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Silesian Institute in Opole  
SILESIAN INSTITUTE SOCIETY

# **HISTORICAL REGIONS DIVIDED BY THE BORDERS**

**GENERAL PROBLEMS AND REGIONAL ISSUE**

**REGION AND REGIONALISM**

**No. 9 vol. 1**

edited by Marek Sobczyński

Łódź–Opole 2009

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**REGION**  
*and*  
**REGIONALISM**  
No 9

## **THE SCHENGEN AGREEMENT AT THE POLISH-CZECH BORDER**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

According to the legislation approved by the parliament, Poland acceded to the Schengen Agreement on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2007. After this date, the control of Polish borders with EU countries was removed. Crossing the border and carriage of goods became possible in every place at every possible time, regardless of nationality. Removal of the border control does not result in the liquidation of the border itself. The borders are still defined by the appropriate international agreements and national legislations. There are also some restrictions to the limits of alcohol and cigarette carriage.

Accession of new countries to the Schengen Agreement is a next step to a further integration of Europe. It entails many advantages and facilitations for EU citizens, but also creates new problems and theoretical threats.

Main problems related to border control liquidation are: increasing crime rate, especially smuggling (e.g. drugs, weapon, cultural assets, cigarettes and alcohol), but also increasing number of border crossings by undesirable people (wanted criminals, people that illegally crossed the external EU borders). Therefore, individual countries are introducing a number of common legal and organizational regulations aiming to maintain previous level of safety, before accessing the Schengen Agreement. As a result of border checkpoints liquidation after Schengen Agreement accession, customs officers were anxious of losing their jobs or being moved to the eastern Polish border. However, the border protection is still based on Border Guard activity. This is where the major modifications were introduced. Amongst

others, Border Guard activity and mobility was increased, the scope of their activity was extended to the whole country, road patrols and controls were intensified, and the transboundary pursuit was permitted. From January 2008, the common Polish-Czech border patrols emerged. Moreover, the Border Guard must be constantly ready for border control re-establishment. Experiences of other EU countries show, that to preserve the previous level of safety, the number of Border Guards cannot be reduced but rather increased ([www.luzyczny.strazgraniczna.pl](http://www.luzyczny.strazgraniczna.pl)).

## 2. POLISH-CZECH BORDER

The border with Czech Republic is 796 km long and is the longest Polish border, with developed infrastructure. In autumn 2007, directly after accession to the Schengen Agreement, there were 121 different kinds of border checkpoints<sup>1</sup>.

Back in the nineties, before Polish and Czech EU accession, this border could be crossed without visa or any larger difficulties. EU accession of these two countries in May 2004, and subsequent accession to the Schengen Agreement in 2007, has completely eliminated any limitations in border crossing.

With border control abolished, the following question has arisen: Will such a model of border crossing influence the transboundary traffic augmentation, but also the intensification of contacts and transboundary co-operation between individual cities and regions? Larger number of travelers can stimulate the economic development of individual regions (e.g. trade, service, tourism), but also generate the increase in different kinds of difficulties (e.g. larger car traffic, noise, pollution, smuggling, crime).

In the last decade, the largest passenger traffic at the Polish-Czech border was observed between 1997 and 2001 and was oscillating at the level of 74–82 million people (Tab. 1). In the later stage it systematically began to fall, therefore in the time of Polish EU accession in 2004, the number of people crossing the Polish-Czech border was approximately 52.5 million.

It could have been expected, that the successive facilitations which were introduced for Polish-Czech border crossing in 2004 (especially with passport possession being obsolete), will contribute to the increase in the

