

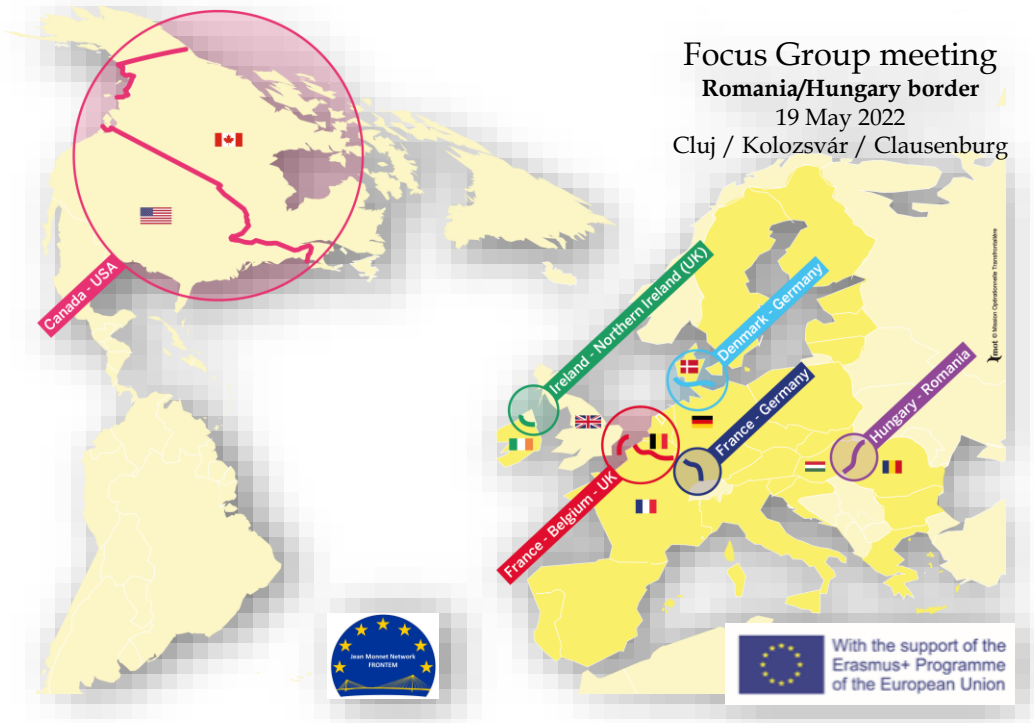


Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai
FACULTATEA DE
STUDII EUROPENE



FRONTIER FOCUS GROUP

ON THE ROMANIAN-HUNGARIAN BORDER



REPORT

The purpose of the Jean Monnet networks is to «promote the development or foster the creation and development of consortia of international players in the area of European Union studies in order to gather information, exchange practices, build knowledge and promote the European integration process across the world».

The Jean Monnet network « Borders in motion » (Frontem) was launched on 18 November 2019. Under the leadership of Sciences Po Strasbourg, the network has seven partners: the University of Southern Denmark, the Euro-Institute, the Centre for Cross-Border Studies in Armagh, the Babeş-Bolyai University, the Catholic University of Louvain and the University of Victoria in Canada. The project aims to benchmark of and to provide a tool-kit on different border management systems and the evolving perception of borders by the citizens.

As part of the project, two Focus Group discussions were organised on the 19th May 2022 between 10am and 6pm CET at the Cluj County Prefecture, Romania with the following participants:

1. Table: List of participants

NR	Name	Organization
1	Laura Abidi	University of Strasbourg (FR)
2	Melinda Benczi	CESCI (HU)
3	Frédérique Berrod	University of Strasbourg (FR)
4	Bojan Ioana	Meridian (RO)
5	Mircea Brie	University of Oradea (RO)
6	Daniela Călinescu	Prefecture of Bihor County (RO)
7	Ioan Horga	University of Oradea (RO)
8	Adelhaida Kerekes	Cluj County School Inspectorate (RO)
9	Apor Kovács	Gate to Europe EGTC (HU-RO)
10	György Kozma	National Self-Government of Romanians in Hungary (HU)
11	Mircea Maniu	Babeş-Bolyai University (RO)
12	Moş Marius	Oradea City Hall (RO)
13	Océane Menu	CESCI (HU)
14	Alexandra Muţiu	Babeş-Bolyai University (RO)
15	Gyula Ocskay	CESCI (HU)
16	Lucia Pantea	Babeş-Bolyai University (RO)
17	Papp Éva	Babeş-Bolyai University (RO)
18	Nicolae Păun	Babeş-Bolyai University (RO)
19	Sándor Péter	Hajdú-Bihar County Police Headquarters (HU)
20	István József Polgár	University of Oradea (RO)
21	Şchiop Nicoleta	Babeş-Bolyai University (RO)
22	Anthony Soares	Centre for Cross Border Studies (UK)
23	Katarzyna Stoklosa	University of Southern Denmark (DK)
24	Stretea Andreea	Babeş-Bolyai University (RO)
25	Schirmann Sylvain	University of Strasbourg (FR)
26	István Szabó	Regional Municipality of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County (HU)
27	Tămaş Enya-Andrea	Babeş-Bolyai University (RO)
28	Birte Wassenberg	University of Strasbourg (FR)

