

## NORTH BORDER OF SLOVAKIA – POLITICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Robert Ištók, Stela Lovacká

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*Prešov University, Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences, Department  
of Geography and Regional Development, Prešov, Slovakia*

**Abstract:** The issue of state borders as well as cross-border regions is a common topic of Political geography research. As to the main theme of the seminar, the paper is dealing with the north border of Slovakia (currently interpreted as a state border between Slovakia and Poland) in political-geographical context with respect to historical-geographical perspective.

The paper analyses the problem in broader geopolitical context emphasizing the development of Slovak-Polish border with the view to conflict and integration factors and traditional interpretation of Slovak-Polish neighbourhood.

The course of events after 1989 and the membership of Slovakia and Poland in the European Union has grounded in new geopolitical configuration which creates prerequisites for more intensive mutual cooperation at the state and cross-regional level. In the conclusion the perspectives of development (reflecting the transformation of Slovak-polish border function) are outlined.

**Key words:** Slovakia, Poland, border, transborder

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary existence of Political geography has put the border as its critical subject of interest. Its founder F. Ratzel drew attention to it in his classical work *Politische Geographie* from 1897 and other works. The state border of Czechoslovakia and its delimitation was a point of interest for Czech and Slovak geographers since the existence of the state in 1918. Many publications have been produced (for example Dvorský, 1923, Hromádka, 1946, Häufner, 1978, Trávníček, 1984). The issue of the delimitation of territory of Slovakia is being analysed not only by Slovak geographers (Žudel, 1995) but also by historians and lawyers (Klimko, 1980). Special attention was paid to Slovak-Polish border (Bielovidský, 1946, Melníková – Vrabcová, 1996).

The north border of Slovakia is identical to current state border of Slovakia and Poland. It stretches from Valy peak in the Jablunkovské mountains north to the village of

Čierne where the borders of Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia meet to Kremenec peak in the Buskovské hills where the borders of Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine meet. Regarding the length of borders, Poland is the second important neighbouring state of Slovakia.

Greater part of Slovak north border is of natural kind. It stems from the character of the Carpathians as natural origin walls. The Slovak-Polish border is constituted by a mountain ranges of Western and Eastern Carpathians, water flows (mainly river of Bialka, Dunajec, and Poprad). The absence of "natural" character of north border on relatively short parts has given rise to more intensive communication and migration, what has influenced different interpretations of its course in the time of historical-geopolitical turning points. It refers mainly to the north region of Orava and north-western region of Spiš.

## **2. THE FORMATION OF NORTH BORDER OF SLOVAKIA UNTIL 1918**

The prevailing natural character of north border as well as its stability resulted from its establishment. The Carpathians as geographical determinant played a dominant role in the formation of Slovak space. Their importance is reinforced by the fact that at least until the end of the Middle Ages the geopolitical development of north border was mainly determined by natural environment set by the Danube river and its tributaries as dominant geographical variables (Klein, 2000).

Before the Hungarian state was founded in around the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Carpathians were a natural ethnic boundary between the tribes of Lechs (who participated in the formation of Polish nation) and the ancestors of the Slovaks. The natural boundary was conditioned by main European water parting stretching from the spring of the Vistula river to the spring of the San river. The effective power of Polish rulers, however, went beyond this boundary in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The most extensive was during the reign of Boleslav Chrabrý (1003 – 1032) when almost whole territory of Slovakia was annexed to the Polish state.

At the outset of the Hungarian state, only gentle power-political control to the north of the Carpathians (as its natural defense belt) had been made to state extent. The Hungarian state sought to lean to the Tatras as its distinct fundament. The process of integration of Slovakia to Hungary within the boundaries of the Carpathians advanced in the course of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and finished at the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was the reason why there were not higher forms of political-social organization at that time.

The stabilisation of the north border from the zonal to linear one was a long-lasting process. The term "border" was viewed differently until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries the most territory of Slovakia was a border zone called *confinium* (*gyepürendeszer*). This space lying between real (external) and internal border of Hungary was intentionally less populated and economically weakly exploited. The Carpathians were an ideal barrier covered by thick woods. The absence of natural barriers was compensated by artificial obstacles to stop people from movements in cross-border regions (Klimko, 1980). The border zone was gradually populated and stable.

