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TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT
PERSPECTIVES FOR THE
SLOVAKIAN-HUNGARIAN
BORDERLINE

by
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The basic negative effect of international borders on the societies lies with cutting off spatial continuity, breaking a free flow of information, commodities and individuals. Efforts to mitigate or eliminate this effect must be a normal reaction of people living on both sides of the borders.

Recent changes in political and economic regimes in the eastern part of Europe have led to the termination of the practice of centralized mechanism of total state control and made it possible to convert the character of multinational links among post-communist countries.

With the accession of several countries in Central and Eastern Europe to the European Union (CEE: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) the issue of permeability of borders as a basic element of these links has been changed radically and has been shed a new light upon.

After 1945 the assignment of international border crossings were regulated by bilateral agreements between the so-called socialist countries standing on the same ideological platform in CEE as a macro-region. At that time these agreements reflected the political and

foreign trade interests of socialist countries and expressed the following features:

- Only few border crossing points were open to international passenger and freight traffic.
- The volume of international freight traffic prevailed on the 2–3 most important crossings.
- Passenger traffic was regulated along each border section to a various extent.
- There were several administrative barriers for passengers (e.g. to travel to the Soviet Union) and the Iron Curtain held up their flow too (e.g. from Hungary to Austria, from Czechoslovakia to Germany and Austria).

The above mechanism hindered the establishment of links both on mezo- and micro-regional levels or between the individual settlements for decades.

But with the time passing it became obvious that the major part of these problems could not be addressed properly and solved by governmental intervention or initiatives. Meanwhile, settlements of the borderzone regions needed different forms of international cooperation, especially under severe circumstances during the first years of emerging economies in the early 1990s.

A majority of these regions of CEE were already less-favoured areas in the socialist era and the general economic

decline of the macro-region in the 90s has only strengthened their peripheral position.

Besides the political transition it became necessary to abolish the outdated mechanism of command economy applied on a regional scale. It was important for people living in

border regions to recognize their common interest: to reduce and eventually to eliminate the dividing function of international borders, and to foster mutual cooperation among deprived regions and settlements along both sides of the borderline (*Illés, I. 1996*).

2.

THE PROBLEMS OF BORDERLAND REGIONS

Having examined the impact of borders on areas in their vicinity, it is worth considering the subject from the perspective of the areas themselves. We can state that border does not necessarily embody a negative potential i.e. obstacles to the development of the economy and society of a particular area but can also represent a remarkable potential for growth. Characteristically, the properties of the given border area determine whether difficulties or opportunities for growth manifest themselves more vigorously in the border area.

Since geographical location is fundamental the question really is how the particular area is related and rated in comparison to the core areas of the neighbouring country and those of its own country. What are the inner social and economic processes like? Are they more characteristic or periphery or of developed areas?

Consequently, there are three major categories according to the type of area along the border: periphery meeting periphery, periphery meeting centre and finally side-by-side existence of two centres. Without doubt, the areas in a relatively more developed position benefit more from the opportunities offered by borders.

On the other hand unfavourably situated less and developed areas lacking external help are more likely to suffer from detrimental effects of their position. Consequently, any negative phenomenon impacts on society much more forcefully in such areas. All this leaves a mark on their network of relations as well. Evidently, more developed or core areas are more interested in establishing and improving their relationships and in facilitating cross border traffic and will promote their development at local and national level alike.

As a result these areas can be expected to concentrate a broad range of economic, institutional and personal contacts. By contrast in peripheral areas opportunities for developing relationships concern a markedly smaller number of people. With official contacts kept at a minimum the role of illegal connections becomes more significant and thus also limiting the number of those profiting from such connections (*Hardi, T. 2005*). The Slovakian-Hungarian border belongs to the type of cross border relations where there are changes of rediscovering the fact that there used to be important forms of cooperation that were beneficial for both sides and this was a mere consequence of coexistence at a time when there were no borders at all. In the present paper the Slovakian-Hungarian cross-border relations are analysed from transportation aspects (*Mezei, I. 2005*).