Greetings

The event started with **Mr Nicolae Păun**'s opening speech in which he welcomed the participants and expressed his gratitude for being able to host the event. He furthermore thanked the project partners and CESCO for organising the Focus Group then asked **Ms Alexandra Muțiu** to greet the participants.

Ms Muțiu's welcome speech focused on the role of Babeș-Bolyai University in developing new ways of knowledge and offering many opportunities for cooperation in all domains. She congratulated the organisers and welcomed the realisation of the event underlining its novelty and importance stating that the participants gathered in the name of science and cooperation and the University supports the cooperation between universities and people and countries.

After **Mr. Nicolae Păun** thanked the Babeș-Bolyai University's support both in terms of organizing the event and referring to the general framework it offers for cooperation in the academic sphere he passed the floor to **Ms. Birte Wassenberg**, the leader of the project who expressed her gratitude to the partners of Frontem. She also provided a short overview on the evolution of the project, which was extended to Cluj because of the longstanding cooperation between the University of Strasbourg and Babeș-Bolyai University and also between Mr. Sylvain Schirmann and Mr. Nicolae Păun. After presenting the partners gathered in Cluj, she described the main activities of the project.

The Frontem – frontiers in motion – project is a pluri-disciplinary project which analyses 5 border regions: France-Germany; Denmark-Germany; France-Belgium; Ireland-Northern Ireland (UK); Romania-Hungary. The project also has a transatlantic link since at the final event the five border regions will be compared with the American-Canadian one. For each border region a research seminar was held in order to obtain a scientific point of view, which was complemented by the organization of focus groups with actors of the civil society. This creates a link between the academic world and the real one. The research seminar for the Romanian-Hungarian border region has already taken place in 2021.

She continued by stating that each border region is different, each has its own problems and different preoccupations. In the case of the German-French border the focus of the discussion was given to the closure of borders due to Covid-19 pandemic. In terms of the Danish-German border region a special approach was taken: for the focus group discussion the organisers invited the minorities of both regions, and the conclusion of the event was that there is no need for integration, there is already a peaceful coexistence. In terms of the Ireland-Northern Ireland border region, the discussions focused mainly on Brexit. She concluded her speech by presenting the results of the mental mapping survey and passed around the printed map to the participants, pointing out that the mental map represents how people imagine the border which is not always in accordance with the reality.

1st Focus Group: Border Management

The focus group on border management was moderated by **Mr Gyula Ocskay**, Secretary General of CESC, who welcomed the participants and mentioned that unfortunately, there are less people present than originally invited as many participants had to drop out for various reasons at the last minute. He then presented the agenda of the day: the first focus group centred around the current state of border management, while the afternoon discussions were focusing on how the border is perceived by the border citizens. In the border management focus group, there were two sections answering the following general questions:

- How does the border function? What are the characteristics of the border regime? What are the conditions of crossing the border?
- In this context, how does cross-border cooperation take place? What are the experiences so far?

Regarding border management, it is a common experience that border crossing both along the Iron Curtain and between the Communist Bloc's countries took place through strict rules; it was not only difficult but most of the time also a humiliating experience. However, the current order in this border area is a new reality for those living here. He also highlighted that Romania was outside the Schengen area, which means that the Romanian-Hungarian border was an exterior border of the EU and thus had different functions and conditions than the other borders of this project.

Mr. Sándor Péter replied by offering a presentation of the current border regime between Romania and Hungary. The Romanian-Hungarian border section has several special characteristics. Following the EU accession of both countries, the Romanian-Hungarian border functions as an internal border of the EU, but as an external border of the Schengen Zone which means that there is no customs control and there is no double border crossing – but the control of persons is still in operational.

The Romanian-Hungarian border regime can be regarded as a pioneer, in the sense that it was the first to introduce the one-step border control/check, meaning that the passengers don't have to stop twice to complete the border control of both countries separately but at one stop they can manage it. This significantly sped up the time spent at the border crossing.