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<sup>1</sup> Including 30 road border checkpoints, 9 railway border checkpoints, 51 tourist border checkpoints and 31 small scale traffic border checkpoints ([www.sg.gov.pl](http://www.sg.gov.pl))

transboundary traffic. However, after Polish and Czech accession to EU, the passenger traffic began to fall. In 2005, it decreased to approximately 48 million people, and in 2006 it reached 44.7 million, which is most definitely the lowest number since the middle 1990s. It was only 20.4% of all people crossing Polish borders in relation to 34% only four years earlier (Tab. 1). The decreasing traffic at the analyzed border was caused by the accumulation of different factors, among others, by increasing prices of roads vignettes in 2005, by increasing competition of road transit through Germany (better roads, lack of toll roads), by growing tourist competition of other European regions (especially of the Mediterranean region), by cheaper holidays in Slovakia, and by dynamically developing market of inexpensive international airlines. The decrease in prices of Czech goods, such as cigarettes, alcohol (especially beer) in Polish shops was also one of the reasons. It was a result of customs duty abolishment, which accompanied Polish and Czech accession to EU. Before 2004, shopping in the Czech Republic was one of the most important reasons for border crossing.

Table 1. Passenger traffic at the Polish-Czech border in the years 1997–2007

Years	Poles		Foreigners		Total	Share in total border traffic in Poland (%)
	departures	arrivals	departures	arrivals		
1997	19,584,092	18,926,745	20,885,724	20,380,473	79,777,034	29,1
1998	20,158,563	19,497,894	21,408,887	20,912,214	81,977,558	29,8
1999	19,412,184	18,576,863	18,265,811	17,871,861	74,126,719	26,0
2000	22,947,321	21,765,602	16,829,578	16,460,281	78,002,782	27,7
2001	24,653,728	24,112,854	13,466,299	13,114,975	75,347,856	33,0
2002	20,796,926	20,368,304	12,095,668	11,760,976	65,021,874	34,0
2003	15,590,178	15,039,282	12,374,953	12,020,917	55,025,330	30,1
2004	13,285,228	12,987,168	13,145,712	13,060,228	52,478,336	26,5
2005	12,532,777	12,040,976	11,726,570	11,840,695	48,141,018	22,9
2006	11,854,183	11,236,096	10,823,492	10,747,159	44,660,930	20,4
2007*	12,103,252	11,620,203	10,554,588	10,651,347	44,929,390	20,1

\* Until 21<sup>st</sup> December 2007.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from [www.sg.gov.pl](http://www.sg.gov.pl).

Taking under consideration a very small increase in the number of people crossing the border in 2007, one can assume that the complete opening of the border after accessing the Schengen Zone will not cause any boost in the border traffic between Poland and Czech Republic, but rather maintain the existing tendencies in the nearest future<sup>2</sup>. In the future, the factors which can cause the reduction of the passenger traffic are: further development of air transportation, increasing prices in the Czech Republic and the growing attractiveness of other European regions. On the other hand, the growing number of cars, increasing wealth of Polish people and subsequently more frequent vacations abroad can result in the gradual increase in border crossings.

Theoretically, removal of border control could also result in the growth of border crossings by undesirable people (wanted by the law enforcement, people that illegally crossed the external EU borders) and smuggling.

The number of people, who illegally cross the border, systematically decreases from 1559 in 2001 to 676 in 2007. Most of the detainees are Polish or Czech citizens. Directly after EU accession, between 2004 and 2005, the number of Poles and Czechs trying to cross the border illegally decreased significantly. On the other hand, the number of illegal Ukrainians and Russians has increased (20–27% of detainees). In the last three years the number of illegal border crossings by citizens from beyond the eastern border has fallen. It is interesting, that their place was taken by the Germans, whose number in 2007 has oscillated at the same level as the number of Poles and Czechs illegally crossing the border ([www.sg.gov.pl](http://www.sg.gov.pl)). Part of these illegal border crossings from before accessing Schengen Zone, most likely took place on the mountain tourist routes in the Sudetes and, to a large degree, resulted from ignorance of the law, according to which, before 2008 only a few tourist routes in Poland could be legally crossed across the border.

Situation concerning smuggling at the Polish-Czech border is varied<sup>3</sup> (Tab. 2). Car smuggling systematically decreases and drugs smuggling is relatively low (except for 2006). On the other hand, high prices of tobacco in Poland influence the increasing cigarette smuggling. In 2005 and 2006, it reached the value of about 10 million Euros, and in 2007 it almost doubled

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<sup>2</sup> After Polish and Czech accession to the Schengen Zone (21.12.2007), the statistical data on the Polish-Czech border traffic, as well as on the other EU internal borders, has no longer been recorded.

