HISTORICAL REGIONS DIVIDED BY THE BORDERS

GENERAL PROBLEMS AND REGIONAL ISSUE

REGION AND REGIONALISM

No. 9 vol. 1

edited by Marek Sobczyński

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REGION
and
REGIONALISM
No 9

POLISH EASTERN BORDER AS AN EXTERNAL EUROPEAN UNION BORDER

1. INTRODUCTION

The date 1st May 2004 is crucial in the history of Poland, as European Union opened out to new countries including Poland. Beside numerous advantages resulting from the fact of joining EU, new obligations and threats appeared. Most of the eastern Polish border, including Polish-Russian, Polish-Byelorussian and Polish-Ukrainian borders, became an external border of EU. Poland became automatically responsible for protection of one of the longest sections of the common external land EU border, receiving for this task 313 million Euro from Schengen funds.

According to Accession Treaty, regulating Poland's access conditions to EU, from the date of joining Poland is obliged to put Schengen I category law into practice.

Parallel to signing Accession Treaty, there were preparations to Poland's access to Schengen Agreement. The most important strategic document concerning implementation of Schengen law in Poland was the Schengen Action Plan. This annually renewed document defines both priorities and

instruments of introducing Schengen's output in Poland as well as time-limits for individual impacts.

The conclusion of Poland's accession to Schengen Zone was the acceptance of a legal act about Poland's share in Schengen Information System and Visa Information by the Parliament and its approval by the President on 24th August 2007.

Four months later, on 21st December 2007, Poland officially joined Schengen Zone. Removal of border control on Schengen Agreement's signatories' borders resulted in Polish eastern border becoming an actual gateway to all EU countries. Crossing it opened almost unlimited possibilities of travelling around the entire European Union.

In fact, the removal of border control and removal of border checkpoints do not mean that international border traffic is not monitored. Identity control, in spite of not being done at the border checkpoint, can be performed randomly within the entire Schengen Zone. In case of serious threat to public order, a protective clause allows each member country to temporarily restore control at its borders with different countries of Schengen Zone, as it was in 2004 in Portugal and in 2008 in Austria during European Cup or in 2006 in Germany during the World Cup. Nevertheless, the chance of control after the removal of border checkpoints within Schengen Zone becomes minimal and that is why solid protection of Polish eastern border is crucial.

2. BORDER INFRASTRUCTURE AT THE POLISH EASTERN BORDER

Eastern border of Poland, which is an external border of EU and Schengen Zone, is 1185 km long, including 232 km[1] of Polish-Russian, 418 km of Polish-Byelorussian and 535 km Polish-Ukrainian borders. At the eastern border, only 104 km between Lithuania and Poland is an internal EU border. There are only 31 border checkpoints in authors' area of interest: 6 between Poland and Russia, 13 between Poland and Byelorussia, and 12 between Poland and Ukraine (Tab. 1). Comparing with other Polish borders with border checkpoints existing before 21st December 2007 (Tab. 2), the

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[1] Including the part delimiting territorial waters of the Republic of Poland and Russian Federation – 22 km.

situation here seems to be definitely worse. It is clearly seen that border infrastructure on the eastern side is underdeveloped.

Development of the border checkpoints' network is the key to improve and develop transborder traffic in described area. However, it is noteworthy that the situation at the eastern border has undergone a positive change. In the early nineties, there were only a few border checkpoints at the entire eastern border, while nowadays their number grew up to 31. This does not mean that there is room for improvement. The most important aspect from the EU point of view is the tightness of the border and its protection system. Polish Border Guard has been preparing for the tasks imposed by Schengen Agreement for many years, modernizing and developing infrastructure at the eastern border.

Table 1. Types and quantity of border checkpoints between Poland and Russia, Byelorussia and Ukraine

Border	Type and quantity				Length
	car	railway	water	total	
Polish / Russian	3	3	none	6	232
Polish / Byelorussian	7	5	1	13	418
Polish / Ukrainian	6	6	none	12	535
Total	16	14	1	31	1185

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from www.sg.gov.pl.

Table 2. Types and quantity of border checkpoints in various parts of Poland before 21st December 2007

Border	Number of checkpoints	
Polish / Russian	6	Eastern border
Polish / Lithuanian	4	
Polish / Byelorussian	13	
Polish / Ukrainian	12	
Polish / Slovakian	54	Southern border
Polish / Czech	121	
Polish / German	40	Western border

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from http://www.strazgraniczna.pl.