Prior to the EU accession, a double border checking system was in place, both at the Romanian border and the Hungarian border. Now, with the one-step system the control takes place at one border, generally at the border of exit, where the border police of both countries carry out the necessary checks. Based on the principle of common trust, one part accepts the decision on entry of the other. In terms of the control of the persons and their documents a duality continues to exist – each part performs their own checks. Either of the parties can decide not to let the person(s) pass the border.

One of the most important consequences of Romania's accession to the EU is that it started a process of reducing differences. Institutions responsible for the border security on both sides have started to think alike, to find similar and also joint solutions to the same problems. The convergence of two countries began: a common journey towards a common destination, namely guaranteeing border security.

Mr. Gyula Ocskay replied that this phenomenon is not obvious for those living in countries where border control has ceased to exist 30-40 years ago. Not only was the border crossing a lengthy

process, more often than not it was a humiliating experience, too. The moderator continued on by telling a story about a trip to France which took place in 1989, during which they had to cross several borders. When they arrived at the German-French border they realized that, although no one was there to check them, they still didn't dare to cross the border out of fear. This was their "heritage" from the socialist regime. The moderator then goes on by asking if others had similar experiences when crossing the borders, and in what ways did this change?

Ms. Adelhaida Kerekes replies that the trips on other countries have been possible only with special conditions. These conditions are not known by children today anymore, so it is worth talking about these experiences. She then gave a short overview of the situation in Romania, where there is a significant ethnic Hungarian population. This gives context to all forms of cross-border relations and cooperation. It is important to underline that the Hungarian minority enjoys the same rights as the Romanian citizens.

Mr. Sándor Péter raised the problem of the permeability of borders. He mentioned that Romania's accession to the Schengen Zone would directly address this. But he also mentioned that he put on his uniform 37 years ago so he can compare that already there is a change that people don't start their cross-border journey feeling stressed anymore, but they can focus on where they are going, what they are doing, and that the few minutes of stopping at the border is not really a particular problem anymore.

Mr. Nicolae Păun continued by saying that it is paradoxical to discuss about the border in the context of two EU countries, it is a topic only because they are separated by an external Schengen border. Romania has for a long time accepted the rules imposed on it – there was corruption, there was bureaucracy – but since the country has reduced these obstacles, it should now be let into the Schengen zone. He claimed that it is time to send a signal about the importance of eliminating the Schengen border between the two countries.

He also remarked that it is indisputable that there have been positive changes: while in the past it was common to wait several hours at the border now there are 7-8 lanes open for crossing (but this is not what is needed, only a little sign post would be needed informing the passengers that they have unnoticeably crossed the border). Romania has completed all the conditions for joining the Schengen zone and respects all the necessary regulations.

Mr. Gyula Ocskay agrees with the statement of Mr. Păun in that it is scandalous that Romania is still not accepted into the Schengen zone. He claimed that "when you are in Romania you have the same European feeling as anywhere else in the EU". The Romanian authorities have met the necessary conditions. It should be an important message of this event that both parties agree on the significance of Romania's accession into the Schengen zone. He called the attention of the project partners that the movie which is being made as part of the project should also highlight this.

Mr. Marius Moș reflected on an experience from 2000, when he was trying to travel to Belgium as a volunteer. First, he was trying to obtain a visa but never managed to get one. After the visa regime ceased, he was able to travel by car to Budapest and then by plane to Belgium. It was shocking for him when he was the only one (as being Romanian citizen) who had to pass a control at the airport. He also mentions the importance of cross-border cooperation for Oradea, a city which has many common projects with Hungarian authorities on mobility, heritage, culture, education, etc. where the border does not have a separating but a uniting effect.

Mr. Gyula Ocskay then steered the conversation towards the subject of changes in the volume of cross-border mobility by asking the participants about their experiences regarding traffic, the objectives of crossing, and about the effects of the pandemic on them. He also asked about the effects of the pandemic on cross-border commuting and the changes brought about by the 2004/2007 accessions.

Mr. Sándor Péter replied that Hungary's accession to the EU generated a process which was then furthered by Romania's accession. The most immediate changes have been felt regarding the free movement of goods. After 2004 the free movement of goods became a reality from the point of view of Hungary, but in its relation to Romania customs control remained in place. Since 2007 this freedom was extended to Romania too, not only in terms of goods but in a wider sense. This had a major impact not only on the transit traffic, but on the regional relations too.

During the pandemic many obstacles, barriers were put in place, both physically and mentally. The area which felt the least the negative effects of these obstacles was the movement of goods. The easiest controls were set up in relation of freight traffic, due to its importance to ensure the permanence of economic production. Freight traffic, with a few exceptions, continued without major interruptions.