<sup>3</sup> Analysis and data are related only to values of the so-called “detainee smuggling”, which is intercepted by Border Control. The real volume, value and structure of the smuggled goods can vary.

(19.4 million EUR). Moreover, the value of smuggled cultural assets is increasing. Although in 2007 there were only 375 detainees who smuggled valuable items (as compared to 2889 in 2005), the value of the goods itself doubled ([www.sg.gov.pl](http://www.sg.gov.pl)).

Table 2. The value of detained smuggled goods at the Polish-Czech border in the years 2002–2007 (in EUR<sup>4</sup>)

Smuggled goods	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Motor vehicles	11,534,003	11,795,236	11,986,576	12,761,197	8,429,370	8,259,606
Alcohol	10,371,610	1,571,628	1,040,382	4,080,198	633,987	1,117,593
Cigarettes	8,754,036	10,371,610	8,648,278	9,967,157	9,924,691	19,357,237
Drugs	651,630	1,217,526	2,191,683	886,031	6,611,138	739,769
Cultural assets	8,594	31,364	20,727	42,151	40,303	89,465
Other	3,582,474	4,644,231	6,791,443	6,418,487	9,334,082	6,181,121
Total	34,902,347	29,631,595	30,679,089	34,155,222	34,973,571	35,744,792

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from [www.sg.gov.pl](http://www.sg.gov.pl).

When comparing the share of the intercepted smuggling values for individual kinds of smuggled goods between 2004 and 2007, some changes can be noticed (Tab. 2). During the period of Polish membership in EU, the decrease of share of motor vehicle smuggling in the total value of smuggled goods is the most noticeable. On the other hand, illegal cigarettes in 2007 constituted more than a half of the smuggled goods' value (these are mostly cigarettes from Ukraine). Unfortunately, in the last few years the total value of all smuggled goods has increased slowly but systematically. One can assume that after Polish and Czech accession to the Schengen Agreement, the value of smuggled goods will start to decrease, mainly because of changes in the customs legislation, which significantly increases permissible amount of the legally transported cigarettes and especially alcohol, namely goods which previously constituted the main part of the total smuggling<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Rate of exchange 1 EUR = 3.3 PLN

<sup>5</sup> The following limits are in effect for a single carriage of cigarettes and alcohol for one's own use in the Schengen Zone: 800 cigarettes, 200 cigars, 1 kg tobacco, 10 liters

However, the smuggling of goods (especially Ukrainian and Russian cigarettes) from beyond the eastern Polish border will certainly still exist or maybe even increase, as well as the large scale smuggling organized by criminal groups. Its scale will depend mainly on the effectiveness of the Border Guard patrols.

One of the specific consequences of Polish and Czech accession to the Schengen Agreement is the deterioration and damages of border markers. From the beginning of 2007 they are being deprived of number plates or national emblems which are commonly removed as mementos. Devastation of border markers is a penal act, and the liquidation of the border control is obviously not synonymous with liquidation of the border itself, which should remain visibly marked in the open area ([www.luzyczny.strazgraniczna.pl](http://www.luzyczny.strazgraniczna.pl)).

### **3. SCHENGEN AGREEMENT IN THE OPINION OF THE POLISH-CZECH BORDERLAND CITIZENS**

Accession of Poland and Czech Republic to the Schengen Agreement was certainly a very important or even historic event, especially in the historical context for this part of Europe in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the period of communism and soviet domination, the national borders were seen as very hermetic, armed barriers with barbed wire entanglements.

Enlargement of the EU, and especially Schengen Zone, has entirely changed the function, concept and philosophy of an international border in central Europe. Despite the importance of this event, the results of the questionnaires carried out three months before accession to the Schengen Agreement among the citizens of the Polish-Czech borderland, revealed very little knowledge about the nearest future, as well as the scale of anxieties and hopes related to it<sup>6</sup>.

