-Romanian and 30% of the border with the former Yugoslavia) sever linguistically and culturally cohesive regions.

Before and during the Second World War, Hungary's borders were again - if only temporarily - revised. In 1937 the length of Hungarian state borders was 2,266 km. In 1938, the First Vienna Decision transferred control of the southern zone of the former Upper Hungary and Sub-Carpathia from Czechoslovakia back to Hungary, so that the length of the state borders increased to 2,734 km. In 1940, as a result of the Second Vienna Decision, Northern Transylvania, ceded to Romania by Trianon, was reincorporated into the Hungarian state. With the collapse of the Yugoslav state after Hitler's invasion in 1941, Hungary regained territory in the south as well, as a result of which the length of its borders increased to 3,491 km. After the Second World War the borders created in 1920 were re-established. The Paris Peace Treaty, signed between Hungary and the allied powers not only abrogated the Vienna Decisions but also ceded three additional settlements of the Pozsony (Bratislava) district to Czechoslovakia (see Figure 1).

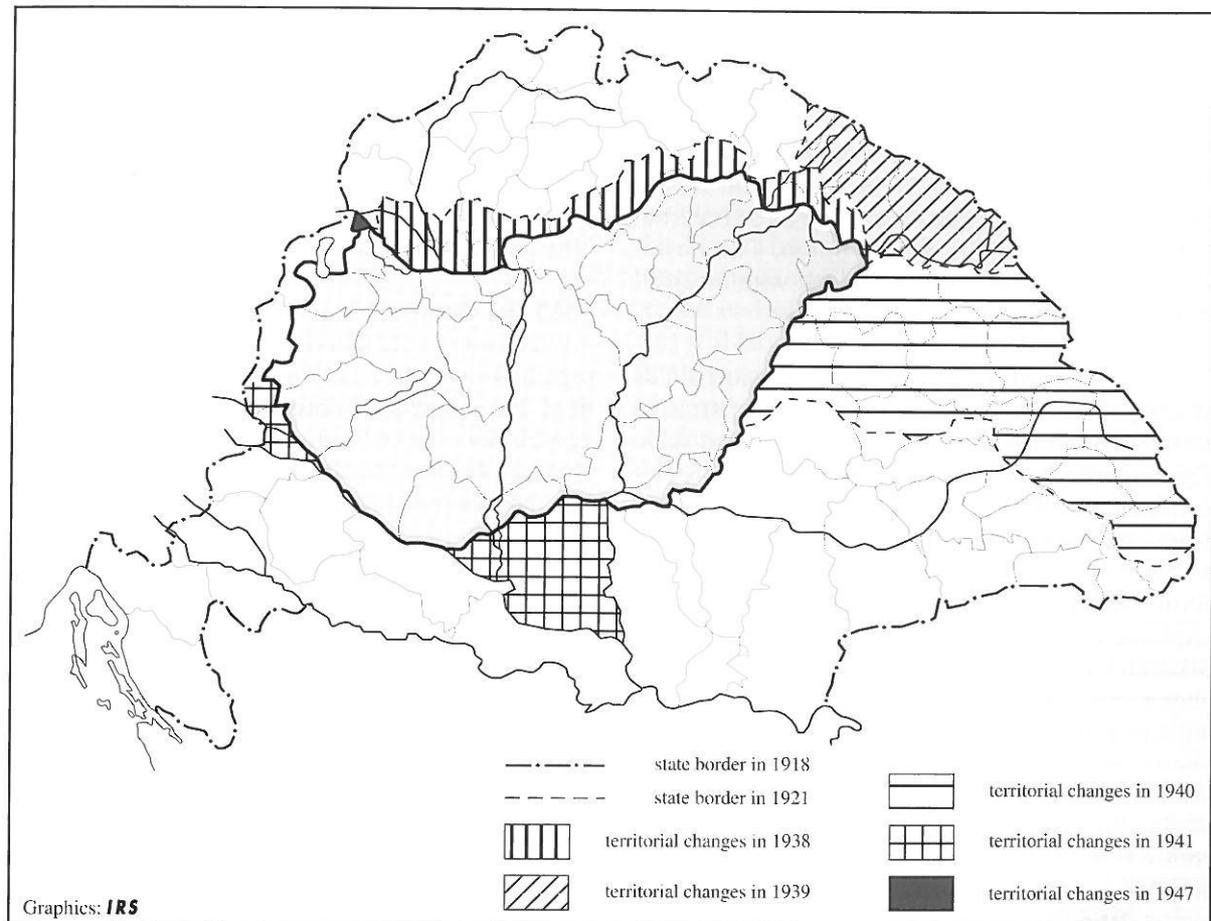
These radical border changes have also been accompanied by important political rearrangements affecting Hungary's neighbors. As a part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Hungary bordered only on Romania and Serbia. After the territorial changes of 1920, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia became Hungary's new neighbors. Austria itself became, as a result of the Anschluss in 1938, a part of the German Reich until 1945. During the spring of 1939, Slovakia declared its independence for the first time. Furthermore, with the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1941, Serbia was occupied by Germany and Croatia became an independent state on southern Hungary's southern border. After the Second World War, Sub-Carpathia was ceded to the Soviet Union, making the USSR a "Carpathian basin country" for the first time in its history and, for more than four decades, Hungary's dominant neighbor.