Ms. Daniela Călinescu mentioned the implementation of a project entitled "Safe border, safer life" which had the objective of improving the management of migration across the border, the intensification of cooperation between partners, their capacity building, etc. In the framework of the project an analysis was conducted regarding cross-border migration in the Bihor - Hajdu-Bihar region since 2015 and invited everyone to consult it at: https://safeborder-rohu.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Research-Report_Diagnostic-Study-regarding-migration-in-Bihor-Hajdu-Bihar-cross-border-region-withi.pdf

Mr. István Szabó continued on by stating that the increase in the volume of cross-border mobility was not so spectacular in the period following 2004. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county has the longest state borders in Hungary, from which a section of 103 km represents the Romanian-Hungarian border. The opening of the truck terminal at the Csengersima border crossing had a major impact on the volume of cross-border traffic. The town of Mátészalka was indirectly affected by this, as the 49 Route crosses the municipality. There is hope that the M49 highway which is now under construction will solve this problem. In 2019 approximately 13,5 million persons have crossed the Romanian-Hungarian border, out of which 40% took place at the Csengersima crossing, meaning 4,7 million persons. The 2021 report shows that the Covid pandemic reduced the volume of the traffic to its half, both at the Hungarian-Ukrainian and the Romanian-Hungarian borders. The negative effects would have been even more dramatic if there had no agreements regarding transit and cross-border commuting.

Freight traffic is closely linked to production activities. The general decline in production levels has also reduced trade across the EU. The Covid pandemic has halved cross-border traffic.

Mr. Gyula Ocskay mentioned that the pandemic had several interesting effects. For example, in the last decades more and more people have moved across the border to Hungary, while still working in Romania or Slovakia. During the pandemic, according to the agreements, only those were able to commute who could prove that they have their address in one country but work in the other. Consequently approximately 12,000 Romanian and Slovakian citizens registered suddenly as living in Hungary. Moreover, we have witnessed a high level of cooperation between both the authorities

and the civil society during the pandemic. The moderator asks about the participants' experiences regarding this.

Mr. György Kozma related his experiences from the point of view of the self-government he represents. There is a native Romanian community in Hungary with a history of 200-250 years. Based on the latest data there are approximately 36,000 ethnic Romanians living in Hungary in the border regions. They have a wide range of autonomy, operating in a similar way to other local self-governments. They also have their own school system teaching children in Romanian. Many Romanian citizens have moved to Hungary, and the pandemic has made it very difficult to travel between the two countries, as travelling always had to have a well-established reason. Because of the difficulties posed by the pandemic and the restrictions of border-crossing, the relationship between the families was also broken. Cross-border mobility regarding tourism also greatly declined, both due to the closure of borders and the suspension of the activities of the tourist facilities.

The self-government tried to help these communities. For example, it tried to help those Romanian students, who study in Hungary and who could no longer travel home, by offering them continuous care in the student dormitories. Later on, they were able to travel home with special certificates.

An important aspect, in addition to the development of infrastructure, would be the resumption of the Joint Committee dealing with the minorities, as the last time it took place was in 2011. This common forum would be more effective for the discussion of matters regarding the two communities. He also agreed that Romania is ready to join the Schengen zone.

Mr. Gyula Ocskay mentioned that indeed, in the past there have been joint meetings of the two governments but the last one took place more than 12 years ago.

Mr. Sándor Péter continued by saying that together with the changes in the function of the border and the increase in its permeability, not only did changes in the economic sector take place, but also regarding the cultural and educational areas too. The pandemic had the strongest negative effects on the mobility of persons, which was alleviated by the introduction of derogations on the mobility of cross-border commuters. The cross-border mobility of students was also resolved by the period of final exams in secondary schools. The pandemic revealed how many students are commuting. It came as a new piece of information, "until then we didn't know, we didn't measure it", he said. From the tourist side: the travel of Hungarians to Romania for tourism purposes has increased.

There is no momentum in our lives to which the border and cross-border travel are not related. Every effort is made to make the crossing as minimal a constraint as possible.

Romania's Schengen control has been successful, and it does not depend on the Romanian border police when will the country become a member of Schengen.

Mr. Gyula Ocskay agreed that being in the Schengen zone would greatly benefit the situation at the border region. He also raised the question of migration, mainly that of illegal migration across the border, and mentioned the commonly known case of cigarette trafficking across the Ukrainian-Romanian-Hungarian border.