In the 1970s and early 1980s the geographical research of borderlands was related mainly to the backward

regions in East Central Europe. At that time national borders appeared as physical barriers of investigations for groups of researchers (*Barta, Gy.–Beluszky, P.–Berényi, I. 1975; Lackó, L. 1975; Beluszky, P. 1976; Tóth, J.–Csatári, B. 1983; Süli-Zakar, I. 1987*). Only a few of these studies dealt with transboundary topics (*Kocsis, K. 1988; Tiner, T. 1988; Kovács, Z. 1990*). The latter ones were based on the recognition that economic or social problems have many similar features in common deriving from similar reasons on both sides of the border.

Latest works of Hungarian authors (*Süli-Zakar, I. 2001; Mezei, I. 2001, 2005; Horváth, Gy. Eds. 2004; Hardi, T. 2005*) have already dealt with cross-border relations in the Euroatlantic processes with special reference to the Carpathians Euroregion and Slana-Rimava cooperations. Slovakian researchers (*Niznansky, V.–Sirak, M. 2000; Drgona, V. 2001, Halas, M.–Slavik, V. 2001; Spislak, P. 2003*) emphasize the importance of the development of deprived regions of East Slovakia and urge effective regional policy to encourage borderland cooperation.

The division of historical regions into political ones belonging to different countries was an artificial measure. This is particularly valid in the case of the neighbour countries in East Central Europe, where re-drawings of international borders occurred relatively not long ago (between 1920 and 1945) and these historical events have changed millions of human lives dramatically in different countries of the macro-region.

The case of the Slovakian-Hungarian border region is a good example to show the effects of the above processes.

In 1920 as an aftermath of the events of the First World War and the Peace Treaty of Trianon the territory of present-day Slovakia was officially detached from Hungary and ceded to the newly formed Czechoslovakia. Following the change in state administration approximately 88,000 ethnic Hungarians moved to the new Hungarian state territory. At the same time approximately 72,000 Czech military personnel, civil servants, entrepreneurs and colonists settled down on the territory of Slovakia (*Kocsis, K. 1993*).

A part of the new southern frontier of Czechoslovakia divided large areas inhabited by Hungarians into two parts and also cut manifold economic and cultural links having hitherto existed. Transportation network as a means of access to areas divided from each other become segmented artificially. Stations of several railway lines and nearly one hundred public roads became terminals within the border zone along the new frontier.

Southeast Slovakia and Northeast Hungary, the sample area of this study is a good example to show the negative consequences of this historical event. The emergence of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county as an administrative region was the result of the appearance of a new 170 km long borderline in Northeast Hungary. (This Hungarian county was created

artificially by merging the southern parts of Abauj-Torna, Gömör-Kishont and Zemplén counties of the former Hungarian Kingdom with Borsod county.) On the Slovakian side a new administrative region appeared with the city of Košice as its seat.

The newly drawn borderline stretching in East-West direction turned the former microregional connections to be oriented toward the new centres within a 5-15 km wide stripes on both sides of the state border. Namely, northward in Slovakia (towards Košice) and southward in Hungary (towards Miskolc). The negative consequences of this obligate polarization appeared soon.

The bad effects of the newly drawn borderline on the demographic process of small Hungarian villages (e.g. demographical erosion, ageing population, accelerated out-migration) is well demonstrated in the works of *Kocsis, K.* (1988, 1993).

Obtrusive dividing into two parts of this underdeveloped region without urban centres has made a negative impact on the accessibility of traditional market centres of the region and affected the attraction zones of labour of the larger settlements adversely (*Kovács, Z. 1990*).

There was a negative effect of the new border on the transport network of the region cutting the former railway and main road networks into two isolated clusters of different configuration. Railway lines

and main roads on the Hungarian side running along the river valleys became oriented toward the borderline, while most of them in Slovakia became parallel to it.