As a result of the recent political and economic changes in Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary's surroundings have yet again completely changed. Through the disintegration of Czechoslovakia, Slovakia again became a neighbor as an independent state, as did Ukraine after the break up of the Soviet Union and Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia after the collapse of the former (socialist) Yugoslavia. Besides the changes of state borders and surroundings, the fundamental and continuous changes in the position that Hungary has occupied in the European power structure should be noted. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy ranked as a European great power during the first decade of the 20th century. Historical Hungary played an important geopolitical role within Europe. Geographically the sixth largest country in Europe, it had the seventh largest population. By comparison, the new Hungary of 1920 occupied only 15th place in terms of territory and 11th in terms of population within the European concert of nations.

In the period between the two world wars, Hungary's primary political ambition - if not obsession - was to regain lost national territory. The unambiguous proclamation of this goal necessarily turned Hungary's neighbors, who naturally sought to keep the acquired territories, against her. However, there was no real military force behind Hungarian revisionist aims. Hungary, weaker than any of its neighbors, found itself surrounded by a more or less unified group determined to keep it at bay. Consequently, Hungary was only able to achieve its goals working within German and, to a lesser extent, Italian power politics. This help from the axis powers eventually compromised Hungary, leading to German occupation in 1944, to repeated defeat in war and, finally, to the occupation by the Soviet army. Thus, after World War II, Hungary became a part of the Soviet Union's zone of influence, first as an occupied country and later as a member of the socialist political, economic and security community. Border region issues were not openly discussed among the socialist countries, the political vocabulary having acquired the ideological terminology of "socialist friendship and cooperation".

For a variety of historical and geopolitical reasons, the concept of a "borderlands situation" is enjoying

Figure 1: Changes in the Hungarian State Borders in the 20th century



wide application in Hungarian scientific literature. There are about 320 settlements and cities - about 10 per cent of all Hungarian settlements - located directly along the 2242 km long state borders. These are considered in a sociological sense as "frontier settlements". The main social and economic characteristics of these settlements are determined by the border (Kovács 1993). Hungarian military geography (Kozma et al. 1993) theoretically considers a 25 kilometer wide strip along the state border as a topographical, and a 50 kilometer wide strip as a strategic borderland area, defining both as danger zones. This concept has figured in our modern history many times, especially in the 1950s. Hungarian settlement and borderland development policy and practice were influenced by this theory.

3 Borderland Situations in the Period of State Socialism (1949-1989)

During the period of state socialism, the country's political geographic situation and the nature of its state borders were determined by many different factors. Among them were the effects of Soviet hegemony in Hungary's external affairs, the Cold War and the evolution of a bipolar world and, later, the process of détente. Crises and changes within the socialist bloc (the exclusion of Yugoslavia at the end of the 1940's, the Czechoslovak crisis in 1968, and the independent policy-making of Romania) as well as events in Hungary (the revolution of 1956, and the economic reforms in 1968) also had considerable impact on Hungary's politi-

cal status. Finally, the economic crisis and internal liberalization at the end of the 1980's, processes that spelled the end for state-socialism, again changed the political environment in and around Hungary.

Beyond some general similarities, the various sections of the border have periodically reflected specific political situations. Neutral Austria, block-free but socialist Yugoslavia and the three fraternal socialist neighbors, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Romania, can all be dealt with as different cases.