Mr. Sándor Péter stated that a key segment of cross-border movement is migration. Illegal migration is high in some parts of the Romanian-Hungarian border, though it is not as voluminous as on the Hungarian-Serbian border. Illegal immigrants entering Romania from Bulgaria and Serbia are dominant around Timișoara, where a large migrant camp is operating. The Romanian section of Csongrád and Békés counties is more intense, the Romanian section of Csongrád County being the

most affected. In Hungary, especially on the southern border, 6-10 smugglers are caught every day. Compared to the big picture, this volume is manageable, but the number is still high. He also added that the migration wave in 2015 was different because the people didn't have their identity documents and so it was impossible to identify which country they are coming from. The co-operation is also great in this respect, the number of arrests realized by their Romanian colleagues is higher in the border section guarded by them than by the Hungarians. Also, a Hungarian-Romanian joint patrol service is operational (when a Hungarian officer joins his colleagues in Romanian territory and vice versa). Cigarette smuggling is very common in the northern parts of the border area.

Mr. István Szabó continued the discussion from the point of view of the northern section of the border, saying that the migration pressure is not so heavy in the border sections of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. However, cigarette smuggling is very common at the triple border. There are 3 main groups in terms of illegal migration 1. Hiding in the trunk of vehicles. 2. Disposal method (human traffickers take illegal migrants to the green border, guide them there, and teach them what to say and what not to say if they are caught). 3. They cross with false documents, e.g. by plane. In 2014, 2015, 2016, the persons stopped by the authorities had documents that helped to identify their place of origin, however since 2017 they have been crossing the border without identity documents.

Mr. Gyula Ocskay asked the participants to discuss about cooperation. "What does the cooperation between Romanians and Hungarians look like?" he asked, mentioning that the cooperation is not an evident, natural phenomenon. The Romanian-Hungarian relationship is burdened by historic conflicts, and its improvement requires much more energy. "We carry with us a significant historical heritage. The role of nationalities as a bridge is important." he said. That is why he invited the participants to discuss about who is working together and within what framework along the shared border.

Mr. Sándor Péter replied by saying that in Hungary, the border police is integrated within the national police organisation, while in Romania the two bodies exist independently. Thus, the cooperation of the Hungarian police authorities with their Romanian counterparts is duplicated. Nonetheless, cooperation goes beyond the protocol levels, it is a professional cooperation. For example, the two parties deliver an annual joint evaluation of their activities performed in the previous year. There are everyday connections between the two parts. This cooperation is regarded as an example for others to follow.

Ms. Adelhaida Kerekes focussed on the cooperation in the educational sphere. Collaboration in Erasmus programmes and mobilities are very common between Romanian and Hungarian schools. The number of partnerships is quite large, especially meaning exchanges of experience between students and teachers. There are also guest teachers from Hungary in Romanian schools and many students coming from Hungary. Naturally, the pandemic had negative effects on these forms of mobility too, however, as most of these activities were managed in a formalized manner they could still go on. In the past there have been negative experiences regarding cross-border cooperation, for example when organizing excursions there have been problems with obtaining vehicle permits accepted also by the Hungarian authorities, but this is not the case anymore. She also mentioned that in the most recent years, some of the students went with their families to Italy or Spain, but now as the situation is better, they come back. The return of these families pushed the state to take the matter into account, therefore, the Romanian government took care of the problem of integration.

Mr. Nicolae Păun described how the Babeş-Bolyai University has practically erased the border. There are approximately 45-46 thousand students at UBB, 10 thousand are of Hungarian ethnicity, 4-5 thousand are from Hungary. The University has 2 Hungarian vice-rectors. He underlined that Hungarian students have the same rights, there is no discrimination in any regard. There is also a Hungarian-funded society of Hungarian scientists. There are 22 faculties in UBB, all of which have lasting partnerships with universities in Hungary and 17 also have a Hungarian section. These are only a few of the advantages of being a member of the EU.

Then **Mr. Gyula Ocskay** steered the discussion towards the subject of municipal, administrative cooperation.

Mr. István Szabó mentioned that in the beginning there was no willingness to cooperate on either side. The easing of border control has had a significant impact on the development of cross-border relations. He said that the findings of an previous research conducted by the police had showed that the reluctance of the Hungarian police staff had been extremely high, with 60% refusing to work with Romanian colleagues. The main reasons behind this were cultural differences and prejudices regarding the differences of work ethics. However, these preconceptions have not been proven, we hear from everyone that cooperation is well-developed and border crossings are fast.