Consequently it was possible for the population in Slovakian villages located close to the state border to reach railway lines or main roads easily in contrast to the rural settlements in Hungary where suddenly large areas had become void of railways and arterial roads. This situation and the bad condition of public roads contributed to the decline of living conditions in the latter region (*Boros, L. 1984*).

Finally, the conditions for transport development compared with the situation before the year of 1920 became unequal on the areas on different sides of the border. For example dozens of villages in Hungary occurred close to the railway line running on the Slovakian side but their inhabitants could not reach it because of the state border emerging as a barrier. At the same time these villages found themselves quite distant from the lines of Hungarian State Railways (MÁV) and main public roads for the same reason.

In contrast to the present seven border crossings there were many public or local roads before 1920 connecting the settlements of the region. With the emergence of the new border line their previous connecting function became eliminated, so for more than 80 years they have been out of use and their maintenance has been neglected.

Here the following question has arisen: Deriving from the new political and economic situation what are the perspectives for the development of cross border transport links between the Hungarian and Slovakian settlements of the regions in concern? The second part of the study deals with this problem investigating the opportunities for opening new border crossings and their possible effects on the everyday life of people in the regions. The permanent pressure from the inhabitants of the region makes the

problem of building more border crossings rather urgent.

In 1993 this demand was demonstrated in the case of the Hungarian border village, Pácin, where the mayor has been leading a struggle for opening a border crossing to Slovakia for years. (His efforts have proven to be successful. The border crossing was opened between Pácin and Vel'ky Kamenec in 1995.)

3.

TRANSPORT GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF BORDERLAND SETTLEMENTS

In a strict sense a town or village can be considered as 'border settlement' only when a certain section of its administrative border coincides with the national frontier. So these settlements are attached to the borderline. Their common features is that the borderline can be reached only by crossing their territory. It is important to mention that in many cases the names of the border crossing points (situated along main roads or railway lines) are different from the names of the real 'border settlement', because the latter ones are often small villages of less importance without any connection to the basic transport network of the region.

For example the border crossing point for international road traffic named 'Tornanádaska' in Hungary is located within the administrative territory of the neighbour village (Hidvégdó); and the official name of the international railway border crossing is Hidasnémeti, but the line crosses the border virtually on the territory of a real 'border village' (Tornyosnémeti).

There are 43 border settlements on the Hungarian side of the studied area; two of them are towns (Ózd and Sátoraljaújhely). Administratively

they belong to six different statistical microregions (those of Ózd, Edelény, Encs, Kazincbarcika, Sátoraljaújhely and Sárospatak). 56 villages and no towns are found on the Slovakian side. Settlements of this area belong to four administrative microregions (those of Košice, Rožňava, Rimavská Sobota and Trebišov).

In the next part of the study the region and its settlements with respect to the main branches of transport will be dealt with.

3.1. ROAD TRANSPORT

Investigating the settlements of the two countries according to the opportunities to establish links between them by reconstructing shorter or longer transboundary public roads in their full length after 85 years, it can be stated that there are more than 30 places along the border where the crossing would be physically possible after road reconstruction. These points were identified by the help of an old public road map compiled by the Hungarian cartographer *P. Gönczy* in 1890. According to this map there were 22 Slovakian and 25 Hungarian villages which had direct transport connections by different kinds of public roads (state, county and other roads, *Fig. 1*).

New crossing possibilities in perspective would be able to revive former relations for the majority of settlements. With the

