

THE IMPACT OF EU ENLARGEMENT ON REGIONS ON THE EU'S NEW EASTERN BORDER

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When the EU enlarges, Poland's eastern border and Hungary's eastern and southern borders will become the new external borders of the EU, operating according to the 'Schengen' regime of controls. The same will apply to Slovakia's (much shorter) eastern border if it joins at the same time. The candidate countries are already under pressure to implement the EU's common visa policy towards their neighbours, including Ukraine, Romania and Yugoslavia, even before they accede to full EU membership. The implication is that what has been a relatively 'soft', easily traversed border in the last ten years will once again become 'hard'. In popular perceptions in the region, this threatens to restore the *status quo ante* of the Soviet period, when movement of people was tightly restricted.

Impact on Inter-State Relations in CEE

The impact of such a development on inter-state relations in CEE is already fairly well known. To recapitulate briefly:

Polish-Ukrainian relations

The rapprochement between Poland and Ukraine in the last decade has been one of the most positive and hopeful developments in post-communist Europe. Despite 150 years of historical enmity between Poles and Ukrainians, and despite the catastrophe of World War II and its aftermath, which saw episodes of bitter ethnic warfare between the two peoples, followed by population transfers and the perpetuation of hostile mutual stereotyping in communist-era historiography, the two states in the post-communist period have formed a 'strategic partnership' in which Poland has adopted the role of patron of Ukraine, promoting its 'European vocation' and westward orientation. The relationship with Ukraine has become a pivot of Poland's foreign policy, recognised right across the Polish political spectrum. The stability of Ukraine, its independence from Russia and eventual integration into the west are defined as vital national interests in Poland, and this will not be abandoned once Poland joins the EU.

Hungarian-Romanian relations

These have become well-known in the West as one of the most sensitive areas in post-communist CEE. This is due in large part to the weaknesses of Romania's 'democratic transition', linked to the high salience of ethno-nationalist thinking and rhetoric in Romanian politics across the party spectrum. Romanian nationalism largely casts Hungary and the Hungarian minority in Romania as the mistrusted 'Others', and interprets the determination of the Hungarian minority, backed by Budapest, to assert minority rights as confirmation of hostile intent. The 'Transylvanian question' historically has been as bitter and intractable as any conflict over territory and national identity in Europe, including, for example, in Northern Ireland. Yet it is to the credit of

these two new democracies that they have exercised self-restraint, and we see a gradual but steady groping towards reconciliation and a more productive redefinition of the relationship. The previous Romanian government's moves (albeit hesitant and incomplete) towards a settlement of the Hungarian minority's problems seem likely to continue even with the return of president Ilescu and the former communists of the Party of Social Democracy of Romania to power. Hungary, for its part, has taken on the role of keen supporter of reform in Romania and its accelerated accession to the EU.

Both Hungary and Poland are officially committed to implementing the Schengen *acquis* and the EU visa regime upon their accession to the EU. But questions have to be raised about how this can be made compatible with the continuation of the positive developments in their relationships with their eastern neighbours, itself a major demand placed on them by the EU itself.

Yugoslavia

Despite last autumn's ouster of Milosevic, the turn to a democratic/western-oriented course remains precarious. The removal of Milosevic marked the first step towards Yugoslavia's 'return to Europe', but tightening up the border with Hungary, and the imposition of visas for travel to Hungary as a result of its forthcoming accession, will send all the wrong signals to the Yugoslav population, by erecting barriers to contact not experienced since the heyday of the Cold War rift between Yugoslavia and the Soviet bloc.

Impact at the regional level

What is less well appreciated is the potential impact of the EU's external border regime on those regions which will fall just on each side of the EU's new external border.