Despite barrier character of Slovak north border, many road communications along the water flows were formed. The roads to Poland ran through the valley of the Orava river, defile of the Dunajec and Poprad rivers, depressions and defiles of Low Beskydy mountains. In these areas the merchants running the goods were controlled. The existence of border at the mountain ridges is confirmed by period works of travellers (Sallai, 1997).

At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, thirteen Spiš towns were put in pledge to Poland. On the basis on agreement between the Hungarian king Žigmund Luxemburský and Polish king Wladislaw Jagellovský signed on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1412 thirteen Spiš towns (Spišská Belá, Ľubica, Vrbov, Tvarožná, Poprad, Stráže pod Tatrami, Veľká, Spišské Vluchy, Spišské Podhradie, Spišská Nová Ves, Ruskinovce, Matejovce a Spišská Sobota), as well as the towns of Stará Ľubovňa, Podolíneč and Hniezde were put in Polish pledge. These towns were considered to be a part of Hungarian crown, however, the mayor appointed by the Polish king was in charge of their administration. The towns had a self-governing bodies with an elected count being in the lead.

When looking at the map, it is clear that the pledged towns consisted of a set of enclaves in the north and central Spiš region. From the geopolitical point of view, it was advantageous for the Hungarian side because the towns did not form a coherent unit so that there was no danger of their annexation to Poland (Žifčák, 1991). It was even advantageous for Poland to partake in the trades in the Spiš region to gain the influence in the cross-border region. Despite some attempts to pay the pledge, the towns were retrieved to Hungary as early as in 1772 (formally a year later after signing a bilateral agreement). For a long time, the pledged Spiš towns were a bone of contention for some Polish politics supported by historians in the question of territorial claims for this space. The duration of Spiš towns pledge did not have an influence on the Hungarian-Polish border formation.

A specific phenomenon regarding the north border of Slovakia was Valach colonisation from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was a process of settlement on both northern and southern sides of the Carpathians by the Romanians, Ukrainians, Slovaks and Polish people. Their well-kept mutual contacts were broken after the stabilization of Czechoslovak-Polish border in 1920. The Ruthenians (on Polish side called the Lemkos) represent an integration factor of Slovak-Polish border to the east of Osturňa, despite their number has decreased and their displacement after Second World War had a violent character (Wisla on Polish territory in 1947).

It was no use considering the existence of Ruthenians as an argument for border changes after the First World War. More appropriate argument referred to the ethnic group of the Gorals on Polish-Slovak borderland, which will be concerned later on. In this context it is necessary to mention the ideas of the Ruthenians to establish a state presented by their institutions (the Carpathian-Russian National Council) after the First World War. The proposal of the Carpathian-Russian National Council in Prešov to found the Carpathian Rus' also included a part of current Polish and Slovak territories with the aim to be joined with Transcarpathian Rus' (Švorc, 1996).

Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century the northern border of Slovakia were delimited and controlled. As the role of borders together with the political and economic development of the neighbouring states rose, they were exactly depicted on the maps made in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Sallai, 1997). Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a linear delimitation of the border with the stones or trees used in the terrain. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the reign of Habsburg monarchy paid much attention to Hungarian-Polish border.

The military needs requested precise delimitation and mapping of this border. It resulted in the set of maps with scale of 1 : 14 400 made in 1769 (Sallai, 1997). Further in-depth mappings were realized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The role of the north border of Slovakia was changed after the First Division of Poland in 1772 when the southern parts of Poland became a part of Habsburg monarchy. Therefore, from 1772 to 1918 it was not a state border but a border between the provinces within one state. The only conflict at that time was a conflict over Morské oko in the Tatras between "Austrian" and "Hungarian" part of Habsburg monarchy. The dispute over a small area rooted in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was finally solved upon the initiative of conflict sides by International Court in 1897. The court's decision of 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1902 allowed "Austrian" part for annexation of the conflict territory.

Since the north border of Slovakia having a natural character was not a subject of frequent critical disputes, it was assumed that its line would have been fully exploited as a stable part of Czechoslovak-Polish border. Therefore, Polish claims for the revision of border were quite surprising. The border which was considered stable for more than 700 years became a matter in dispute then.