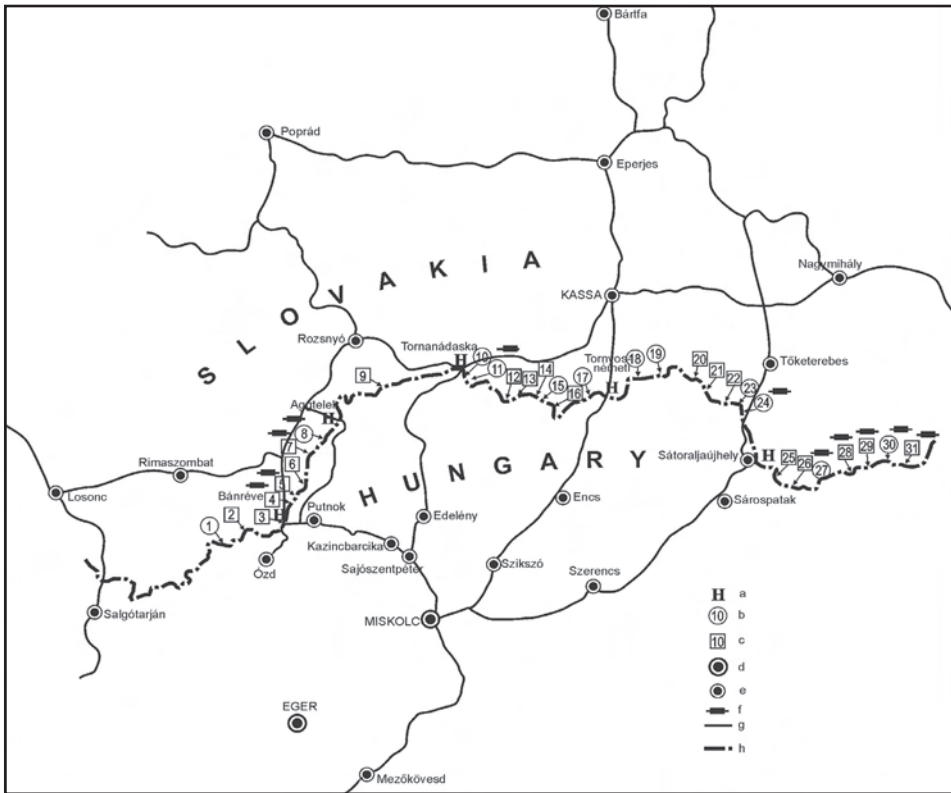


Fig. 1. Existing and potential border crossings along the eastern section of the Hungarian-Slovakian state border. (Compiled by Tiner, T. 2004). – a = existing border crossings; b = potential border crossing on former county road; c = potential border crossing on former public road; d = county seat in Hungary; e = towns; f = railway stations on the Slovakian side of the border accessible through potential border crossings; g = main roads; h = international border; 1-31 = numbering of potential border crossings (see Table 3).

accession to the European Union for Slovakian and Hungarian citizens living in the studied border zone prospects are promising.

As it was mentioned, the designation of the state border in 1920 had a detrimental effect on the transport

network of the region resulting in a more developed (Slovakian) section and a less developed (Hungarian) portion within the region (Tab. 1).

But it has to be mentioned that this relatively better position of Slovakian villages was not sufficient for them

Tab. 1. Some transport geographical parameters for settlements in borderland investigated

Parameter	In Hungary		In Slovakia*
	Town	Village	
Settlement with railway line	2	8	16
Settlement with main road	2	7	12
International border crossing for railway traffic	1	2	3
International border crossing on road	1	5	6
Settlement having former public road crossed the new border	1	25	23
Endpoint for road traffic	-	12	4
Endpoint for railway traffic	-	1	-

*Only villages.

Source: National Atlas of Hungary, Bp. 1989.

to avoid demographic and economic decline and to get rid of their marginal position.

Of border settlements only those Slovakian and Hungarian villages have not occurred in a traffic shadow position which

- function as permanent border crossings,
- can be found in the neighbourhood of border crossings, or
- located near urban settlements.

These villages might prove to be able to increase their economic activities due to their favourable transport position and relatively good traffic conditions offered by major thoroughfares or railways (*Tab. 2*).

In the course of studies an attempt was made to evaluate the transport geographical position of settlements of the border region according to the following criteria:

- Spatial pattern of settlements having border crossing roads used only before 1920,
- Position of border settlements in public transport network,
- Role of Hungarian minorities in strengthening bilateral relations.