Local self-governments, especially after the change of regime and especially after the EU accession, were a kind of engines of cooperation. Twinning relations had often times a history from the socialist era, but these partnerships have been generally designated by the communist party. After the regime change a completely new system of relationships has been created. Municipalities encouraged cultural and economic cooperation. In the framework of PHARE projects it was expected to have cross-border partnerships, however, these were not balanced due to the fact that Hungary was in an advanced position of the accession process. On one side of the border (in Romania) studies were drafted while on the other side (in Hungary) infrastructure investments were implemented. Now the relations are more balanced, the local governments supervise them and support them, but the contents are filled in by cultural associations, educational institutions, etc. These are largely based on nurturing common cultural traditions, based mostly on Hungarian-Hungarian and German-German relations.

Mr. Gyula Ocskay then asked the participants about deeper institutionalized collaboration and Romanian-Romanian relations.

Mr. Apor Kovács after introducing the gate to Europe EGTC, replied that in the 1990s cooperation began at municipal level. After the accession of Hungary and Romania, INTERREG programmes and other EU-funded programmes dynamized cooperation, they moved it to a higher level by the early 2000s. The counties (regional municipalities) play a major role in INTERREG programmes. In Hungary, the political influence of county self-governments is rather limited compared to their Romanian counterparts. At the same time this is a more stable, balanced form of government. The role of the counties in Romania is more affected by Romanian politics, which in some cases makes cooperation cyclical, affecting the permanence of cooperation. The cooperation of the municipalities is also important. The creation of the EGTC is very important in this sense. In the Hungarian-Slovak relation, EGTCs were given programme management roles for small-scale projects which is not the case in the Hungarian-Romanian context.

Cooperation in the economic sphere should be encouraged, because there are sharp borders in terms of economic development thinking. He said that civil cooperation is good, there are strong

cultural links, the development of which does not require intervention, but increasing the density of border crossings would help the interoperability. There are only 3 border crossings in the area of the EGTC, which limits civilian relations. However, this is a governmental task.

Mr. Gyula Ocskay adds that there are 4-4 counties opposite each other with 4-4 larger cities, who see each other both as partners and competitors at the same time. It is difficult to find common ground along which cooperation could take place. Interests are very divergent and they are competing for the same resources and investors.

Mr. György Kozma approached the issue from the point of view of the Romanian community living in Hungary. They can learn Romanian, after high school they also have the opportunity to study in Romania. Between 2000 and 2010, the Romanian state ensured the training of teachers in Romania. Every year, the Romanian government provides scholarship opportunities for students graduating from the Balcescu high school in Gyula. Romania also provides 2 teachers for the school of Mémkerék. Civil relations are not only formal, the two parts regularly organize common programmes and strengthen their identity. The majority of Romanians in Hungary are of Orthodox religion, and there are 14 Orthodox parishes and 1 diocese in Hungary. 11 out of 14 places are served by Romanian priests. The population can practice their religion in their mother tongue. In the early 2000s, insults of exclusion could be experienced by Romanians in Hungary, but now this is not the case anymore. There are also good diplomatic relations with the consulates.

Mr. Gyula Ocskay concluded the first focus group discussion by thanking the participants for their contribution, hoping that the Western European colleagues have received a comprehensive picture of the Romanian-Hungarian border.

2nd Focus Group: Border perception

After the lunch break, the second focus group's moderator was Mr. Mircea Maniu, Associate Professor at the faculty of European Studies of the Babeş-Bolyai University.

Mr. Mircea Maniu welcomed the participants and announced that due to health issues Mr. Ovidiu Pecican was not be able to attend and moderate the second focus group. After introducing himself, he started presenting the agenda of the discussion. While in the first focus group concrete, punctual issues were raised, the discussion about the perception of the border presupposes a cultural, social, political, geopolitical logic, logics that are more diffuse; needs a multidisciplinary background and the idea of knowing in depth several fields. He brought up two points of the first focus group discussion:

- the idea of frustration about the Schengen perspectives of Romania and the fact that the technical conditions were met in 2011. The pandemic has shown that belonging or not belonging to the Schengen zone can make a difference.
- The second triggering factor of the discussion regarded the issue of cross-border rivalry. In this regard there have been two different opinions.

Then, he presented the subjects to be discussed: civic involvement, cultural diplomacy; exogenous factors that disrupt relations: the pandemic, the war in Ukraine.

Mr. Nicolae Păun started by underlining the change of perception regarding the Romanian-Hungarian relations: "this normality we are talking about today has not always been this way. Especially during the last years of the communist regime the Hungarian minority was repressed. We must remember the moment after the revolution in Târgu Mureş when we could have plunged into a civil war. This dialogue between the minority and the majority is essential in a society, it must be approached with positive discrimination, not only with equality", he said. He also pointed out that there were many moments in Transylvania with extremist nationalist connotations. The easiest way was to resort to nationalism. He also claimed that "It is indisputable that Transylvania belongs to everyone. We are in the EU, we live in the present. This is the perception that can be seen very clearly in Cluj too."