First, the arrival of the new eastern border could have a destabilizing effect within states left outside the EU, by opening up divisions between regions located at the border, and those in the interior or east; and by exacerbating centrifugal pressures and tensions between regions and the national capitals of fragile, poorly integrated states like Ukraine, Romania and Yugoslavia. Second, the EU's external border regime seems likely to have a damaging impact on the economic and political stability of the borderland regions themselves, on each side of the new eastern border between Poland and Hungary and their eastern neighbours. In the last decade of relatively free movement across the border, a significant degree of economic interdependence has built up on the basis of informal cross-border trade and commuting for employment, which has become for many inhabitants a vital means of surviving in these peripheral, often impoverished, rural areas. Moreover, many borderland regions are multi-ethnic in composition, and open borders have provided opportunities not only for 'rediscovering' suppressed national minority identities, but also for welcome encounters with 'others' on both sides of the border, contributing to the diminution of mutual animosities over the past decade.

The borderlands have in fact achieved much since 1989, largely by their own efforts, often in the face of unhelpful policies and nationalist rhetoric emanating from the state

capitals, and, moreover, in an international context of heightened uncertainty when the meanings of borders were being redefined across Europe (German unification; disintegration of USSR, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia). The formation of several new states, with uncertain/contested national identities and interests, and undefined relations with their neighbours, and of course the wars in Yugoslavia, further added to the sense of insecurity. The sudden opening up of previously closed or tightly restricted borders between the former USSR and the Central and East European countries offered not only opportunities but challenges to the stability of borderland regions, and yet we find they have managed to establish new bases of internal stability and cross-border contacts. The EU's external border and visa regimes are now viewed in the eastern borderlands with dismay.

It is worth reiterating a point often overlooked by western policy-makers: the right to hold a passport and to use it to move freely across borders is probably the topmost, and the least ambiguous, gain for most people in CEE from the revolutions of 1989-91. Opinion polls in the late communist period regularly showed that high on the list of what people resented most about communism was the lack of opportunity to travel. Indeed, the right to travel abroad was central to their understanding of what it meant to be 'free'. Economic changes since 1989 have been, for most people, at best a mixed blessing; there is widespread disillusion with democratic politics (although stopping well short of rejecting democracy); but the right to travel has – up to now – been achieved.

Some Illustrative 'Thumbnail Sketches'

The city of Przemyśl in Poland's south-east Podkarpacki region

Historically the city of Przemyśl was an important centre of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic (Uniate) Church, but became part of independent Poland in 1918. The sizeable Ukrainian minority in the region resented inter-war Poland's 'nationalizing', assimilationist policies, and many Ukrainians took advantage of the Nazi dismemberment of Poland to fight - with Nazi backing - for independence in World War II. After the war, the Polish communist authorities forcibly deported Ukrainians to the USSR, or dispersed them around Poland (especially in the newly acquired ex-German territories in the West). The aim was to destroy the Ukrainian minority in Poland. Communist historiography perpetuated popular anti-Ukrainian ethnic prejudices. After 1989, the tiny remaining Ukrainian minority demanded return of its church in Przemyśl and restoration of the cemetery of Ukrainians who died (fighting Poles) during the war, and planned to hold a Ukrainian minority festival in the city. These demands were vigorously resisted by the local authorities, and local Poles saw the demands as a threat to the 'Polishness' of their region. The increasing use of Ukrainian, as Ukrainians began to come in from Ukraine to trade and work, also caused disquiet. But over time, local Poles discovered the economic benefits of increased contacts with Ukraine. New shops and roads were set up to cater to the burgeoning traffic of 'economic tourists'. The region, appreciating the Polish government's foreign policy towards Ukraine, began to style itself as 'Europe's gateway to Ukraine'. But the EU's external border and visa regimes threaten these developments.