A significant number of guards from the western and southern borders was moved to the eastern border and trained to fulfill new tasks. Modern communication systems, documents, identifications as well as means of land, water and air transportation were purchased. Border Guard structures were rearranged, totaling four squads operating at the eastern border at the total of 56 posts[2].

All the activities connected with the tightness of the border are to prevent negative phenomena like human trafficking, smuggling of goods or illegal border crossing. On the other hand, it causes obstacles for legitimate border traffic. That is why it is so important to increase the number of border checkpoints at the entire eastern border to avoid the effect of building borders, a symbolic walls or curtains, separating Poland from its eastern neighbors.

3. CHANGES OF DYNAMICS IN BORDER TRAFFIC AT THE POLISH EASTERN BORDER

Passenger border traffic across Polish eastern border, which is at the same time an external EU border, is irregular (Fig. 1). The busiest passenger border traffic can be observed at the Polish – Ukrainian border and features the biggest changeability in years 2002–2007. During the studied period it increases dramatically in the years 2004–2005 from circa 12 million crossings per year to almost 20 million crossings in years 2006–2007. The year 2004 is the time when Poland joined EU. At the same time, it was the period of "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine. The phenomenon involved Polish authorities as well as many Polish civilians. These two events influenced directly and indirectly the increase in traffic at the Polish-Ukrainian border.

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[2] Respectively: Warmińsko-Mazurski Unit – 10 posts, Podlaski Unit – 16 posts, Nadbużański – 17 posts, Bieszczadzki Unit – 13 posts, source: www.strazgraniczna.pl.
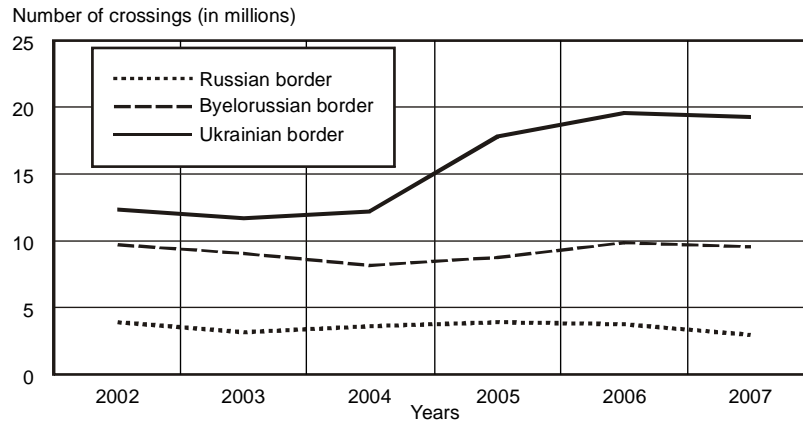
Number of crossings (in millions)

Fig. 1. Number of border crossings at the border between Poland and Russia,
Byelorussia and Ukraine in the years 2002–2007
Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from http://www.strazgraniczna.pl

In case of Byelorussian and Russian border passenger traffic, it is definitely limited and the amounts are respectively about 9 million and 3.5 million crossings per year. In the years 2002–2007 the border traffic is relatively steady. Rapid increase in the year 2004 was not observed as opposed to the activity at the Ukrainian border.

The situation at the eastern border entirely changed after Poland's accession to Schengen Agreement (Tab. 3). Passenger border traffic decreased dramatically at the discussed borders.

Table 3. The amount of border crossings at the Polish-Russian, Polish- Byelorussian
and Polish-Ukrainian borders, during the first 9 months of 2008

Part of border	Total		Including			
			from Poland		to Poland	
	9 months 2008	relation-ship between	9 months 2008	relation-ship between	9 months 2008	relation-ship between
	9 months 2007	2007 2008 in %	9 months 2007	2007 2008 in %	9 months 2007	2007 2008 in %
Russia	1,498,478	-35,8	749,270	-35,4	749,208	-36,2
	2,334,835		1,159,770		1,175,065	
Byelorussia	3,960,617	-44,4	2,061,311	-42,9	1,899,306	-46,0

	7,127,200		3,607,339		3,519,861	
Ukraine	12,580,233	-15,4	6,204,910	-15,7	6,375,323	-15,2
	14,877,077		7,358,591		7,518,486	

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from http://www.strazgraniczna.pl.

At the moment, data from only first nine months of 2008 are available. In comparison to analogical data from the year 2007 in case of Byelorussia, the decrease of circa 44% is observed. The situation looks better at Russian and Ukrainian borders, where the decrease reaches respectively 35% and 15%. The reasons of such dramatic changes derive from greater rigors in the border traffic control which result from Poland's accession to Schengen Agreement.