The list of different public roads (county roads and other ones) used to run through the borderline and of the settlements along them can be seen on *Tab. 3*. After reopening or reconstructing these roads they would be able to serve again the mobility

Tab. 2. Volume of traffic through international border crossings on the borderland investigated, 2003

Border crossing	Number of vehicles, 1,000		Railway traffic, pair of trains
	Together	of which motor car	
Bánréve/Král'	378	95	810
Aggtelek/Domica	5	56	–
Tornanádaska/Hraničná pri Hornáde	9	9	–
Tornyosnémeti/ Hos'tovce	384	342	1900
Sátoraljaújhely/ Slovenské Nové Mesto	81	48	1260
Pácin/Vel'ký Kamenec	8	8	-

Sources: Roadtech Kft. and Hungarian State Railways (MÁV), Bp., 2004.

of people living on both side of the border.

As it can be read from the data of Table 3, there are a number of villages along the 170 km state border section which could establish closer relation with their partner settlements due to the relatively short road sections marked. For example, within a 58 km long section (between Hungarian border crossings Bánréve and Tornyosnémeti) you can find more than 15 former public roads which used to cross the border with an access to the nearest Slovakian highway (Road Nr. 50, Rimavská Sobota–Rožňava–Košice)

within 5–14 km. After opening borders these “dead-ends” could be converted into transit roads and function again after many decades.

Settlements with former state or county roads have a better position over the other ones because those roads had served as traditional routes for international or long distance domestic trade and were embedded into the economic circulation of the region for ages. All the existing border crossings in the region – except Pácin/Vel'ký Kamenec – were established either on a former state road (Tornyosnémeti/Hraničná pri Hornáde) or county roads (Bánréve/Král', Agg-

Tab. 3. Former public road available for border crossing potentially along the eastern section of the recent Hungarian-Slovakian state border (after Gönczy, P. 1890)

Nr.	Hungarian	Slovakian	Approx. length of road section in kms	Former function of road (C = county road, O = other road)
1.	Hangony	Šimonovce (Rimasimonyi)	10.4	C
2.	Susa (Ózd)	Chrámec (Harmac)	4.6	O
3.	Bánréve	Lenártovce (Sajólénártfalva)	2.5	C
4.	Serényfalva	Abovce (Abafalva)	8.2	O
5.	Kelemér	Král' (Sajószentkirály)	8.1	O
6.	Kelemér	Neporadza (Naprágy)	7.2	O
7.	Szuhafő	Tornal'a (Tornalja)	13.6	O
8.	Aggtelek	Tornal'a (Tornalja)	16.8	C
9.	Szögliget	Silická Jablonica (Jablonca)	9.3	O
10.	Hidvégdárdó	Chorváty (Horváti)	4.0	O
11.	Hidvégdárdó	Turňa nad Bodvou (Torna)	7.2	C
12.	Keresztéte	Janík (Jánok)	10.4	O
13.	Perecse	Janík (Jánok)	8.3	O
14.	Kány	Buzica (Buzita)	5.8	O
15.	Büttös	Buzica (Buzita)	8.9	C
16.	Szemere	Buzica (Buzita)	12.6	O
17.	Hidasnémeti	Perín-Chym (Perény)	5.3	C
18.	Kéked	Trstené pri Hornáde (Abaújnádasd)	3.8	C
19.	Hollóháza	Skároš (Eszkáros)	6.6	C
20.	Pusztafalu	Slanská Huta (Szalánchuta)	4.6	O
21.	Füzérkajata	Byšta (Biste)	3.9	O

Tab. 3. Continued:

Nr.	Hungarian	Slovakian	Approx. length of road section in kms	Former function of road (C = county road, O = other road)
22.	Vilyvitány	Byšta (Biste)	5.9	O
23.	Felsőregmec	Michal'any (Alsómihályi)	2.8	C
24.	Felsőregmec	Kazimír (Nagykázmér)	4.7	C
25.	Felsőberekci	Klín nad Bodrogom (Bodrogszög)	3.8	O
26.	Karos	Streda nad Bodrogom (Bodrogszerdahely)	6.1	O
27.	Pácin	Vel'ký Kameneč (Nagykövesd)	4.2	C
28.	Kisrosvágy	Vel'ký Horeš (Nagygéres)	5.1	O
29.	Lácacséke	Pribeník (Perbenyik)	3.4	O
30.	Dámóc	Pribeník (Perbenyik)	4.1	C
31.	Zemplénagárd	Vel'ké Trakany (Nagytárkány)	4.8	O