Only about half of the respondents living in the Polish-Czech borderland were conscious of what the Schengen Agreement concerns to (Tab. 3). Considering a relatively short period of time between the field studies and complete removal of the border control and respondents' proximity to the

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of spirits, 20 liters of strong wine, 90 liters of wine and 110 liters of beer (based on [www.luzyczny.strazgraniczna.pl](http://www.luzyczny.strazgraniczna.pl)).

<sup>6</sup> Based on Naremski (2008). Questionnaires were performed during the period of September – November 2007, among 172 randomly chosen citizens of the Polish-Czech borderland (including 101 respondents from Poland and 71 from the Czech Republic).

border, it is a very small number. It clearly shows a low interest of Poles and Czechs in the integration processes within Europe, the insufficient information campaign in media or the influence of both of these factors.

Table 3. Respondents' opinions about the Schengen Agreement in %

Schengen Agreement concerns:	Poles	Czechs
Introducing Euro in Poland/Czech Republic	31	21
Free flow of people	51	46
Exchange of thoughts and technology	18	33

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Naremski (2008).

The respondents were asked how in their opinion the Schengen Agreement could influence the situation of private companies, service institutions and the general the situation of borderland (Fig. 1). As one can notice, the optimistic attitude predominates. Most of the citizens of both, Polish and Czech, borderlands expect the development of commercial and service institutions. The development of private companies and general development of borderland are slightly less expected. However, the percentage of respondents believing that nothing will change is also relatively high, especially among the Czech citizens. The number of skeptical respondents, who foresee the deterioration of general situation in the borderland is insignificant and does not exceed 7% on Polish, and 9% on Czech side.

Very high expectations of the Poles are related to the decrease in unemployment (70% respondents). 59% of the respondents believe that immigration, which is already high, will rise in numbers, 56% think that also the phenomenon of foreigners settling on the borderland will increase. In case of Czechs, due to a better situation on the labor market, only 48% of respondents expect the decrease of unemployment. Similar percentage of respondents, as in case of Poland, believes that the complete opening of the border will intensify the occurrence of foreigners settling on the borderland (52%). Only 36% of the respondents think that Schengen Agreement will influence the increase in emigration, as the economic emigration in the Czech Republic is not very significant and the anxiety of large-scale emigration is rather slight.

Respondents were also asked about the supposable influence of the Schengen Agreement on the chosen spheres of their lives. Answers varied, as

most of the negative answers related to the field of natural environment, which according to 34% Polish and 42% Czech respondents will undergo deterioration. On the other hand, 69% respondents believe that it will influence the general conditions of life with profit.

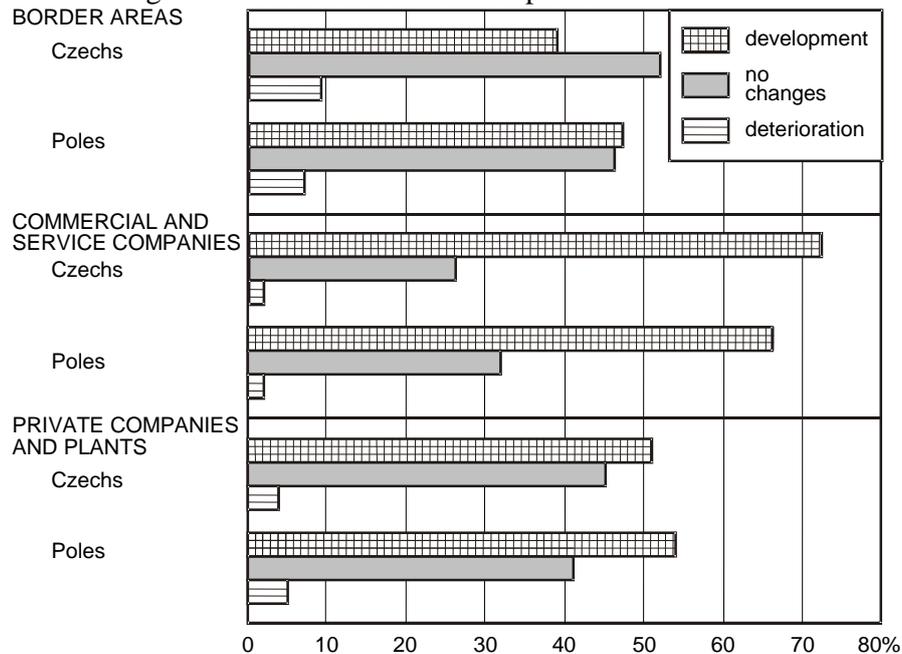


Fig. 1. The influence of the Schengen Agreement on the economic situation of Polish-Czech borderland, according to the respondents