The city of Lviv, capital of the historic region of Galicia in western Ukraine

Galicia, and its capital Lviv (Lwow, Lvov, Lemberg), was the historic centre of the Ukrainian national movement in the nineteenth century under Austrian rule, and in the first half of the twentieth century under Polish rule. It only became part of the USSR between 1939 and 1945, and remained a centre of anti-communist feeling. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Lviv was the centre of the *Rukh* movement of democratic Ukrainian nationalism, and the Lviv elites, in an awkward coalition with the Kiev former communist *nomenklatura* elites, spearheaded the drive for Ukrainian independence. Since then, however, Lviv has found itself increasingly marginalised in a highly centralised state dominated by the Kiev *ex-nomenklatura* ‘oligarchs’, whose economic and political mismanagement and corruption have betrayed the ‘return to Europe’ that the Galicians hoped for for Ukraine. There is rising frustration in the region, and dismay at the prospect of increasing difficulties in maintaining contact with the west. Some Galician intellectuals have revised their previous commitment to the unitary model of the Ukrainian state, and argue instead for increasing regional autonomy, if not federalism, in order to allow Galicia to go its own way. The idea of ‘EU accession by regions’ – with Galicia in the vanguard – has been mooted. But Lviv is also an important site of Polish cultural heritage, and Polish requests for the restoration of a military cemetery of Polish patriots (who fought against Ukrainians) have touched a raw nerve. Pressure on Lviv from Kiev to accede to Polish demands, in the interests of the inter-state ‘strategic partnership’ with Poland, has only exacerbated the city’s alienation from the capital, despite the fact that the city also aspires to be Ukraine’s ‘gateway to Europe’.

Transcarpathia – Ukraine’s westernmost region

Transcarpathia is an economic and political backwater that has changed hands several times over the past century between Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the USSR and independent Ukraine. Separated from the rest of Ukraine by the high barrier of the Carpathian mountains, it has a special identity of its own. It is a multi-ethnic region whose largest group’s identity is contested: upon annexation by the USSR after 1945, this group, hitherto known as Rusyns (Ruthenes), was declared Ukrainian, and their Greek Catholic Churches handed over to the Russian Orthodox church. In the late 1980s, a Rusyn ‘national revival’ took place, asserting their separate identity and the distinctiveness of their language, and demanding ‘autonomy’ for Transcarpathia. This was resisted by Kiev, which saw the demand (in the context of other separatist/autonomist movements in Crimea and Donbas) as a threat to the territorial integrity of the new state. The imposition of Ukrainian as the state language was a further source of friction. The other minority groups in the region – Hungarians, Slovaks, Germans, Roma and others – all get along remarkably well, using Russian as the *lingua franca*, again in contradiction to Kiev’s language policy. All inhabitants of this impoverished region now depend heavily for economic survival on regular travel westwards, chiefly into Hungary and Slovakia, for small-scale trade and unregistered employment. Since Slovakia imposed visas on Ukraine in June 2000, some of this traffic has diverted into visa-free Poland. The Hungarian minority in particular has benefited from closer contact with Hungary, which was virtually impossible in the communist period. The prospect of the EU’s external border and visa regimes is prompting many of the minorities to emigrate westwards. In order to stem what could be a flood, the

Hungarian government plans to award special status to ethnic Hungarians, to give them access to work, education and health services in Hungary as long as they do not settle there. Such a solution is likely to be controversial, and may affect inter-ethnic relations; it would also appear to run counter to EU legal principles by distinguishing between citizens of another state on ethnic grounds.

Banat in south-west Romania

Banat is another multiethnic border region that, like Transcarpathia, has successfully maintained ethnic peace through the transition period. Its population is overwhelmingly Romanian, but they take pride in the region's 'multicultural' and 'Central European' heritage. Relations with the ethnic minorities are thus very good. The shared regional identity has fostered the sense of mission as Romania's 'gateway to Europe', leading the way in economic reform, pluralist democratization and toleration. Banaters reject Romanian nationalism emanating from Bucharest, and are dismayed at the ineptitude and corruption of the national political elites. Rising frustration with the politics of the capital mainly accounts for why large numbers of Banaters either abstained, or voted for the far-right nationalist demagogue, Vadim Tudor, and his Greater Romanian Party, in last winter's elections. Frustration with the prospect of exclusion from the EU, and the impending EU border and visa regime with neighbouring Hungary, no doubt enhanced the appeal of Vadim Tudor's xenophobic anti-Europeanism. Multicultural toleration is fragile in Banat.