Mr. Mircea Maniu continued by highlighting that there are about 4 million Romanians who work abroad but return each year to their home country. The vast majority of these people pass through Hungary. This determines a significant macroeconomic flow across the border.

Ms. Lucia Pantea mentioned that at the level of the citizen, things are much simpler. There have always been interactions, the historical framework has led to various approaches to this exchange between the two sides. This has determined the emergence of a cooperation at all levels and areas: administrative, cultural, educational, health. Her perception is that there is no competition, only very good collaboration between neighbours.

Mr. Marius Moş added two aspects about collaboration. Firstly, he mentioned a joint project which saw the development of a bike path that leaves Oradea and reaches Hungary, the construction of roads that connect the two sides and the establishment of regular bus rides seeing that many people work on the other side. Labour mobility no longer takes into account borders. Secondly, the relations are characterised both collaboration and competition. The latter can be illustrated with the example of the airports in Oradea and Debrecen.

Mr. Mircea Maniu brought up the subjects of identity and initiated a discussion on the investigation into the way people primarily declare themselves: as citizens of a locality, a region, or a country?

Mr. Apor Kovács replied by saying that the change of borders has led to an identity change. The dividing role of the border weakened in the 1990s and the existence of the border was seen more and more as a trade opportunity. The border also became an opportunity because of the INTERREG resources. Therefore, the cross-border status is seen as an opportunity. A survey was conducted among the partner settlements of the EGTC regarding the pandemic restrictions' effects on their activities, after the first wave of closures. Among the most popular responses was mobility and education: these were the most affected fields according to the local population. Economic problems were moderate.

Mr. Mircea Maniu offered information about the specificities of trade between Romania and Hungary, and mentioned that small cross-border trade is no longer what it used to be, it has definitely changed. He concluded with the recent surge in cross-border mobility from Romania to Hungary with the objective of purchasing fuel, due to the Hungarian fuel caps and the reduced prices. He also asked about the status of the cross-border free zone in Oradea.

Ms. Lucia Pantea replied by saying that it remained only at the level of discussions.

Mr. István Szabó replied to the previous questions. Mr. Păun's intervention put the discussion in a historical context. The issues raised so far, namely the relationship between border towns,

institutional relations, and identity issues are important, but their narrower aspects are inevitable to be discussed. It is no coincidence that the EU sees border regions as one of the least advantageous ones. The border areas of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county have to cope with all forms of disadvantages.

The 8 big cities of the border area are in strong competition with each other, and they will be as long as they feel growth potential exists. Their area of attraction expects the same from them.

For a person living in a small village on the border with Satu Mare, the possibility of cross-border mobility also means trying to step out and rehabilitate the family and personal relationships that have been broken. With the modification of the border, the settlement networks changed. Before the change of the borders, Mátészalka was an insignificant settlement strongly connected to Satu Mare, but it became a beneficiary of the border change. The former functional connections were interrupted, to this day the settlement network that existed could not be restored. Nyíregyháza became the county seat after the administrative reform, and a spectacular development took place there. The permeability of the border that exist today is insufficient to restore the previous system of connections with the settlements on the other side of the border.

Regarding the identity subject, namely the question 'how do identities relate to each other?' there is a European feeling, there is an attachment to the EU, but it must be accepted that some have a local, regional identity. All identities are connected to each other. These are mutually reinforcing and mutually enriching identities. "The Europe in which these are expected to disappear is not a Europe we should want" he said. The breakthrough in cross-border relations will be experienced if local self-governments and non-governmental organizations build not only Hungarian-Hungarian but also Romanian-Hungarian and Hungarian-Romanian relations.

Mr. Apor Kovács said that in the beginning, Hungary was remarkably more developed than Romania, but in recent years this has been reversed, According to him, the systems of the two countries are so different that it will take much time to overcome the obstacles it poses. He invited the participants to consult CESCI's work on legal accessibility. Legal and economic regulations affect everything, e.g. patient care. In many ways, they hinder our lives as border citizens. It also has an economic impact because different regulations do not allow the development.

Mr. Mircea Brie sees borders not as a dividing line, but as a meeting line where we can exchange experiences, good understanding. The goal of the EU is to create a space with diluted borders.

Mr. Ioan Horga described the perception of the University of Oradea about the border. He talked about the role of the University and their work in studying the Romanian-Hungarian border. Their perception of the border has also changed. He mentioned the Roman word '*limes*', a flexible border which was closed only when there were difficult situations. "That is the meaning of borders. That's what we want to achieve.", he said.