### **3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH BORDER OF SLOVAKIA FROM 1918 TO 1924**

The Polish claims on territory of the Orava and Spiš regions are reflected in cartographical interpretations of some conception of territorial delimitation of Poland presented by Polish researchers and politicians at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Eberhardt, 1999). Mapa ziem polskich (by A. Janowski) from 1913 included the area of the northwestern Spiš in the territory inhabited by Poles. In 1917 W. Wakar included an area of the north Spiš and north Orava regions in the territorial programme of Poland. The map of reunited Poland (by W. Skargi-Dobrowski) of 1918 depicted the south border in a way that Poland consisted of the whole regions of Kysuce, Orava and the Poprad river as a boundary in the Spiš region. Claims on the part of the Kysuce, Orava, and Spiš regions are displayed on the map by J. Jaskólski of 1919. The similar claims are presented on the map made by Polish delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris (by R. Dmowski). The realization of such processes, however, required convenient arguments from the Polish side.

As it was already mentioned, in spite of the fact that the course of the north border of Slovakia implied the isolation of Hungary and Poland, there were still some parts of the border which gave rise to possible migration and pervasion of ethnical groups. So was the situation in the north parts of the Orava region and the northwestern part of the Spiš region. Area of Goral settlement stretching from the north Kysuce through the north Orava to the north Spiš was founded. The Goral people inhabiting the isolated mountainous territories depended on the contacts with the Slovaks underlying the process of their gradual assimilation. As J. Hromádka (1943) quotes they were culturally under the influence of Slovaks and always claimed Slovak nationality. The Goral settlement was exploited as an argument for their annexation to renewed Polish state.

The population in the conflict area spoke a blended dialect, stemming from the cultural and language affinity as well as cross-border contacts. The situation was relieved

by the inclusion of the Halič region to Habsburg monarchy at the end of the 18th century so that both territories were developing within the same state. The evaluation of citizens' identity in the above territories is different. The Slovak authors claim that the people do not incline to Poland but they consider themselves to be a part of a Slovak nation (Deák 1994). The argumentation over the population being Polish is preserved in Polish literature up to the present.

The Polish side argued that the pledged Spiš towns should have belonged to Poland for the loan was not paid off (Majeriková, 2004). When looking at the map, it is indisputable that the Polish claims underlay strategic factors, mainly to improve the position around the town of Zakopane as the southmost Polish projection.

The claims on conflict territories of the Orava and Spiš regions were supported by the articles on high number of Poles on the other side of border as well as the existence of "the Krakow center". This association joined the representatives of intelligence who formulated the claims of Poland on return of the Spiš and Orava regions. From the ethnographical point of view, the Krakow center identified the Gorals with the Polish people.

The history of the border conflict after the First World War was connected with the armed fights and took its toll. The first armed fights dating back to December 1918 took place in the north Spiš near the town of Podolínec.

A new tactic concerning the formation of the borders in Central Europe was promoted. It assumed that after gaining compromise more extensive profits are to be achieved. Therefore the Polish memorandum of 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1919 claimed to surrender political districts of Spišská Stará ves, Kežmarok, Stará Ľubovňa and parts of the Levoča and Poprad districts to Poland. Relatively vast claims were put to the Orava region (political districts of Námestovo and Trstená) as well as the Kysuce region (whole district of Čadca and a part of the Kysucké Nové Mesto district). As the Czechoslovak-Polish negotiations on border problem solving in July 1919 in Krakow were not successful, it was necessary to carry out a plebiscite.

A plebiscite territory included the districts of Trstená and Námestovo in the Orava region and the district of Spišská Stará Ves and a part of Kežmarok in the Spiš region. The course of border line should have grounded on the citizens' votes. The ethnographic, economic, and strategic factors were suppressed. The plebiscite territory administered by an international commission (supported by French army units) had become a neutral territory for some time.

The withdrawal from the plebiscite realisation related with the endeavour of Czechoslovakia to gain Tešínsko as a significant region from the geopolitical and economical viewpoint. It was assumed that plebiscite held in Tešínsko would have been in favour of Poland. Therefore, the problem of the Orava and Spiš regions was pushed aside as a secondary one and appropriate for compensation. Poland agreed with the abolition of plebiscite under the pressure of unfavourable situation. A must of military supplies passing over the Czechoslovak territory forced Polish government to make a compromise. The problem was to be solved in the Ambassadors' conference.