Citizens of neighboring countries have to fulfill the following require-ments to enter Schengen territory:
– to have valid travel documents and visa, if it is required from the citizen of the given country;
– to define the purpose of the journey;
– to have enough money for the visit and return;
– the person who is going to enter Schengen Zone cannot be on the list in SIS System as an unwelcomed visitor or a threat to the public order;
– the main factor which influenced such dramatic decrease in border traffic was the introduction of expensive and hardly accessible "union visas" instead of cheaper and free visas, which were being used in the past.

When analyzing data concerning border traffic, it is noticeable that introduction of visas considerably decreased foreigners' arrivals to Schengen Zone (Tab. 4–5). Even in case of Ukrainian border, where in fact passenger traffic decreased totally only by 15%, the arrivals and departures of foreigners decreased by over 50%[3]. The loss is compensated by increasing border traffic performed by Polish citizens.

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[3] Before Poland's accession to EU, Ukrainian citizens needed visas to enter Poland. The visas were free, multiple and easy to obtain. After Poland joined the EU, "union visas" were introduced. They were more difficult to obtain but were still free. After Poland's accession to Schengen Agreement, Ukrainian citizens had to pay 35 Eur for the visa and the procedure to obtain it became much more complicated. On the other hand, Polish citizens do not require visas to enter Ukraine.

Table 4. The amount of border crossings at the Polish-Russian,
Polish- Byelorussian and Polish-Ukrainian borders by Polish citizens,
during the first 9 months of 2008

Part of border	Polish citizens					
	total		from Poland		to Poland	
	9 months 2008	relation-ship between	9 months 2008	relation-ship between	9 months 2008	relation-ship between
	9 months 2007	2007 2008 in %	9 months 2007	2007 2008 in %	9 months 2007	2007 2008 in %
Russia	885,427	-24,3	43,534	-23,9	448,893	-24,7
	1,169,996		573,753		596,243	
Byelorussia	754,837	-22,4	426,202	-18,9	328,635	-26,6
	972,943		525,239		447,704	
Ukraine	8,848,875	+21,9	4,383,116	+21,4	4,465,759	+22,4
	7,259,702		3,611,292		3,648,410	

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from http://www.strazgraniczna.pl.

Table 5. The amount of border crossings at the Polish-Russian, Polish- Byelorussian
and Polish-Ukrainian borders by foreigners, during the first 9 months of 2008

Part of border	Foreigners					
	total		from Poland		to Poland	
	9 months 2008	relation-ship between	9 months 2008	relation-ship between	9 months 2008	relation-ship between
	9 months 2007	2007 2008 in %	9 months 2007	2007 2008 in %	9 months 2007	2007 2008 in %
Russia	613,051	-47,4	312,736	-46,6	300,315	-48,1
	1,164,839		586,017		578,822	
Byelorussia	3,205,780	-47,9	1,635,109	-46,9	1,570,671	-48,9
	6,154,257		3,082,100		3,072,157	
Ukraine	3,731,358	-51,0	1,821,794	-51,4	1,909,564	-50,7
	7,617,375		3,747,299		3,870,076	

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from http://www.strazgraniczna.pl.

4. CONCLUSIONS

1. Apart from Finnish-Russian border, Polish eastern border is one of the longest external European Union and Schengen Agreement land borders under the control of a single country.

2. For the last few years, Polish Government has significantly improved the infrastructure of Border Guard at the eastern border in order to prevent "flooding" of Europe by illegal immigrants and smuggled goods.

3. Despite this fact, Polish eastern border does not have sufficient infrastructure, especially when the number of border checkpoints and roads is taken into consideration. The abovementioned, along with difficult border crossing procedures, may lead to creating a new symbolic "wall" separating Poland from its eastern neighbors. To avoid this, it seems necessary to introduce procedures, both on regional and international levels, to encourage trans-border regions' integration. Co-operation should be dealt both in industry as well as in cultural and scientific fields

4. Border traffic at the polish eastern border has been relatively steady for the last few years and even in the case of Ukraine its intensity was increasing. Poland's accession to Schengen Agreement dramatically reduced border traffic at all three borders. Initially, it was caused by the visas for the citizens of neighboring countries and difficult access to them. As a consequence, the number of crossings at the eastern border by the foreigners dropped in certain places even by 50%. To improve the situation it is necessary to simplify visa procedures. Moreover, works on introducing possibilities of crossing borders within so-called small border traffic guaranteed by the EU law, should be finished as quickly as possible. Otherwise, restrictions in border traffic may weaken economic development in border regions and decrease trade exchange, both on local and regional scale.

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