Source: Gönczy, P. 1890. *Magyarország megyéinek kézi atlasza (Manual Atlas of Hungarian counties)*. – Budapest.

telek/Domica, Tornanádaska/Host'ovce, Sátoraljaújhely/Slovenské Nové Mesto). Villages in the direct neighbourhood of these settlements had also a relatively good position within the network.

The next questions are referring to the physical condition of these former roads. What are their surface (paved or not paved), width and linkage to other existing public or local roads like? Do these roads still exist? It would be very important

to survey them “in situ” on both sides of the borderline. This is a must because it many of them might not exist any more for different reasons (e.g. certain road sections might have been destroyed, built-up, enclosed, became part of cropland etc.). In these cases there is no chance to reconstruct them in order to put into use again. But it can be anticipated that many of them are merely neglected and are suitable for reconstruction at a relatively low cost in the near future. Their

reconstruction is a common interest for Slovaks and Hungarians living in the region.

3.2. RAILWAY TRANSPORT

Investigating the transport position of border settlements with regard to the access to the nearest railway line (station), conspicuous things can be discovered. From the map (*Fig. 1*) it can be seen that two groups of railway stations on the Slovakian side are located very close to the borderline. The first group consists of four stations situated in the western part, whereas the second one with

five stations can be found on the eastern margin of the border region. These railway stations were identified on the official map of the network operated by the Slovakian State Railways. Comparing their location with the lining of former roads marked on the map by *P. Gönczy* of 1890, it was stated that 14 Hungarian villages would have favourable accessibility to these stations by using former public roads across the border.

Consequently with the reconstruction of these public or local roads new crossing opportunities would appear in the future

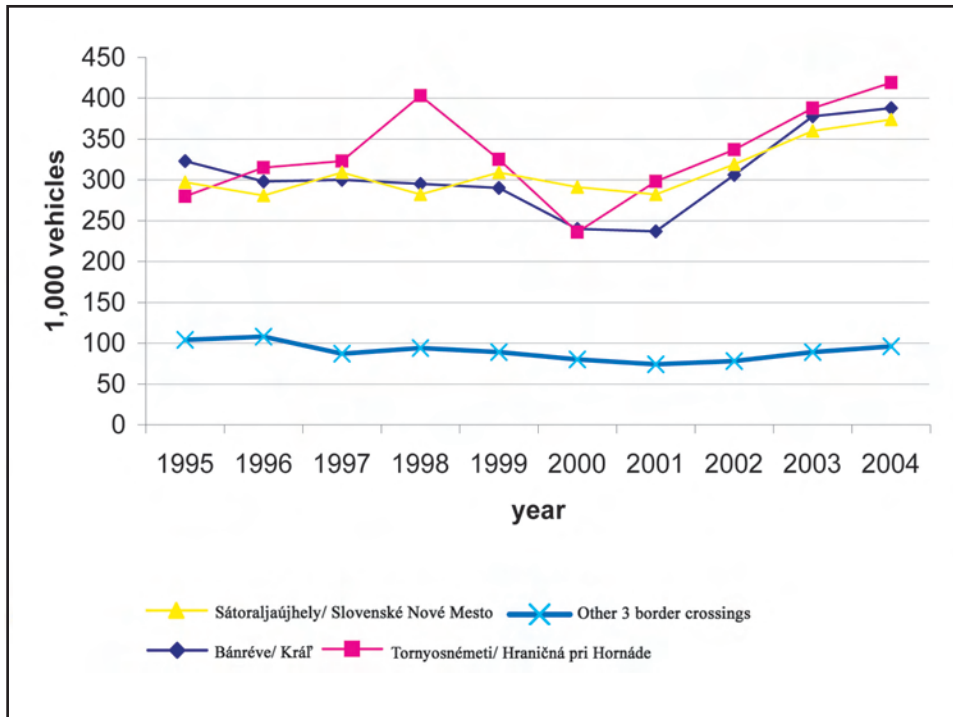


Fig. 2. The volume of cross border traffic on eastern section of Hungarian-Slovakian border, 1995-2004.