The Ambassadors' conference took a stand to this point on 28<sup>th</sup> July, 1920 in Spa. The outcome was following – the annexation of 584 km<sup>2</sup> to Poland (approximately 195 km<sup>2</sup> from the Spiš region and 389 km<sup>2</sup> from the Orava region). According to the census of 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1921 there were 22 648 inhabitants living in that area (Čongva 1990). Within the region of Spiš there were thirteen villages detached (Nová Belá, Fridman with the settlement of Falštín, Krempach, Tribš, Dirštín, Čierna Hora, Jurgov, Repisko, Vyšné

Lapše, Nižné Lapše, Nedeca, Kacvín, and Lapšanka), within the region of Orava there were also thirteen villages detached (Nižná Zubrica, Vyšná Zubrica, Bukovina – Podsklé, Chyžné, Vyšná Lipnica, Harbakúz, Jablonka, Oravka, Pekelník, Podvlk, Srnie, Hladovka, Suchá Hora) (Trávníček, 1984).

The state border between Poland and Czechoslovakia was confirmed in the Sevre Peace Agreement (Agreement on some boundaries in Central Europe) of 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1920. The border is identical with historical border of Hungary in the Carpathians except for the areas being handled at the conference in Spa.

On 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1921 the Ambassadors' conference adopted a motion of a boundary committee and allowed to annex a part of the village of Nová Lipnica (which accepted a new name of Slovenská Lipnica) to Poland and the villages of Suchá Hora and Hladovka to become part of Czechoslovakia. The decision was realised in 1924 after the problem of Javorina was sorted out (Žudel, 1995).

Poland discontent with the verdict of the conference (July 1920) promoted its claims to gain the Javorina village, rest of the village of Jurgov cadaster, and western part of the village of Ždiar cadaster (firstly without the territorial compensation, later based on the exchange of the Kacvín and Nedeca villages). The small extent of the conflict area made the Czechoslovak-Polish relationships hostile.

The attempt to make a compromise (for example to divide the conflict area between both states) was not accepted from the The Ambassadors' conference's side. The dispute was finally solved at the International Court which arbitrated to make small changes of the borders under the agreement of United Nations. The treaty on the course of the border between the states was signed in Krakow on 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1924. On its basis, the Javorina village became a part of Czechoslovakia.

Czechoslovakia and Poland agreed on the border regime too. The inhabitants of the villages annexed to Poland and Czechoslovakia respectively could have passed the border to their pastures located outside the state. People could also have transported the planted products, woods and coal (Sallai, 1997).

#### **4. DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH BORDER OF SLOVAKIA FROM 1924 TO 1945**

During the interwar years the Czechoslovak-Polish relationships were worsened by territorial problems. Poland was not content with the delimitation of the border in 1924 when the problem of the Javorina village was temporarily sorted out. From time to time there were some other claims to next parts of the Orava, Spiš and Kysuce regions from the Polish side. Even Czechoslovakia was dissatisfied too. The achieved compromise was considered a failure for both sides (Krejčí, 1993).

Slovakia was viewed as a wedge isolating Poland from Hungary. It was not advantageous for both states because of the common historical bounds, geopolitical conception referring mainly to similar ambitions in the Podunajsko region. Both states (Hungary and Poland) aimed to create common borderline at the expense of separation, destabilisation and the breakup of Czechoslovakia. During the interwar years in the foreign political field both countries cooperated with the aim to revise the geopolitical

**arrangement** of the Central European space in order to dispose Czechoslovakia as a **distinct** geopolitical factor and to commence their own power ambitions.

As the position of Slovakia had weakened, Poland exploited a chance to open the question of common border revision in 1938. There were even more ambitious projects. In the spring 1938 there was an idea of Slovak annexation to Poland in the Polish politics (Batowski, 1971). Later on the Hungarian priorities in Slovak space were put to foreground.

At the end of 1938 the Polish government had decided to lay only moderate claims to the border change with Slovakia. Poland sought to maintain the support of Hungary and the inclination to some Slovak political groups. It stemmed from the Polish ambitions to create a power counterweight to Germany or Russia meaning the incorporation of small and middle states inbetween the Baltic sea and the Black sea (Medzymorze or Intermarium). Poland tried to maintain Slovakia in its sphere of influence and exploit it as a bridge towards the Southeastern Europe and the Balkans. Slovak political representatives, however, did not support this idea.