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Naremski (2008)

In comparison to the Poles, the Czechs have a more skeptical approach. According to 53% of the respondents, Schengen Agreement will enhance their living conditions, but 40% believes that it will not influence their life at all. Taking into consideration the level of education and civil consciousness, in both cases majority of respondents believe that they will not undergo any changes and respectively, 12% of the Polish respondents and 15% of the Czechs stated that the lack of border control would not influence any field of their lives. One can clearly see that Czech citizens have smaller expectations towards membership in the Schengen Agreement than the Poles, who in majority expect the improvement of their living conditions and development of the borderland.

Respondents, who were asked to indicate the consequences of the free flow of people, perceived both positive and negative effects. Most frequently, they saw the intensification of contacts between the citizens of different EU countries and the growth of crime rate and emigration. The number of people expecting social changes was relatively high. Despite the popular saying “the Pole can do it”, considerably less people believed that the Schengen Agreement would influence the growth of entrepreneurship among the citizens of the borderland. Poles, more often than Czechs, were afraid of the increase in emigration. However, Czechs indicated the growth of crime rate more frequently (Fig. 2).

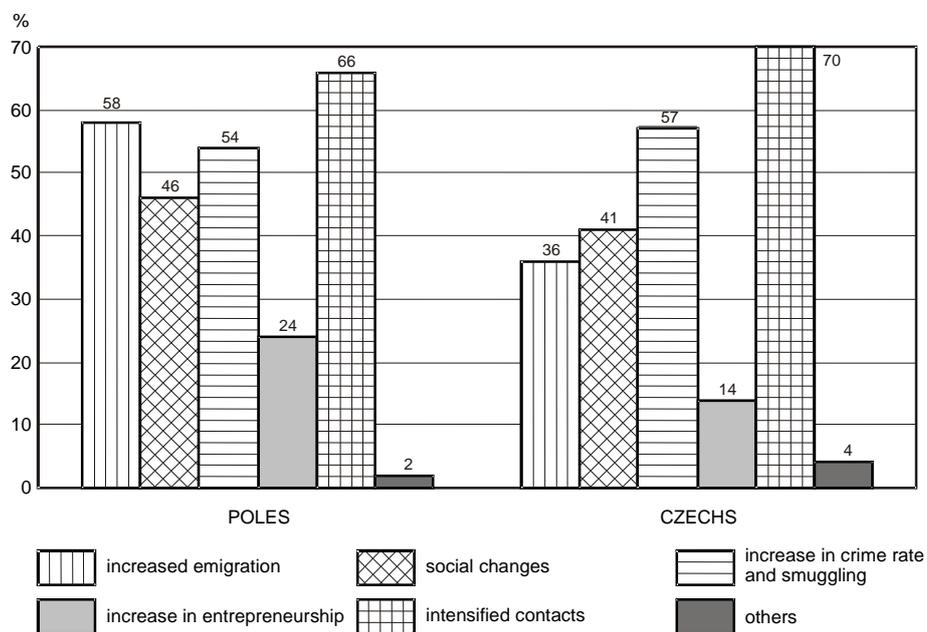


Fig. 2. Consequences of Poland's and Czech Republic's accession to the Schengen Agreement, according to the respondents  
Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Naremski (2008)

According to the respondents, the accession to Schengen Agreement will bring the same amount of advantages for both Polish and Czech borderlands. 52% of the Polish and 63% of the Czech respondents are convinced about it.

Respondents were also asked about their expectations towards the accession to Schengen Zone (Tab. 4). Results show, that hope predominates over fears, especially among Poles. Czechs are more anxious of the situation

after extending the Schengen Zone. Moreover, a large part of Czech respondents declares both, hope and the fear.

