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The peculiarities of the human mobility frame in the Romanian-Hungarian and Romanian-Ukrainean border area

Les spécificités du cadre de la mobilité dans les zones transfrontalières roumano-hongroise et roumano-ukrainienne

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The peculiarities of the human mobility frame in the Romanian-Hungarian and Romanian-Ukrainian border area

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Alexandru Ilies

Introduction

- 1 A person's right to free circulation represents a determining (essential) attribute for his/her existence. However, the reality shows us that there are significant differentiations within the European continent in terms of international human mobility with huge discrepancies between Western Europe and the countries of the former communist block. After the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, the role of frontiers witnessed a newly marked dimension after 1990. This new situation, determined by the new "organisation" at a European level, respectively the transition from two antagonistic blocks with different ideologies to a United Europe, also triggered the reconsideration of the role of the border in the afore-mentioned countries and in Romania.
- 2 Under these circumstances, the frontier and its corresponding border areas transformed their role, which was predominantly military and defensive with a divergent tinge in terms of economic and social aspects, into a convergent one, more open to the border areas' economic development and implicitly open to cross-border collaboration. The French-German model was taken as a reference for the comparison of tendencies from this part of Europe as far as the relations between the border areas of these contiguous states are concerned.

- 3 Nevertheless this process is time-consuming, which in the pre-adhesion phase triggered major differences within the ex-communist countries with regard to the perception of the role of borders, both at an individual or human collectivity level and from an economic and political point of view. This process and differentiation are closely related to the countries' adhesion to the EU and NATO.
- 4 In the present study, we aim to carry out a staged analysis of the evolution of conditions favourable to human mobility for the population from the Romanian-Hungarian and Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border areas.

The geographical analysis frame

- 5 Taking into account the physical-geographical particularities of the analysed frame, this study refers to the Romanian-Hungarian border as a whole and to the Romanian-Ukrainian border which corresponds to its occidental part (figure1).

Figure 1. The political frame of the analyzed area.

- 6 As we can note in Figure 1, the support of the Romanian-Hungarian border corresponds to a conventional line traced on a plain relief, the hydrographical support only exists on a small area while the Romanian-Ukrainian frontier is more complex and combines the conventional support of plain with the hydrographical (on the Tisa River) and the orographical one (in the Oas and Maramures Mts).
- 7 Demographically, this border sector's particularity is in the existence on both sides of the border of various communities that belong to the same ethnic group: Romanians and Ukrainians in Hungary, Romanians and Hungarians in the Ukraine and Hungarians and Ukrainians in Romania. This particularity represents the main motivation for intensifying cross-border collaboration in the recent period, reflected in the human cross-border flows.

The staged evolution of conditions favourable/unfavourable to cross-border human flow

- 8 From post World War I to 1990, two major periods stand out : the inter-war period and the communist period, both considered the longest and most stable in terms of accessibility/restriction of cross-border human mobility. After 1990, the evolution of cross-border human mobility within the European political system and within the ex-communist countries, triggered recurrent changes at regular intervals in the favourable and unfavourable conditions also reflected in significant differentiations in Central and Eastern Europe. This situation brings about a third shorter stage in terms of duration but with numerous changes in the conditions and evolution of cross-border human mobility. We will present further on the particularities of each determining stage.

The inter-war period

- 9 The *inter-war period* is presently differentiated in the fact that the territory north of the Tisa River was administered by Czechoslovakia, thus identifying a Romanian-Hungarian cross-border area and a Romanian-Czechoslovakian one. This is a period of unhindered freedom as far as cross-border flow is concerned, a situation similar to that existing within the Schengen space.
- 10 For both frontier sectors, there were 23 crossing points of which 18 were road and 5 railway crossing points, among which 9 were with Czechoslovakia. This period is characterized by an intense cross-border flow which took the form of daily movements for work and school. The favourableness of frontier crossing was given by a formal control; it was possible to cross the border with only an identity card. An essential element of cross-border flow, especially in its northern part, was the living area of families characterized by a high dispersion throughout the territory, a fact which allowed the identification of members of the same family community on both sides of the frontier.

