



Journal of Geography, Politics and Society

2016, 6(2), 7–12

DOI 10.4467/24512249JG.16.008.5453

BORDERS AS BARRIERS (BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF EUROPEAN POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES)

Wioletta Szymańska

Institute of Geography and Regional Studies, Pomeranian University in Słupsk, Partyzantów 27, 76-200 Słupsk, Poland,
e-mail: szymanskaw@apsl.edu.pl

Citation

Szymańska W., 2016, Borders as barriers (based on example of European post-Communist countries), *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society*, 6(2), 7–12.

Abstract

Functions of political borders as a spatial barriers have been analysed in the paper. A direct and an indirect (through the border region) impact of the borders has been distinguished. It was found that intra-EU borders and one between Belarus and Russia play the least direct role as a spatial barrier. By contrast, the worst situation is on the borders of Ukraine with Transnistria, occupied Crimea and the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic. When it comes to the borderland areas, the worst situation is in the border regions of Ukraine with Russia.

Key words

border, barrier, post-Communist countries, Central Europe, Eastern Europe.

1. Introduction

The objective of the study is to analyse the function of borders in contemporary European post-Communist countries, as direct and indirect barriers in traffic and cooperation between inhabiting them populations.

The shaping of the current borders in the analysed area took place mainly in two periods. The first one occurred immediately after the end of World War II, and its largest beneficiary turned out to be the (former) Soviet Union, when, among others, the Finnish-Soviet border was moved by handing over three so far Finnish regions: Karjala, Petsamo, Saala to the USSR; the borders of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were taken down because of the incorporation

of those states by the Soviet Union; a new border was established in East Prussia (earlier: Germany) due to splitting the land between the USSR and Poland (Wendt, 2004); the Soviet-Polish border was significantly moved due to taking over large areas of the former Second Polish Republic by the USSR¹; similarly, the Czechoslovak-Soviet border was moved due to the incorporation of Subcarpathian Ruthenia into the USSR, and the border with Romania due to the incorporation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina into the USSR. The second period in changes of the borders began after the fall of the system of socialist states as a result of the so-called "Revolutions of 1989"². Its characteristic feature is the emergence of

¹ Polish: Kresy Wschodnie, in English: Eastern Borderlands.

² The period is sometimes called "the Autumn of Nations".

a number of new states as a result of the dissolution of the existing federal countries: Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the USSR. Currently, there is a new quality process which does not involve changes to the course of the borders as much as changes in their significance. This is a consequence of the former post-Communist states joining the European Union and the Schengen Area.

During the period of Communism, populations of those countries were subject to increased control, whose one element was great difficulties in crossing the state borders. The Iron Curtain, separating countries belonging to the Warsaw Pact from the remaining ones in Europe is a symbol of this period. Changes of a political (Birch, 2003; Michalski, 2010b; Rose, 2009; Szul, 2001; Wendt, 2002, 2004; Wendt, Ilię, 2001), social (Illner, 1996; Michalski, 2010a, 2015; Radchenko et al., 2014; Sztompka, 1996, 2004, 2008; Wegner, 2000), economic (Bał, 2006; Grykień, 2004; Stryjakiewicz, 1999; Vančura, 2006; Wendt, Ilię, 2011), etc. character, which took place in these countries after 1989 also resulted in changing the role and the significance of borders.

2. Direct and indirect functions of a border as a barrier

State borders may directly and indirectly influence the displacement of populations and contacts between communities inhabiting both sides. A direct impact is that any political border serves as a spatial barrier (Maik, Parysek, 1978), namely it is an obstacle for links, traffic and interactions in the physical space (Rykiel, 1991). J. Łoboda (1983) understands the following as a barrier effect:

- resistance, sometimes identified with psychological, economic, cultural, etc. barriers;
- directional deviation resulting from the diversity of space, which means that the innovation stream in different directions takes place with different speed;
- barriers, both natural (e.g., mountains, swamps, seas) and artificial (e.g. political, ethnic, linguistic).