In the period of state socialism, the possible fields of cooperation between regional administrative units were strictly defined by the centralized state. The contacts between borderland areas were determined, beyond the global international surroundings, by prevailing bilateral interstate relations. Similarly, central government determined the ability of citizens to cross international borders and implemented strict controls on travel during the first years of socialist rule. The state was the main player in economic life and, at the same time, the initiator and supervisor of business contacts as well.

Within COMECON, basically a socialist version of the European Common Market, the issue of common development initiatives for the borderland areas of member states was first raised in 1960. A report delineating various aims of border regional development was published in the early 1960s and submitted for official consideration by COMECON within the framework of the so-called Complex Program. The Complex Program was a long range development plan for COMECON countries that included a problem-oriented approach to border regions. However, no real attempt was made to promote or even emphasize the importance of day-to-day contacts within international border regions.

Functional Changes of the Hungarian-Austrian border

In 1945, the Austrian territories adjacent to Hungary were occupied by the Soviets. At this point, the Hungarian-Austrian borderlands were controlled

by the same foreign power. The internal role of the occupying army, however, differed considerably in the two countries. Intervention in the internal affairs and in the economic development of Austria was significantly more moderate than in Hungary's case. Austria was relatively "free", and its borders were "open" towards the West. After the take-over of power by the communists in 1948/49, Hungary's relations with Austria deteriorated, adversely affecting the common border areas.

After the Austrian treaty in 1955, the occupying Soviet troops were withdrawn from Austria, which regained its sovereignty and became an independent but neutral country within the capitalist system. Its 356 km common border with socialist Hungary became an almost completely impenetrable frontier between the capitalist and socialist worlds. The "Iron Curtain" materialized and all along the border minefields were set. The border checkpoints of Hegyeshalom and Sopron were maintained only for managing international rail and road traffic, itself reduced to a minimum.¹ The first cracks in the "Iron Curtain" appeared during the Hungarian revolution of 1956, even if for only a very short time. The borders were opened, and more than 200,000 people emigrated.

From 1960 onwards, Hungarian-Austrian relations gradually improved, although positive effects of this improvement were slow to reach the border regions. The re-establishment of interstate contacts started from the top down. After the "ice" had been broken during the 1960s, new and deeper forms of cooperation were able to develop in the 1970s with contacts between local governments, cities and private citizens gradually increasing. By the 1980's, binational relations at all levels and in most aspects of everyday life had, by and large, normalized.

Similarly, the Hungarian-Austrian border zone, controlled by frontier guards and characterized by dozens of administrative regulations, became more permeable and less restrictive. The negative attitudes of political leaders towards transboundary cooperation mellowed, the economic development of frontier areas became more intensive and, finally,

1 It was a peculiar element in the frontier relations, that the Győr-Sopron-Ebenfurt railway, an Austro-Hungarian joint property, was not socialized. During these years, this railway functioned as a window towards the West.

new border checkpoints were opened. Out of the "Iron Curtain" evolved the "Iron Door" and a growing number of Hungarians discovered the benefits of cross-border travel.²

The Hungarian-Austrian borderlands became model areas for the peaceful coexistence of countries with different political and economic systems. Research on border region problems and transboundary regional planning studies began already in 1967 but, due to the initial lack of interest on the part of Austria, these efforts were stopped in 1972. The issue of common development of the frontier was raised again in the 1980's and eventually was incorporated into the policy-making process, both at the interstate and regional administration levels. During the 1980s, the initiative for forming more intensive frontier relationships came from the Austrian side, generated, to an extent, by the growth of large scale transboundary shopping. Cross border commuting also intensified, first in the form of contracted workers and later in large flows of inexpensive Hungarian labor.

As a consequence of these developments, the Hungarian counties located closest to the western borders of Hungary were the first in contact with the Alps-Adriatic Working Community (an association dedicated to interregional cooperation including the Alpine and Adriatic coastal areas of Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia) through their relations with the neighboring Austrian state of Burgenland. Eventually, the Hungarian counties of Baranya, Győr-Moson-Sopron, Somogy, Vas and Zala became members of the organization. By 1985, the Hungarian-Austrian border had become the easiest to pass and the busiest between "East" and "West". Because of the rapid economic and political changes taking place, Austria and the Austrian border became a vital gateway for Hungarian traffic and international trade and, at the same time, the most accessible western country for Hungarian citizens. In 1989, the "Iron Curtain" opened not only for Hungarians but for East German citizens as well, eliminating any remaining rationale for maintaining a defensive border between the two countries.