Borders separate states, human societies. The Romanian-Hungarian border separates communities. In the 90's we ignored the border, we didn't want to approach it. Over time, these communities began to communicate and became neighbouring communities. We are still not at the level we want. With the accession to the EU and access to INTERREG, things started to change a lot. Integrating micro-communities have appeared. The Association of Border Communes (with 11 Romanian and 9 Hungarian members) was a pioneer in our area. It was born out of a need: the need to develop water supply systems. Over time, several cross-border communities began to appear.

With Romania's entry into the EU, we have moved to another level. Oradea and Debrecen have a problem, they have no growth potential, so another solution was needed - an Eurometropolis named Debora. Funding was obtained for this project from Oradea City Hall. A questionnaire was applied to citizens living in the area, and the results were very favourable: 75% were in favour of the joint development plan on both sides. However, the existing restraints were signs of a political change and a different vision. The project was blocked. Instead, the business community reacted and implemented it under the same name.

We usually talk about symmetry or asymmetry in a relationship. At that time the relation between Oradea and Debrecen was asymmetrical, Hungary was more developed. Over time, investments began to appear in Oradea and these turned the asymmetry into a resource. He brings up the example of the BMW project in Debrecen. This will be an integrating factor, as the company will purchase the car's components from the automotive factories in Romania.

Mr. István Polgár presented his personal perspective regarding the border. In the 80's-90's he lived close to the "green border", but it was perceived to be dangerous, "you had to stay away, but it was a meeting place for people divided by the border, and a place where people could exchange goods and interactions". For him as a private person the border was a meeting place, then in the framework of a project (2008) when CBC wasn't recognized by the academic environment, the border was investigated by a big company, where the border was only about numbers and work force.

Between 2007-2013 we saw the emergence of a romantic period in terms of cross-border cooperation. There was a great opening from the part of the population, cross-border cooperation was well seen. Everyone thought the border was just what we needed to cross, but there was nothing wrong with that: the crossing point was considered as a bus stop. Between 2014-2020 things slowed down. It felt like taking a step back. Now there is disappointment regarding the stage of cooperation. Eight areas have been identified, including public safety, waste management, medical services, where developments could be done jointly, and in the end the population would feel that cooperation works. Between 2014-2020 the structure of the funding changed a lot such as the profile of the beneficiaries. Since the pandemic, the border became again uncrossable and an obstacle. It was useless to move or commute. The funding programme have changed very fast. He said he was disappointed about where CBC currently was, because the decision-maker forgot the target group: population living at the border. We're not only talking about RO-HU but also about EU citizens.

Mr. Mircea Brie mentioned an example of public policies in the field of education. There is a project under way which aims to offer a joint curriculum to students in the cross-border area. This would bring the two sides closer.

Ms. Katarzyna Stoklosa had a question to Mr. István Polgár. The analogy of the border being a bus stop reminds her of her own perception of the border from her childhood, when her school was one step away from the border and she couldn't understand its meaning. She asked about the way in which political events influence the direct perception of the border.

Mr. István Polgár replied by saying that we currently witness a change because of the Ukrainian war. Since February this border section is heavily affected by the arrival of refugees. Before the crisis the border was closed, institutionally there have been only weak links in terms of cooperation. But since the crisis began an amazing level of mobilization took place in this border area. It represented what a real European citizen can show to non-Europeans in terms of mutual assistance. He also mentioned that cross-border cooperation with Ukraine is hindered by the high level of scepticism

from the part of Ukrainians. Basically, cross-border cooperation is not possible neither institutionally nor from a point of view of people-to-people relations and this situation will prevail after the war ends, too.

Anthony Soares pointed out that the national differences are important to be taken into account, similarly to the Spanish-Portuguese case. He also said that the people and businesses are usually a couple of years ahead compared to politics in terms of cross-border cooperation which makes their monitoring very important.

Mr. Mircea Maniu brought the discussions to an end and invited for closing remarks.

Closing remarks

Ms. Birte Wassenberg shared a short conclusive analysis of the event. She stated that it was clear that there were differences between border regions. The communist past, the security issues, cross-border criminality, Romania's accession to Schengen were the main special focus points of the discussions. However, there are also similarities with other border regions, such as the existence of certain frustrations. Even today, after 40 years of cross-border cooperation there are frustrations in the French-German border region too.

Mr. Nicolae Păun expressed his thanks to all the participants for their meaningful interventions, to all the partners for bringing such a prestigious event to Cluj-Napoca and starting a dialogue on such important matters between the two communities, he also thanked the organisers for their help.

Pictures about the event