Euroregions

The westernmost regions of Ukraine and Romania, and Vojvodina province in northern Yugoslavia, have all embraced the idea of 'Euroregions', modelled on west European practice, as a vital means of developing cross-border economic, political and cultural cooperation. But these Euroregions on the eastern borderlands have all faced problems of lack of support from national capitals, lack of resources, inexperienced and inefficient regional administrations within over-centralized states, inadequate transport infrastructure, etc. The Duna-Maros-Koros-Tisza Euroregion, uniting counties in south-east Hungary, south-west Romania and Yugoslav Vojvodina, has also been paralysed by the embargo on Milosevic's Yugoslavia and the 1999 NATO bombing. All of these Euroregions now face the EU's external border regime, which runs right through the middle of them. And yet these Euroregions could provide the framework for stability and prosperity across the EU external border. Flourishing Euroregions could avert the danger of economic impoverishment in the borderlands, with the associated implications of rising criminality, emigration pressures, etc. They could also support the achievements of the borderlands in multiethnic coexistence, and help to realise these regions' aspirations to act as 'gateways to Europe' for their more sluggish national hinterlands.

Policy Implications

The EU's relations with both the CEE accession candidates and non-candidates like Ukraine are focussed overwhelmingly at the level of national capitals, for obvious reasons – but it is not enough. The national capitals in still highly centralized, but politically weakly integrated, states lack the infrastructure (both in terms of transport and

communications, and developed party-systems) to communicate effectively with their regions; they may be (often are) ill-informed, indifferent and insensitive to the needs and perspectives of their regions. Given the importance of the external border to the EU, the EU itself cannot afford to ignore developments in the borderlands on each side of it.

EU enlargement may serve to integrate the new member-states, but it is also likely to be accompanied by increasing regional differentiation as the economic dynamism of the regions closer to the west exceeds that of the traditionally poorer, less well-placed east. The impact of the new EU external border will exacerbate this: regions in the west, bordering on existing EU member-states and benefiting from freer cross-border contacts westwards, will be much more sympathetic to western demands for tighter controls at the eastern border than regions in the east, which see an open and lightly-policed eastern border as their vital interest. This will pose new challenges for centre-periphery relations within the new member-states. In the eastern neighbours, outside the EU, these challenges may heighten centrifugalism and centre-periphery tensions.

Policy Proposals

1) Engage the candidate countries fully in developing the EU's 'neighbourhood policy'

EU member-states should consult fully with Poland on the common policy towards Ukraine to secure a policy that Poland itself will feel satisfied with as a new member-state, given the high salience of Ukraine in Poland's national foreign policy agenda. Close consultation will bring the benefit of Poland's unrivalled accumulation of knowledge and understanding of Ukraine, and Poland's special influence over Ukraine, having won its trust as a reliable partner and role-model for its own 'road to Europe'. Hitherto, Poland has found the US more open and receptive than the EU to its perspective on the question of Ukraine, and this has led to a certain disillusion with the EU as a serious and effective foreign policy partner on a matter of Poland's vital national interest that is of no less importance to the EU.

It is difficult to see an entirely similar role for Hungary in south-eastern Europe, given the complexity of that country's historical relations with its neighbours and the sensitivity of the Hungarian minorities issue. However, Hungary's assumption of a role promoting in whatever way it can Romania's acceleration towards EU membership should be taken seriously and welcomed. Hungary and Romania could usefully be encouraged to work together to assist Yugoslavia's re-entry into the European integration process. This could strengthen emerging cooperative ties between Hungary and Romania, and also give Romania a sense of purpose and a responsible role in an area that is of acute concern to the EU. Romania's current chairmanship of the OSCE also gives it a chance to confirm its credentials as a reliable partner. While both countries' governments stood behind the West over Kosovo, public opinion in both is broadly sympathetic to the Serbs and Yugoslavia, and would strongly support actions promoting Yugoslav reintegration.