The Hungarian-Yugoslavian Border

By the end of the 1940's and with Stalin's censuring of Tito, the common border between Yugoslavia and Hungary, 631 kilometers in length, became a border of heightened political, ideological and military confrontation. As was the case on the Austrian-Hungarian frontier, minefields were laid here initially as well. Even though tensions have eased this border has remained problematic with regard to security as well as economic and social concerns. At the end of the 1950's the Yugoslavian border was still largely sealed off. Regulations here were, in many respects, even stricter than along the borders with Austria. Small-scale confrontations and clashes were a common occurrence. Both interstate relations and contacts between the respective Socialist parties (the decisive ones during this period) improved only slowly and it was not until the early 60's that comparatively stable and balanced binational political relations began to develop.

Research on the territorial development along the Hungarian-Yugoslav border as well as work on a common border region development policy first began in 1966. In 1970, the two countries established the Standard Committee of Urban and Regional Development and in the course of its activities, coordinated at government level, long term regional development goals were identified and a harmonization of public investment policy initiated. Most successful in this respect were activities along the frontier with Slovenia, where political leaders demonstrated the greatest openness for transborder cooperation. Furthermore, a variety of agreements were concluded in the 1970s between Hungary and Yugoslavia supporting such cooperation efforts. A good example of this was the processing of Hungarian sugar beets in Yugoslav factories for reimport and/or marketing in third countries. Direct contacts between universities and other educational institutions were encouraged. At the same time, transborder shopping boomed.

The national minorities living in the frontier areas profited from this increased freedom of movement

² As the "Iron Door" gradually became penetrable, the slogan that "Hungary is the Brightest Barracks in the Soviet camp" began to make the rounds.

and were able to reestablish traditional and familial ties. Minorities were helped in their activities in order to help create "bridges" between the two countries. This was supported by a significant reduction of restrictions on local cross border traffic.

The Hungarian-Soviet Border

Despite the economic, political and military alliance that existed between Hungary and the Soviet Union, the Hungarian-Soviet border (215 km in length) was at least as impermeable and, at times, as hermetically sealed off as the Hungarian-Austrian border. On the Soviet side of the border a "socialist iron curtain" was, in fact, established that was less visible than the "real" Iron Curtain at the Hungarian-Austrian border. Sub-Carpathia (in the Ukraine) became a strategic zone with high troop concentrations. The Soviet military presence was, of course, not directed against Hungary itself, but nevertheless had a significant negative effect on transboundary communications.

Local transboundary cooperation between small regions was hindered by many factors. The most important of which were the fear of Hungarian agitation and the presence of about 200,000 ethnic Hungarians living very close to the border on the Soviet side. Along this border there was only the Záhony road and railroad checkpoint serving larger regional centers. Border crossing facilities operating here in the period of state socialism were so few and far between as to effectively close the border to local interaction.

The Hungarian-Romanian border

According to official propaganda, the Hungarian-Romanian border should have been an area of friendship and of cooperation between socialist "brothers". However, because of differing attitudes towards the issue of minority rights during most of the period of state socialism, the Romanian-Hungarian border symbolized alienation and even downright hostility. Poor binational relations limited everyday local level interaction here as well - despite the fact that the peripheral situation of the common border logically should have provided incentives to cooperate. The fact that the Hungarian-Romanian border transects Hungarian linguistic areas could also have eased the establishment

of transboundary cooperation. But in practice it became the main hindrance to closer cooperation. For the Romanian government, it was more important to change the frontier's ethnic character than to allow and encourage cross-border contacts. Romania restricted even the maintenance of civil relations through very strict administrative measures.

The Hungarian-Czechoslovak Border

The character of the Hungarian-Czechoslovak border (608 km in length) has changed several times since 1945. The years following the end of World War II were an emotionally charged period of deportation and forced emigration. Citing the legally and morally questionable principle of "collective responsibility", the authorities in Czechoslovakia expelled about 40,000 Hungarians from the Sudetenland. Simultaneously over 100,000 people were sent from other parts of Czechoslovakia to Hungary. The sizeable Hungarian community that remained in the country was effectively deprived of citizenship until 1948. Because of this legacy attempts to establish transboundary contacts between Hungary and Czechoslovakia were not energetically pursued until the end of the 1950's.