Since Poland did not find the support within the Slovak autonomous government, it made pressure upon the government in Prague. Delimitation works on a new border between Slovakia and Poland finished on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1938 by signing a protocol in Zakopane. Slovakia has therefore lost more than 226 km<sup>2</sup> and more than four thousand inhabitants (parts of the Čierne, Skalité and Svrčinovec villages in the Kysuce region, the villages of Hladovka and Suchá Hora in the Orava region, the villages of Javorina and Lesnica in the Spiš region as well as small areas alongside the boundary). Further development suggested that Poland overestimated its power and its geopolitical position in the Central Europe. The common border of Hungary and Poland was renewed only for a short period of time inbetween March and September 1939.

After the establishment of autonomous Slovak state the requests to revise the northern border were put on the table. Their realisation was plausible just after the Second World War was over. In September 1939 the Slovak army occupied the territories that were annexed to Poland in 1920 and 1938. So the German-Slovak treaty to get them back was signed on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1939. The next day the territory of 720 km<sup>2</sup> and more than 35 thousand people became officially again part of Slovakia. Some politicians insisted on further extension of the state, what was not realised after all.

In 1945 the north part of the Orava region and the northwestern part of the Spiš region were occupied by the Red Army. Czechoslovak representatives sought to maintain the conflict territory within Czechoslovakia. In April 1945 with the agreement of Soviet command there was a referendum lucidly articulating support to this conception (Kovalčík, 1996). Despite the effort the Czechoslovak delegation did not manage to convince the Soviet command to carry out border changes in the Spiš and Orava regions during the negotiations in Moscow in June 1945 (Kastory 1993). On the basis of so called Prague protocols of 20<sup>th</sup> May, 1945 there were the Czechoslovak-Polish borders of 1920 renewed again. Situation got stabilised thanks to the agreement on friendship, cooperation and mutual help of 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1947. The problems of postwar period in the Polish regions of Orava and Spiš were a point of attention for many Czech, Slovak, and Polish researchers (f. ex. Sobczyński 1986, Orlof 1993, Kastory 1993, Kovalčík 1996 e. a.).

A question of Slovak minority and its cultural development in Poland was exceptionally sensitive. Since 1947 there were Slovak primary schools established in the Polish Spiš and Orava regions, however, many of them were closed in the 60ties of the

20<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays, there are only 11 Slovak primary schools in Poland ([www.mswia.gov.pl](http://www.mswia.gov.pl)). The estimations on the number of Slovaks living in Poland are diverse. R. Matzkowski (2001) claims 21 000 Slovaks in 1961/62, in 1995 only 18 – 20 000. According to census in Poland in 2001, there are 1710 people claiming Slovak nationality (in Slovakia there are 2602 people claiming Polish nationality). Slovaks have an association „Association of Slovaks in Poland" established in 1995. Its predecessor was a „Cultural Society of Czechs and Slovaks in Poland in 1957.

## **5. NORTH BORDER OF SLOVAKIA AFTER THE YEAR 1954: A BARRIER OR A SPACE FOR COOPERATION?**

During the Cold War and communist government in both countries it was not expected that the borders would have been changed. There was a certain stagnation of cross-border contacts manifested in the reduction of transport connections. The border regime became more rigorous mainly after the events in Poland at the beginning of the 80ties of last century.

During the Habsburg monarchy there were four railways intersecting north border of Slovakia (built mainly from strategic reasons as the elimination of Russian expansion). In the post-war period there was only one railway passage between the village of Plaveč and Muszyna (built in 1876) connecting Czechoslovakia and Poland by the north border. The track on Skalité – Zwadoń (built in 1884) was stalled during the Second World War. After its close the tracks on Palota – Lupków (completed in 1876) in Eastern Slovakia and Suchá Hora – Podczerwone in the Orava region (completed in 1899). In 1976, there were only seven road border crossings (Suchá Hora – Chocholów, Trstená – Chyzne, Javorina – Lysa Polana, Podspády – Jurgów, Lysá pod Dunajcom – Niedzycza, Mníšek nad Popradom – Piwniczna, and Vyšný Komárnik – Barwinek).