contributing to a better accessibility of Sátoraljaújhely (H), Košice (SK) and Rožňava (SK) by rail from villages in the western and eastern peripheries of the region.

There is a further occasion to improve the accessibility of railway from villages in the central part of the region. Namely, it would be very important and useful to reconstruct a short (13 km) torn up railway section between Tornanádaska (H) and Hosťovce (SK). With its rebuilding dozens of Hungarian villages in Bódva River Valley could reach stations of a main railway line connecting Košice with Rožňava in East Slovakia and at the same time many Slovakian villages could get direct railway connection to Miskolc, seat of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county.

3.3. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TRANSPORT

Settlements in the border regions in East Slovakia and Northeast Hungary have several similarities. These are the followings:

- A vast majority of these settlements – with the exception of towns – belong to small or tiny villages with population less than 1000.
- The demographic structure of the population is unfavourable.
- The majority of the settlements are found in economically deprived regions.
- More than 90 per cent of these villages have agricultural character, but the natural endowments for farming are meagre.

- The unemployment rate among people in economically active age are much higher than in cities or other villages around towns or close to transport arteries.

Consequently villages of the border region have several troubles in the field of transportation as well. Public transport services are not too frequent (daily services are rare because of the few passengers using bus or railway). The level of private motorization of the inhabitants is also lower than the national average in Slovakia or Hungary. This situation has occurred due to the low personal income in villages of the region on both side of the state border.

In contrast to it, international traffic of passenger cars, lorries and vans at the six existing border crossings of the region has shown a permanent increase since the turn of the millennium. This phenomenon can be considered a token of some take-off in the economy of the region (*Fig. 2*).

Studying the curves of *Fig 2* it can be seen that international traffic flow exceeded 1.1 million outgoing/incoming vehicles in 2004 with more than 1.5 million persons.

A further characteristic is that the overwhelming part (near 90 per cent) of the borderland traffic is focused at some international border crossings featuring main roads (Tornyosnémeti/Hraničná pri Hornáde, Bánréve/Král' and Sátoraljaújhely/Slovenské Nové Mesto). The rest play a subordinate role in international vehicle traffic of the region but with a flow

tending to increase, too. Consequently, public road sections currently not in use might have future functions in the growth of this flow within a few years. Vanishing state borders in the European Union and opening more public or local roads between Hungarian and Slovakian villages may lead to bus services operating in longer and cross border routes. These services may have destinations in the neighbouring countries and aim to collect passengers from both sides of the border. Slovakian and Hungarian bus companies may cooperate, i.e. operate joint services or extend own services beyond the border.

These favourable trends would be accelerated by reconstructing a few former public or local roads across the border in the region.

Establishing a common labour market in the eastern part of the Slovakian-Hungarian border region would help unemployed people to find work and entrepreneurs to create jobs. Vanishing border lines and the reconstruction of former roads would serve this positive process effectively.

The growing rate of active earners and their salaries will lead to a higher level of motorization in the long run (increasing number of private cars per 1000 inhabitants). These groups of the rural society will use these reconstructed or improved roads while commuting to urban centres as major places of work in the future (Košice, Rimavská Sobota, Miskolc, Kazincbarcika etc.)

Finally, the expansion of renewed, reconstructed public or local roads crossing the present-day borders will contribute to the more opened and widening communication between Slovaks and Hungarians of the region. Hungarian minority in Eastern Slovakia must play an important part in the process of socio-economic transformation (to be a “bridge” in the political conversation between the Slovak and Hungarian ethnic groups).

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