As transboundary cooperation then slowly developed, it was influenced by the specific characteristics of the border region. As such, the Hungarian-Czechoslovakian border (in practice, the border between Hungary and the Slovakian half of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic) could be divided into three different subunits: the Danube, an area of contiguous Hungarian settlement characterized by joint use of the river and heavy transboundary traffic, the central area, dominated by the Budapest metropolitan region, and the eastern border zone, in which cooperation in heavy industry was quite pronounced.

The zone along the Danube is a principal transport and development axis within Hungary. It is an industrialized area, very attractive for the neighboring Slovakian territories settled by Hungarian minorities. Labor moved quite freely across this part of the border in what was a rather unique binational relationship for the period. Nevertheless, the cooperation had its clear limits. The bridge across the Danube at the Hungarian city of Esztergom, destroyed during World War II, was never

rebuilt, although the issue was brought up several times. Another important element of cooperation involved joint investments in the Gabcsikovo-Nagymaros hydroelectric dam. This project, which drew considerable criticism on environmental grounds, would eventually affect political relations between Hungary and the new Slovak Republic.³

The most important characteristic of the central part of the Hungarian-Czechoslovak border is the attractiveness of Budapest. The Hungarian capital city would have dominated the neighboring Slovakian territory in all respects had the present border not materialized. Whether officials were willing to admit it or not, the political management of the "Budapest-problem" caused many headaches during the period of state socialism, as the city represented a natural centre for Hungarian minorities living in the southern part of Slovakia.

Significant areas of the eastern border with Czechoslovakia can be described as peripheral regions and agrarian in character. However, in other areas heavy industries predominate on both sides of the border - a fact that, in the past, has prompted Hungarian-Slovak cooperation. This area remains one of potential cooperation, primarily between the regional centers of Miskolc and Kosice. Bilateral cooperation between other cities in this border region is developing in the field of tourism.

In 1971 the two countries established a Permanent Working Committee for Regional Development, which in 1977 prepared a medium-range development concept for the common border (1977-1990). Only a few elements of the concept were implemented; political and environmental movements protesting the construction of the Danube hydroelectric power station and barrage as well as severe economic difficulties (debt crisis) hindered implementation on the Hungarian side.

4 Frontier Relations and Perspectives During the Period of Democratic Transformation

The collapse of the bipolar world, the fall of state socialism either by evolution or revolution, the

break-up of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia and the withdrawal of occupying Russian troops from the area were all factors that contributed to a completely new situation around Hungary, creating, in turn, new conditions for cooperation with an increased number of neighbors (see figure 2). Beginning in the 1990's, new cooperative ambitions appeared in attempts to establish new inter-state relations (Visegrád Three, Visegrád Four, Pentagonal, Hexagonal and, finally, the Central-European Initiative) among the former Central European satellites of the Soviet Union. These activities were aimed, in part, at avoiding a political vacuum in Central Europe and motivated out of distrust of Russia's long-term ambitions in Europe. They also resulted from the necessity - often grudgingly acknowledged - to establish new multilateral forms of economic and political cooperation hitherto restricted by Soviet hegemony.

However, one should not forget that future integration into the EU could foster greater cooperation. The articles of association that apply to Hungary, the Czech Lands, Slovakia and Poland carry with them the possibility of establishing common political and social values. These new initiatives and agreements promise to create a better basis for transboundary cooperation despite the fact that, in most cases, such cooperation does not command much attention at the national level. Some of the newly independent countries are primarily concerned with internal issues (organizing the state, institutionalization, economic and financial crisis management). As such, the purposeful development of frontier relations has not been a policy priority.

The Hungarian-Austrian Border in Transition

Post-socialist transformation has affected the Hungarian-Austrian border in many respects. General research characterizes it as Hungary's "open-border" (Rechnitzer 1991) and one where intensive economical, social and local political interaction is developing. New possibilities for cooperation are best symbolized by the Adam Opel factory (an automotive subsidiary of General Motors) recently established in the border city of Szentgotthárd.