J. Bański (2010) identified many possible criteria of the division of boundaries. This study is based on the classification proposed by A. Moraczewska³ (2008), based on the criterion of international relations. Accordingly, three main functions of borders have been distinguished:

- disintegrative (its essence is to close the border to contacts);
- fragmentative (characterised by varying degrees of openness, depending on the agent penetrating it);
- integrative (characterised by a high degree of openness and the intensity of contacts).

On the other hand, the indirect impact of borders on the displacement of the population takes place due to the specifics of the borderland areas. Firstly, their development is clearly affected by the border through the functions it plays (cf. Nowińska, 1997). Secondly, due to their peripheral location, these regions are generally considered to be less developed, thereby requiring activation. According to S. Ciok (1994, 2010), a delay in the development of these areas may be due to two reasons: (1) for a long time this area has been poorly managed or not managed at all, or (2) a delay results from changes in the course of the borders⁴.

3. The situation in post-Communist countries

Looking at the functioning of borders in the analysed region (cf. Cichocki, 2004; Dołzbłasz, Raczyk 2015; Ilię et al., 2011b; Komornicki, 2001, 2007, 2008; Miszczuk, 2010; Sadowski, 2004; Wendt, 2004; Więckowski, 2001) and referring to the division proposed by A. Moraczewska (2008), we can conclude that in the analysed area borders mainly play the second and the third function, less often the first one⁵ (Fig. 1):

1. In every sense of the word, the integrative function in this area is played by borders between countries of the Schengen Area and partly the EU borders between Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria⁶,

⁴ In the latter case, we deal with an area originally developed economically, and only designating a border in it entails adverse effects which often cause stagnation or even regression in regional development.

⁵ In the proposed division a fragment of the border between Ukraine and Russia (and more specifically, between the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic and the Russian Federation) has been omitted due to the lack of reliable data that would allow including this fragment of the border in one of the three functions listed here (although based on fragmentary data one can venture a statement that this border plays a fragmentative function, but with significant elements of the disintegrative function).

⁶ Partly, because these countries do not belong to the Schengen Area, hence intra-EU border controls are in force between them, although they are not as strict as, for example, on the external borders of the EU.

³ Such a division partly refers to that proposed by R. Domański (1970) into four main types of barriers.