There were no distinctive north border changes after the Second World War. In the 50ties of the last century the Czechoslovak – Polish Commission for border delimitation was established. The stability of Czechoslovak – Polish border was definitely achieved by the agreement on finite delimitation of state borders signed in 1958. Due of the agreements of 1975 and 2002 only small modifications were carried out. It referred to small areas in the Pieniny mountains, along the Dunajec river, at Dukla, and near the Skalité village.

It may be said that the historical burden stemming from the border conflicts in the Orava and Spiš regions as well as the events in 1938 and 1945 is already overcome. After 1989 there were new opportunities for cooperation emerging from changed geopolitical situation in Europe and perspective integration of both states into western European structures opened. The initiative of both states resulted in the establishment of Common Slovak-Polish Commission for Cooperation.

The establishment of euroregions has become a striking manifestation of cross-border cooperation on the north border. In the 90ties three euroregions connecting the areas of Poland and Slovakia were founded. Namely, it is the Carpathians Euroregion (founded on 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1993, includes regions of Hungary, Ukraine, and Romania) the Tatras Euroregion (founded on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1994), and the Beskydy Euroregion



(founded on 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2000) which was later extended to cross-border regions of the Czech Republic.

The intensity of cross-border cooperation was reinforced by the agreement on border crossings and crossing of Slovak – Polish state border signed on 1st July, 1999. The outcome of the Primary Minister of Slovak Republic M. Dzurinda was to create borders of „Schengen" type ([www.vlada.gov.sk](http://www.vlada.gov.sk)).

Nowadays, there are more than fifteen border crossings, tourist transits, small border connections between Slovakia and Poland. Moreover, there has been a revival of railway tracks on Skalité – Zwadoń (in 1992) and Palota – Lupków (in 1996). The railway track on Kysak – Prešov – Plaveč – Muszyna was electrified in 1997. In 2004 the negotiations of Trstená and Nowy Targ self-government bodies on the revival of cross-border railway connections were realized. In terms of European multimodal corridors the railway track on Čadca – Skalité - Zwadoń was electrified and the construction of highway (Svrčinovec – Skalité – state border of Poland) is being planned. Apart from that, there is a project of speed road communication on the line of Prešov – Svidník – state border of Poland.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The north border of Slovakia has developed for almost thousand years. Until 1772 (with a short break in 1370 and 1382 when Hungary and Poland were in personal union) it was a state border of Hungary and Poland. Then its meaning decreased due to the fact that it was only internal border within Habsburg monarchy. After 1918 up to now the north border of Slovakia is a state border (in 1918 – 1939 between Czechoslovakia and Poland, in 1939 – 1944/45 between Slovakia and German Empire, in 1945 – 1992 between Czechoslovakia and Poland and since 1993 it has been a state border between Slovakia and Poland).

If balancing the history of the north border of Slovakia we may state that the importance of its barrier and contact function has been changed. From the physical-geographical aspect the barrier function has been reinforced as the Carpathian ridge hampered the cultural influences, naturally restricted people from movements, and changes of commodities. At the same time, it was a place of contact between Slovak and Polish territory and their inhabitants. Most intensive contacts were concentrated to the valley of the Orava region, then to the breach of the Dunajec and Poprad rivers and to the passes of the Nízke Beskydy mountains. Nowadays, the contact is concentrated to relatively high number of border crossings, what indicates that the contact function of the north border has strengthened after 1989.

The functions of the state border depended on geopolitical configuration in the Central Europe as well as relations between neighbouring states. So was the north border of Slovakia. When analyzing the development after 1918, it can be stated that the dominant function was a barrier one. It rooted from the relationship between Czechoslovakia and Poland and their effort to revise the border. Moreover, the Polish interwar ambition was to have the common border with Hungary. After the Second World War Czechoslovakia became a part of Eastern bloc. Despite the fact that border

disputes were definitely sorted out, the activation of contact function was not noticeable. However, in the 80ties the barrier function was reinforced.

The development over the last fifteen years after cardinal geopolitical changes has contributed to the implementation of contact function of Slovak-Polish border. It is demonstrated by the growth of border crossings and to the intensification of crossborder cooperation as well as the establishment of three Euroregions extending common border. After the admission of Slovakia and Poland into the EU and after their perspective admission into the Schengen system their further development is expected.