3 See Galambos (1993) and Assetto and Bruyninckx (forthcoming 1995) for a good overview of the issues involved.

Figure 2: Characteristics of Transboundary Cooperation on the Hungarian Border in 1995



In particular, the privatization of the Hungarian economy has brought with it an inflow of Austrian capital, some of which is being put to use in illegal ways. This frontier region is, for example, affected by the unlawful purchasing of cropland by Austrians. Hungarian law forbids the purchase of land by foreigners. Austrian farmers on the frontier acquire land with so-called "pocket contracts", hoping to assume full title to their properties once legal restrictions are suspended. (So-called "double ownership" was typical of the situation between the World Wars, when land owners had their properties split up by a new international border).

Austria's membership in the European Union, effective since 1 January 1995, will certainly create

new conditions and modify transboundary relations with Hungary, since the border now separates Hungary from the European Union. Due to the requirements of the Schengen Agreement, in force since April 1995, frontier controls will probably become stricter. One can only hope that no new barriers to cooperation will be erected.

The Hungarian-Ex-Yugoslavian Border

The events connected with the disintegration of Yugoslavia have made the Hungarian frontier here very unstable. The international community maintains a long-term presence, with NATO scoutplanes patrolling the ex-Yugoslavian area from Hungarian air-space. Due to UN sanctions imposed

on Serbia, international observers now control traffic on the Danube. Furthermore, the acute problem of refugees requires international attention.

The relations between Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia - and between Serbia and Croatia in particular - have strongly influenced Hungary's southern border regions. During the civil war that was fought in close proximity to Hungarian territory, Hungarian areas came under fire. Bombardments and the violation of Hungarian air-space were of common occurrence.

According to international law, the area that is confined by the Danube and Drava rivers, the so-called Baranya-Triangle, belongs to Croatia, but Croatia cannot enforce its sovereignty here due to Serb occupation. This part of the Hungarian-Croatian border is currently perhaps the most impenetrable border in Europe and transboundary cooperation has been suspended indefinitely. The most important issue in the Baranya part of the Hungarian-Croatian border is when and by what means Croatia will attempt to re-establish control over the region. Should this be possible only through a show of force, then frontier war may again become a reality.

In the meantime, UN sanctions against Serbia have had considerable impact on transboundary traffic on the Hungarian-Serbian border. Smuggling has greatly increased, bringing with it a host of problems. Indeed, the Hungarian border city of Szeged must live under "Balkan" conditions. With crime and violence on the increase, long-term investment in Szeged has been discouraged. In contrast to this, the Hungarian-Slovenian border is relatively problem-free; in fact, it is a region of expanding economic and social contacts and of little conflict between the long and short term ambitions of the population. The existence of national minorities living on both sides of the border has tended to promote rather than hinder transboundary cooperation.

The Hungarian-Slovak Border

The establishment of an independent Slovak state has produced an entirely new situation on the northern border of Hungary. The first democratically elected governments of Hungary and Slovakia

were not able to resolve differences between the two countries involving minority rights and the formal recognition of mutual borders - differences inherited from the previous system. Thus they could not provide a new basis for interstate relations through an international treaty. In the meantime, the proportion of Hungarian-speaking persons compared to the total number of citizens has increased in the new Slovakian state. About 3.8% of the former Czechoslovakia's total population was of Hungarian nationality, in sovereign Slovakia ethnic Hungarians make up 10.7% of the total population, concentrated mainly in a narrow strip along the Hungarian-Slovakian border. From the standpoint of Slovaks, the Hungarian minority's ambitions for autonomy therefore increase the danger of possible future territorial losses.