The communist period (1948-1989)

- 11 The *communist period (1948-1989)* is characterized as the previous one by the maintenance of certain types of conditions (this time opposite to those of the first stage) during a longer period of time. Furthermore, under the aspect of state organization, the territory formerly administered by Czechoslovakia was incorporated in the USSR so that the Romanian-Czechoslovakian cross-border area would become the Romanian-Soviet cross-border area for almost half a century. The border's role was formerly specific to the socialist system where the military function prevailed, although the three countries were part of the same system.
- 12 As regards the unfolding frame of human mobility, we can assert that this stage "created" extremely opposite conditions versus the former stage spotlighted through: the closing of 22 frontier crossing points and the concentration of flows of people and goods towards Hungary through five corridors and none with the USSR in the sector analyzed. There were 3 crossing points at Valea Viseului and Câmpulung on the Tisa

River, and at Halmeu, but these were used exclusively by the Soviets for the transit of traffic; the strict and thorough control of the population at the border.

- 13 Cross-border collaboration was very much simplified by the existence of a reduced number of crossing points; border crossing by physical persons was carried out in a very well-organized manner, and in this sense individual trips were organized and the itinerary was very well-known. As far as cross-border traffic was concerned, group outgoings/incomings were encouraged rather than individually or with family members. Border-crossing by physical persons was organized in the form of trips and if individuals wanted to cross the frontier they knew the route very well, the restrictive circulation system in the border area specific to each of the mentioned countries, enhancement of illegal migration from Romania to Yugoslavia, from Banat and Crisana to Germany. These are just a few aspects which shaped the role of the frontiers in the analyzed period and enhanced the divergent character of the contiguous border areas through their strong military function, to the detriment of their economic character specific to the previous period.

The post-communist period (1990-2003)

- 14 The *post-communist period (1990-2003)* is considered the most dynamic due to changes in the unfolding political frame of cross-border human mobility. Under state organisation, the northern sector witnessed a new transformation due to the dismantling of the USSR and the assertion of the Ukraine as an independent state. For the first time, the Romanian-Soviet cross-border area became a Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border area.
- 15 The period that followed the fall of the communist system (1990-1992) is associated with maximum liberty and permeability as far as cross-border circulation is concerned. Under the new political circumstances, each citizen of the ex-communist block could circulate freely throughout Europe. Thus, we can state that the communist and predominantly military role of the frontier was gradually replaced by an economic one which brought about the transformation of the socialist cross-border area formed by two divergent border areas into a convergent cross-border area, as far as the interests of the contiguous border areas are concerned.
- 16 As this phase is characterized by many changes under the “pressure” of political decision, according to the major changes reflected and perceived by the population we identify three intervals with different particularities: the 1990-1994 interval; the 1994-2002 interval and the period subsequent to 1st January, 2002.

The 1990-1994 Interval

- 17 This is the beginning of the post-communist period with regard to the analyzed themes and is characterized by a maximum freedom of circulation for cross-border human mobility, a situation determined by the unchaining of the communist system and the “thirst” for freedom of the citizens of the ex-communist camp. Some of the elements that define this period are as follows: the boom in small border traffic carried out formally at the border’s crossing points; border-crossing could not be achieved without having a destination visa; the opening of 9 (5 road and 4 railway) new border-crossing points for both border sectors; the temporary disappearance of the *illegal migration*

notion due to the freedom of cross-border circulation existing in this period; the ongoing process of the German minority's definitive migration from Romania to Germany.

- 18 This interval is characterized by the “boom” in cross-border human mobility and the “sudden” change in the communist-type cross-border areas’ divergent character into a convergent one, especially shaped by the economic component.