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Vláda SR schválila návrh na uzavretie dohody medzi Slovenskom a Poľskom o hraničných priechodoch a prekračovaní spoločnej štátnej hranice. <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/>

## **Severná hranica Slovenska – politickogeografické a historickogeografické súvislosti**

### **Resume**

Hranica je predmetom záujmu politickej geografie od počiatkov jej modernej existencie. Problematikou štátnych hraníc Československa a Slovenska sa zaoberalo nielen viacero geografov, ale aj historikov. Osobitnú pozornosť priťahovala aj severná hranica Slovenska, ktorú možno stotožniť so súčasťou štátnou hranicou Slovenskej republiky s Poľskou republikou.

Väčšia časť priebehu severnej hranice Slovenska má povahu „prírodnej“ hranice, čo vyplýva z charakteru Karpát ako prirodzenej prírodnej hradby. Absencia jej „prírodného“ charakteru na relatívne krátkych úsekoch utvorila predpoklady na výraznejšiu komunikáciu a migráciu, čo neskôr v období historických geopolitických zlomov vplývalo na rôzne interpretácie jej priebehu.

Karpaty boli dominantným geografickým determinantom vývoja slovenského priestoru a stali sa približne od 10. storočia prirodzenou etnickou hranicou medzi slovanskými kmeňmi Lechov a predchodcami dnešných Slovákov. Aj uhorský štát, ktorý sa formoval od prelomu 10. a 11. storočia, sa na severe opieral o Karpaty, ktoré tvorili proti severnému susedovi prirodzený obranný pás. Údoliami väčších riek a priesmykmi viedli diaľkové cestné komunikácie, spájajúce nielen Uhorsko a Poľsko, ale aj Pobaltie s Balkánom.

Špecifickým historickogeografickým fenoménom bol záloh 13 spišských miest Poľsku v rokoch 1412 až 1772. Zálohované mestá vytvárali medzi časťou poľských politikov až do polovice minulého storočia isté sentimenty, vyúsťujúce do odôvodňovania poľských nárokov na územie severného Spiša. Tieto pretenzie sa opierali aj o existenciu etnickej skupiny Goralov, ktorí žili na poľsko-slovenskom pomedzí a ktorú považovali viacerí poľskí predstavitelia za súčasť poľského etnika.

V rokoch 1772 až 1918, teda po prvom delení Poľska, neplnila severná hranica Slovenska funkciu štátnej hranice. O to viac sa vyhrtili problémy s vytýčením československo-poľskej hranice po prvej svetovej vojne, keď Poľsko prezentovalo svoje nároky na územie Spiša a Oravy. Tento spor bol ukončený rozhodnutím konferencie veľvyslancov 28. júla 1920, ktorá zasadala v meste Spa. Poľsku pripadli severné časti územia Spiša a Oravy, ktoré sú jeho súčasťou (s výnimkou rokov 1939 až 1945) dodnes.

V období studenej vojny a komunistickej vlády v oboch krajinách cezhraničné kontakty stagnovali, resp. mali iba formálny charakter. Prejavilo sa to o.i. obmedzením dopravných spojení (existovalo sedem cestných hraničných priechodov a iba jeden železničný priechod). Po roku 1918 viac ako sedemdesiat rokov dominovala bariérová funkcia slovensko-poľskej hranice.

Možno konštatovať, že historická zát'až, prameniaca z hraničných sporov, ako aj udalostí v období druhej svetovej vojny, je dnes už prekonaná. Po roku 1989 sa vytvorili nové možnosti cezhraničnej spolupráce. V 90. rokoch vznikli na slovensko-poľskej hranici tri euroregióny, začala pracovať Spoločná slovensko-poľská komisia pre spoluprácu, boli podpísané dohody o hraničných priechodoch. V súčasnosti spája

obe krajiny viac ako 15 cestných priechodov a bola obnovená doprava na dvoch cezhraničných železničných tratiach.

Vývoj v posledných pätnástich rokoch výrazne prispel k presadeniu kontaktnej funkcie slovensko-poľskej hranice. Prejavilo sa to v zintenzívnení cezhraničnej spolupráce. Po vstupe Slovenska a Poľska do Európskej únie a po ich perspektívnom prijatí do schengenského systému možno očakávať ďalší pozitívny vývoj, ktorý bude výhodný pre obe strany.