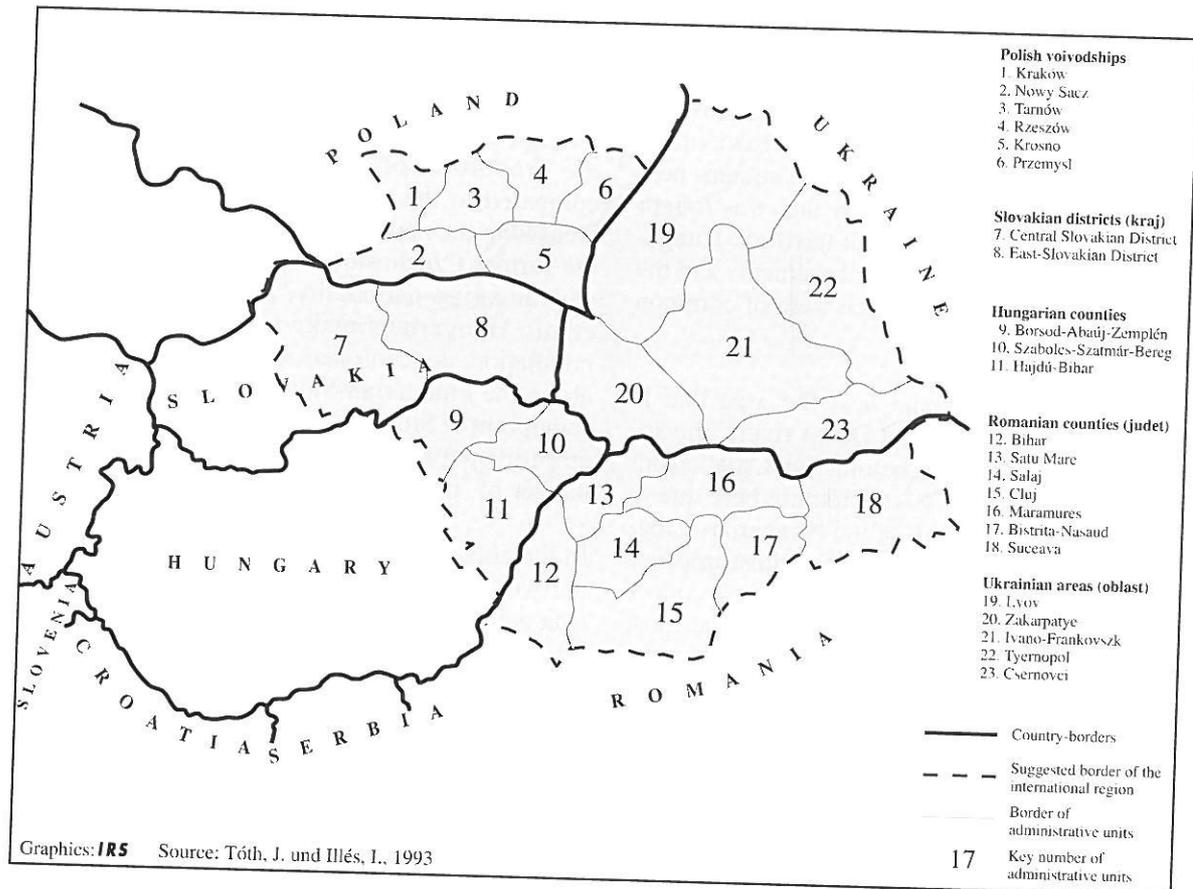
In the context of rather strained relations between the two countries, the issue of opening up border crossing points became an important political one. Of the four additional border crossing points demanded by the Hungarian population only one was opened by August of 1994 (despite the fact that the mayors of the two Hungarian settlements on either side of the border went on a hunger strike to emphasize these demands). The inauguration of this crossing point was presided over by the heads of state of Hungary and Slovakia, underlining the political (as opposed to technical) character of the event.

An inherited problem of this border region is the Danube hydroelectric power plant, which has put relations between the two countries under severe stress. If the two countries cannot reach an agreement of their own accord, the decision of the Hague International Court will probably be final. However, systemic change and economic transformation has also allowed greater possibilities for social contacts between residents of the border region. Travel is now without restriction and cooperative relationships between private companies have begun to develop.

The Hungarian-Ukrainian Border

With the collapse of the Soviet Union this border region has experienced considerable change. This is primarily because the sovereign state of Ukraine has adopted new approaches to dealing with its border regions and transboundary cooperation with

Figure 3: The Carpathian Euroregion



its neighbors. It has also been quite lenient with regard to the status of Hungarian and other national minorities. The binational treaty between Ukraine and Hungary in 1991 has formed the basis for long-term and friendly relations, containing, among others, "border guarantees" pertaining to the respect of territorial sovereignty and the assurance of minority rights. In 1993, extraordinarily heated and harsh discussions took place in the Hungarian parliament about the treaty. In fact, members of the parliamentary majority accused their own government of treason and ratification was only secured by support from the opposition.

Despite objections to recognizing the "Soviet" status quo, benefits to the local community on the Hungarian-Ukrainian border have been appreciable. It is now possible for the Hungarian population living in Sub-Carpathia to visit Hungary for the

first time since 1945. In addition, four new border crossing points have been opened up within a short period of time. Cross-border passenger traffic has increased and, in the Hungarian border cities, businesses catering to the needs of visitors have developed rapidly.