The 1994-2002 Interval

- 19 When the Schengen frontier came to the forefront and constituted a new frontier between Eastern and Western Europe and for the population of Romania and the Ukraine, the obligation of a visa was imposed in order to enter the member countries of the Schengen Agreement.
- 20 The enlargement process of the EU and the extension of the Schengen space gradually imposed a differentiation for the population coming from this part of Europe, by the acceleration of the adherence procedure and the widening of the gap between countries with minor discrepancies until 1990. Thus, after almost two years of free circulation, the “gates” of Western Europe closed for these countries in a different way, stressing the importance of cross-border collaboration. This aspect also had an impact on the population from the Romanian border area.
- 21 Furthermore, the position of the three afore-mentioned states, in the process of adhering to the European structures, is different. If Hungary is the representative of the first wave of adherence to the EU, Romania is in the second wave and the Ukraine is still only debating the matter, as it is a member of the Community of Independent States, the new structure that replaced the USSR. Within this new political frame, it is evident that cross-border relations and their complexity are ever more dynamic while the spot lighting of differences between the contiguous cross-border areas run parallelly.
- 22 According to the permeability of their borders in relation to the Schengen space and their proximity, we emphasize two categories:
- free crossing without a visa; in the CEEC-CEEC and CEEC-Schengen relations;
 - free crossing with the necessity of a visa; in the CEEC-CEEC and CEEC-Schengen space relations.
- 23 Meanwhile, the number of border crossing points in the analyzed sectors has increased: i.e. 12 with Hungary and 4 with the Ukraine against the backdrop of the appearance of the first nuclei of institutionalized cross-border cooperation: the Carpathian and Danube-Cris-Tisa-Mures Euroregions; the Association of Border Localities of Hungary and Romania, etc. The illegal cross-border flow is growing and the consequences of visa obligation for the population in the border areas are the most unfavourable with regard to the time allocated to this endeavour. For instance, we present here the situation specific to the Romanian border from the analyzed area: for an inhabitant of Oradea (15 kms away from the nearest border crossing point) a 6-day trip or a visit to the Schengen space entailed the doubling of this interval due to formalities for visa obtention. Thus, 4 additional days in Bucharest were necessary at the Embassy or Consulate of the respective country, coupled with the uncertainty about actually obtaining the visa, and only after this lengthy process was there a filter at the border crossing points with Hungary (which represented the “sanitary cord” of the EU) and with the Schengen space (figure 2). At present, only for those who surpass a 3

month stay is this journey (periplus) still in force and will probably remain so until 2007, when it will be possible for Romania to join the EU. For those who stay for less than three months, “life” is very much simplified and it takes a maximum of a few hours to cross the border, eliminating the fatigue and stress imposed by the “preparation phase” of a visit to Austria, for instance.

Figure 2. The evolution of the number of crossing points at the Romanian-Hungarian and Romanian-Ukrainian borders after WWI.

A.) PERIOD BETWEEN WWI AND WWII; B.) THE COMMUNIST PERIOD (1948-1989); C.) AND D.) THE POST-COMMUNIST PERIODS

After January 1st 2002

24 We can note that the number of border crossing points has increased considerably to 18, among which 8 with the Ukraine. The obvious outlining of the position of the three states, in terms of their perspective to join the EU and NATO, triggered important mutations in cross-border traffic dynamics, poignantly differentiating Romanian-Hungarian cross-border cooperation from Romanian-Ukrainian and Ukrainian-Hungarian cooperation. Thus:

- in the Romanian-Hungarian area, the number of crossing points is growing, an important aspect in this sense has been the suppression of entry visas in the Schengen space for Romanians from 1 January, 2002. This is very important for the population who lives in the cross-border area, materializing in the reduction of time allocated to the movement. The number of crossing points reached 14, among which 4 are railway points, and there are projects in progress for the opening of new crossing points.
- in the Romanian-Ukrainian area there was an involution as far as development favourable to cross-border cooperation is concerned, and implicitly cross-border traffic. Due to natural disasters, some bridges connecting railway traffic through Valea Viseului and Câmpulung on

the Tisa River were destroyed and the “historical” bridge between Sighetu Marmatiei (Romania) and Slatina (the Ukraine) was not open to the traffic. Therefore, only the pedestrian crossing points are open, located at Campulung on the Tisa River, Trana Mica and Halmeu. This aspect is fully revealed by the significant drop in the number of persons crossing the border. Furthermore, the formalities necessary for crossing the aforementioned points are increasingly complex and movements are ever more restrictive. An conflict in this sense is the fact that the Romanian-Ukrainian and Hungarian-Ukrainian borders represent a “NATO” border.