The high priority of Yugoslavia on the EU agenda should not be allowed to displace attention from the extremely difficult situation in Romania. Romania cannot simply be left to drift further behind. The change of government should be approached as an opportunity; notwithstanding the poor past record of Iliescu and the PDSR in power, there are hopeful signs. The unexpected success of the far right in the elections of November/December delivered a salutary shock to the Bucharest political elites. The opposition, including the Hungarians, now recognise the need to be constructive in the best interests of the country; and the governing elites, if offered the right incentives, could prove more effective in implementing reforms than the previous coalition, on account of the rather stronger tradition of party discipline in the PDSR. Active engagement on the part of the EU, in cooperation with other international organizations such as NATO, should keep them on the right track.

2) The EU's foreign policy towards the eastern neighbours needs a regional (sub-state) dimension

Inevitably, the EU works with national capitals in the candidate countries and the 'outsiders'. But national capitals may be ill-informed, indifferent and insensitive to the needs of their regions at the border with the enlarged EU. Given the importance in EU members' politics and public opinion of the whole question of managing the EU's eastern external border, the EU cannot afford to rely on a perspective derived mainly from contacts in the national capitals on questions relating to the situation in the borderland regions.

A greater, and permanent, EU presence is needed in the borderland regions each side of the new external border:

- as an alternative channel of information 'from below' on emerging tensions within states at the regional level, and between regions and the national capital, as a result of the EU's external border regime;
- as the base for possible EU participation in border management at the EU's new external border, or at least close monitoring of border management;
- to overcome the difficulties posed by the common visa regime for residents of the border regions, given the distance from, and lengthy travelling time to the EU members' embassies in the national capitals; cooperation among member-states could lead to joint consular facilities, or transfer of visa-issuing authority to common EU consulates in the borderland regions;
- to advise and assist local/regional authorities and NGOs in making applications for PHARE/TACIS/Stability Pact and other EU support, for which people in these peripheral regions are often ill-equipped and inexperienced;
- to promote greater visibility and understanding of the EU in the regions, including contacts with regional universities, public education and EU-awareness events;
- to provide on-the-spot support for the development of Euroregions across the EU's new external border. A permanent EU presence in the borderland regions could help depoliticise Euroregion activities, often captured by local political and party interests to the detriment of the functioning of Euroregions. The EU's

- regional presence would offer an alternative channel of information on Euroregional possibilities, and assist regional groups in preparing projects and applications for funding.
- to signal EU encouragement for the aspirations of the borderland regions to act as 'gateways' between EU members and non-members. The role of the westernmost regions of states on the wrong side of the EU's external border in pressing for accelerated reform needs recognition and support.

The European Commission should set up a dedicated Task Force for the development of Euroregions straddling the new eastern external border:

- to coordinate PHARE/TACIS/Stability Pact funding, and 'join up' the activities of the DGs for Enlargement, External Relations, JHA, the Regions, and others.
- substantial additional resources should be found for supporting Euroregions as one of the most promising ways to soften the impact of the new external border both on inter-state relations in CEE, and on the economic and inter-ethnic situation in the borderlands. A greater proportion of funds allocated to border management should be devoted, and seen to be devoted, to additional border crossing-points and to speeding transit through the border, to offset the impression that the EU is mainly interested in strengthening the protective/exclusionary functions of border controls.

Given the sensitivity and complexity of centre-periphery relations in many of the states potentially involved in such initiatives, the EU should be careful to consult with the national capitals; explain the rationale for any stepped-up involvement in the border regions to them in a way which increases the sense of mutual interest and engagement on the external border issue; and manage its role so as to be seen to be strictly neutral between national and political groups.