On both sides of the border, respondents declaring fear are mostly concerned about the growth of smuggling and crime rate (41%). Moreover, the anxiety is also connected with increasing inflow of undesirable foreigners and the growth of emigration.

Table 4. Respondents' expectations towards the Schengen Agreement accession in %

Specification	Poles	Czechs
Hope	61	54
Fear	44	53

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Naremski (2008).

However, the number of respondents expecting improvements after accessing the Schengen Zone exceeds the amount of those declaring fear. The most popular expectations were connected with the hope for quick development and improvement of living conditions (44%), easiness of relocation and work beyond the border and the growth of the citizens' entrepreneurship.

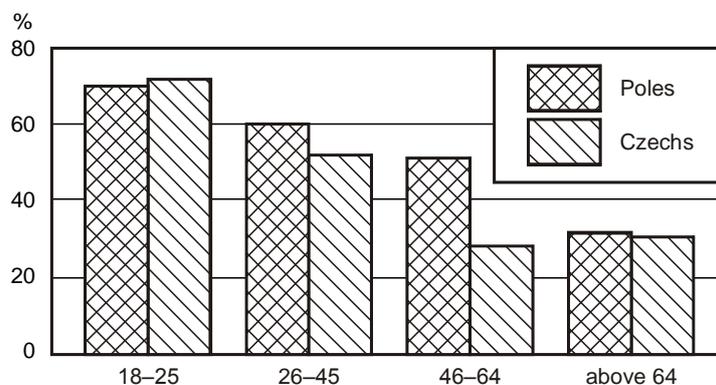


Fig. 3. The number of respondents in specific age groups who did not declare any fears connected with accession to the Schengen Agreement  
Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Naremski (2008)

The most optimistic approach to the matter of Schengen Zone extension, was observed among young people (over 70% of the respondents on both sides of the border declared lack of fears), who most clearly are not yet

concerned about the threats that the Schengen Agreement brings, or who are not conscious of it yet (Fig. 3). Optimism among respondents clearly diminishes together with the growth of their age. Among the respondents above 64 years of age, only 31% of Czechs and 32% of Poles did not have any fears connected with the accession to the Schengen Zone. The largest difference between the citizens of both countries was in the case of the population aged between 46 and 64. Within this age group, only 29% of the Czech respondents did not have any fears, which makes them the largest pessimistic and skeptical group (Fig. 3). Taking into consideration the gender structure, women tend to be more skeptical, both in Poland and Czech Republic.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

1. The extension of the Schengen Agreement to the countries of Central Europe is the historic event, which finally ended the isolation of the communist period, entirely changing the functions and perception of the state border in this region of Europe and accelerating the integration of European states.

2. Despite the border control removal, one should not expect immediate growth of the border traffic at the Polish-Czech border. However the smuggling of goods may still intensify.

3. Despite the great importance of the Schengen Agreement, the knowledge of Polish-Czech borderland citizens about this event several months before its introduction was scarce. One should hope, that introduction of a new legislation and its practical use, will significantly change the consciousness of citizens.

4. The majority of the respondents on both sides of the border expect that the opening of the border will positively change the image of the Polish-Czech borderland. However, there is also a large group of people, especially on Czech side of the border, who think that the Schengen Agreement will not introduce any changes, although the number of pessimists foreseeing the deterioration of the situation is scarce.

5. Respondents on the Polish side of the border have larger expectations towards functioning of the Schengen Agreement, while Czechs are more skeptical about it.

6. There is a strong dependence between the age of the respondents and declaration of fears connected with the accession to the Schengen Zone – the older the respondents, the higher percentage of skeptical people.

7. Expectations and hopes connected with functioning of the Schengen Agreement are related mainly to the economic development of the borderland, especially trade, services, enterprises, as well as with the improvement of living conditions and facilitations in transboundary contacts and foreign travel. Among respondents' expectations, economic benefits are the most popular.

8. The most frequently indicated fears, connected with the lack of border control, are the growth of crime rate, smuggling and deterioration of natural environment. Moreover, Polish citizens are afraid of the increase in an already high emigration rate.

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