- 25 This differential evolution of Romanian-Hungarian and Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border dynamics is also prevalent in the development of different institutionalized forms of cross-border cooperation and implicitly in the direction and dimension of human cross-border flows.
- 26 All these aspects presented above are emphasized in the chart in Figure 3, which views the dimension of cross-border flows during the period 1975-2000 through the Romanian-Hungarian from Bihor County.

Figure 3. Evolution of the number of emigrants from the Bihor County (situated in the Romanian-Hungarian borderland) between 1975-2000.

DATA SOURCES: DJS BIHOR, 2001

Conclusions

- 27 From the analysis of the particularities existing between the Romanian-Hungarian and Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border areas, we can assert that the states' position on the integration scale within the European Union conditions and determines the border's role in the respective areas. Despite the fact that the conditions of cross-border collaboration are favourable for both analyzed areas, their practical application is different, the Romanian side being the most dynamic. From borders with a divergent character and a predominantly military function, we obtain free border crossing so that with the clear positioning of the three countries' statutes in the “competition” for European integration, the role of the borders can oscillate between the concepts of “barrier” and “filter”, an intra-community border (cf. Romanian-Hungarian) and a marginal community border (cf. Romanian-Ukrainian and Hungarian-Ukrainian).
- 28 We can note the fact that presently (2003) Romania's citizens are the only ones in Europe who can move freely without the necessity of a visa in all the European countries (except for Great Britain).

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ABSTRACTS

The present study illustrates the radiography of the situation of the Romanian-Hungarian and Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border areas reflected through the angle of cross-border dynamics, particularly during the post-communist period. The legislative and political context has changed perpetually and has had a profound impact on the free circulation of people. In the conditions in which Hungary is in the first wave of integration, Romania in the second and the Ukraine is only a partner and member of the CSI (Community of the Independent States), social-economic life in the contiguous areas of the three states becomes complex for the present situation but nevertheless optimistic as regards the future of the political European ensemble. Among the elements that diminish or enhance the permeability of the frontier, we mention here: the necessity of a visa and other formalities regarding access to the territory of another state, the number of border crossing points, the motivations that determine the dimension and the dominant direction of human flows.

Cette étude présente une radiographie des zones transfrontalières roumano-hongroise et roumano-ukrainienne sous l'angle de la dynamique transfrontalière, principalement pendant la période post-communiste. Le cadre législatif et politique s'y est modifié en permanence et a beaucoup influencé la libre circulation des personnes. Vu que la Hongrie fait partie de la première vague d'intégration à l'UE, la Roumanie de la deuxième, et que l'Ukraine n'en est qu'un partenaire membre de la CEI (la Communauté des Etats Indépendants), la vie sociale dans les zones contiguës des trois Etats devient très complexe actuellement, bien que positive pour l'avenir de l'ensemble politique européen. Parmi les éléments qui entravent ou favorisent le passage des frontières, nous examinons ici les contraintes en matière de visas ou autres formalités concernant l'accès au territoire d'un autre Etat, le nombre de points de passage de la frontière, les motivations qui déterminent la dimension et la direction dominante des flux humains.

INDEX

Keywords: human mobility, cross-border mobility, Romanian-Ukrainian border, Romanian-Hungarian border

Mots-clés: mobilité des personnes, mobilité transfrontalière, frontière roumano-ukrainienne, frontière roumano-hongroise

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