The Hungarian-Romanian Border

The expectations of better interstate relations and more liberal border policies raised during the period of the Romanian Revolution (1989-1990) have only been partly fulfilled. The past few years have proved insufficient for the leaders of the two countries to improve historically cold relations. Asynchronously, the "liberation of individuals" has rapidly increased mobility and transboundary interaction has become more intensive than at any time before.

At the time of writing (1995), Hungary and Romania have not yet concluded a binational agreement. However, the period of artificial restraint has ended and negotiations regarding a "Basic Treaty" are underway. Both countries consider their own ambitions of joining the European Union as important and integration into the European community of interests and values could contribute to the improvement of bilateral relations between Romania and Hungary. But "top down" conformity cannot resolve all binational tensions, in fact it could serve to cover them up. Therefore, it is very important for both nations to intensify direct interaction along the common border, because only initiatives coming from the "bottom up" and good relations established with popular support will last in the long term.

The Challenge of a Carpathian Euroregion

The idea of establishing the Carpathian Euroregion was first raised by geographers at the end of the 1980's and was a result of the re-establishment of full national sovereignty in the Central European states of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Poland. It was an attempt to follow the good example of the Alps-Adriatic Working Community and one in which expectations of generous Western support were raised. During the period of state socialism, the Carpathian-Tisza region was a common periphery of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, the Soviet Union and Romania. Simultaneously, however, it served as an area of interstate interaction. Large transportation and other physical infrastructure networks emanating from the Soviet Union (e.g. oil and gas pipelines, electricity grids) crossed through this region without integrating it.

While the Euroregion concept was being developed, various political, economic, environmental, ethnic and other issues began to bear heavily on relations between post-socialist countries. Arguably, supporters of the Euroregion idea did not properly consider the difficult and tumultuous history of the region. One need only look at developments in the 20th century to understand that the Carpathian-Tisza basin is a large regional periphery with no stable and dominating center or capital; it changed hands many times after 1914 and has seen an endless host of rulers including Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Czechoslovakia, Ger-

many, Romania, Poland, the Soviet Union and Ukraine. As a result, the region is characterized by complicated spatial relationships and linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity.

The scientific research that accompanied political attempts to establish the Euroregion relied on broad-based cooperation between research institutes and universities of the countries involved. The proposals for joint action that emanated from this cooperative work de-emphasized local level cooperation, concentrating instead on the wider regional context. The Hungarian development concepts, for example, would have affected an area of about 200,000 square km and 18 million inhabitants (Illés 1993). This mesoregional approach encountered not only Romanian opposition (Romania took umbrage to geographical reference to the "most Hungarian" of rivers, the Tisza, in the official name of the Euroregion) but also the problem that it included nearly half of the territory of the new created Slovak Republic.

The Euroregion was formally established in 1993, at a conference of the Hungarian, Ukrainian and Polish foreign ministers in the Hungarian city of Debrecen. Slovak and Romanian representatives declined the invitation. Almost immediately after the agreement was signed, heated parliamentary debate ensued over the political significance of the Carpathian Euroregion in all the countries involved. Here, historical resentments and rivalries rather than the consideration of the potential long term economic advantages of cooperation dominated and almost prevailed. This comes as no surprise in this part of the world; history is not an academic issue here, but a part of everyday politics.

6 Conclusions

The 20th century brought enormous and rapid change to Hungary's geographical surroundings as well as spatial and functional transformation of its borders. Neighbors and borderlines were of little permanence. Hence, one cannot speak of historically balanced, long-term transboundary cooperation and experiences in this region. The beginning of the 1990's brought yet again a rearrangement in the political geography in the area around Hungary. This process proceeded along the southern borders of Hungary under circumstances of a bloody

war and along the northern and eastern borders in a peaceful way.

Along the Hungarian borders the tendencies of integration (primarily into the European Union) and of disintegration are present at the same time. We will most likely have to reconcile ourselves to the prolonged coexistence of these two tendencies and, primarily at the southern borders, with long-term uncertainty, even perhaps with the possibility of violent frontier conflicts re-surfacing. In the meantime, it is quite likely that transboundary cooperation along Hungary's other borders will develop and, with time, emulate the success of West European Euroregions.

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