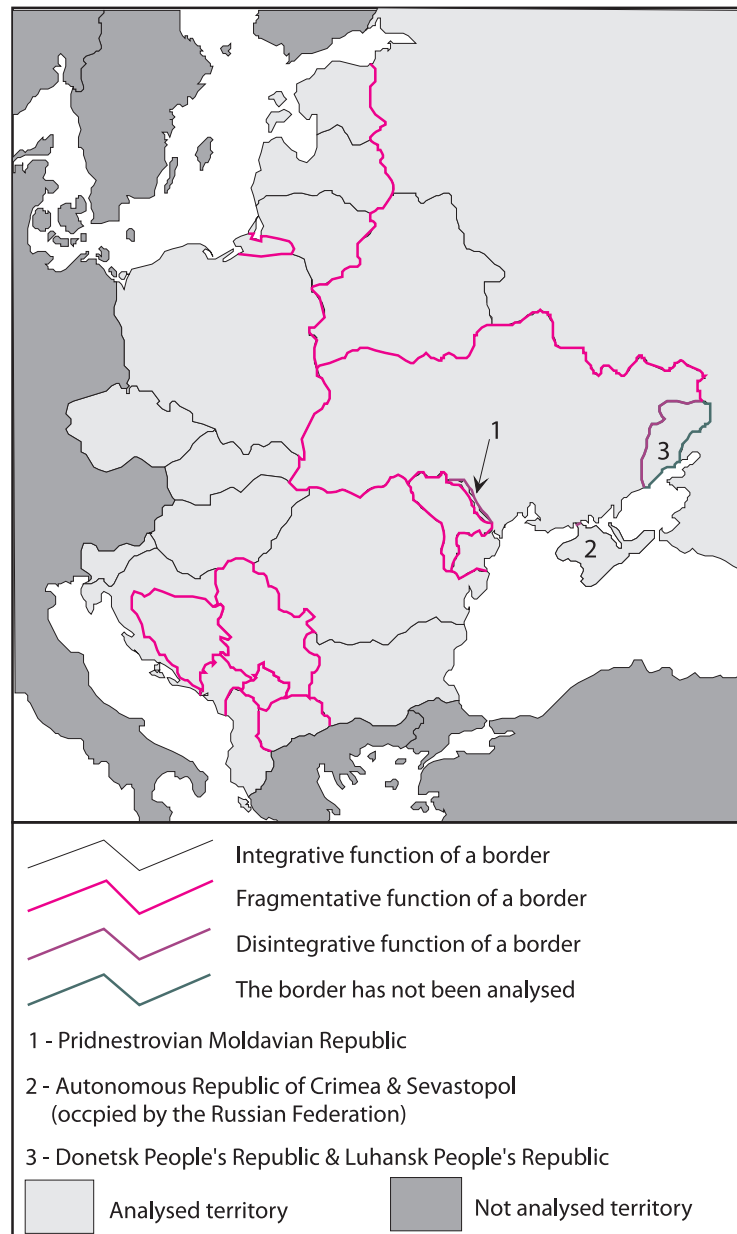


Fig. 1. General division of functions of borders in European post-Communist countries, state at the beginning of 2016
Source: own study, based on A. Moraczewska (2008).

as well as the border between Belarus and Russia⁷.

2. The fragmentative function is played by most of the borders between the countries not belonging to the European Union and by the external borders of the European Union.
3. A border plays a disintegrative function relatively seldom. In the analysed area this is the front line between Ukraine and the so-called Luhansk People's Republic and the Donetsk People's Republic, and partly the border between Ukraine and

Transnistria and between Ukraine and Crimea occupied by Russia⁸.

Referring to the classification of backwardness in the development of the borderland areas proposed by S. Ciok (1994, 2010), in the analysed area there are regions which for a long time both have been poorly managed or not managed at all, e.g. the borderland area between Czechoslovakia and Hungary and Austria, and also with borderland areas whose backwardness results from changes in the course of the

⁷ Due to the fact that these countries make the Union State of Russia and Belarus.

⁸ Due to a stable situation, the border between Transnistria and Moldova has been included among those playing a fragmentative role, which does not mean that a conflict can reignite there at any time, and thus this border will serve as a disintegrative barrier.

borders, as is for example the situation in the former East Prussia after the end of World War II (cf. Wendt, 1999).

After the negative impact of a border on the frontier region ceases, usually its development takes place. A model of such a development was presented by M. Miszczuk (2013). However, even if the border stops having damaging effects on the borderland region, making up for the delays requires time and financial outlays. Still one can clearly see that making up for this backwardness is much more efficient on the internal borders of the European Union than on its external borders or on borders between countries not belonging to the EU (cf. Ilieş et al., 2009, 2011a; Komornicki, Miszczuk, 2010; Vlad, Ilieş, 2014; Wendt, 2007; Węclawowicz et al., 2006).

If during the period of Communism borders clearly divided populations inhabiting both its sides, today Z. Chojnicki's (1998) observation that a border not only separates the two neighbouring areas but it also connects them is becoming increasingly more valid on most borders. A release of possibilities of their activities which happened after the fall of communism (cf. Bafoil, 1999) is of major importance in playing not only a function of a barrier but also of a link between the communities living on both sides of a „permeable” border. Its institutional dimension manifests itself the creation and functioning of euroregions.

Yet, it should not be forgotten that the fall of communism and the „opening” of borders also entails risks, such as: an increase in crime, emergence of sex tourism and smuggling on a previously unknown scale, a decrease in epidemiological safety (cf. Dziecięca..., 2011; Michalski, 1999, 2003, 2008; Perkowska, 2010, 2013).

Looking at the current (the beginning of 2016) situation in European post-Communist countries, it seems that the worst situation now is on most external borders of Russia and the border areas of its neighbouring countries (cf. Gogsadze, 2011; Gurzu, 2015; Saldžiūnas, 2016; Горбулін et al. 2015) as well as in Transnistria (Całus et al., 2014; Rodkiewicz (ed.), 2011). This is largely a derivative of the neo-imperialist policy pursued by that country.

4. Summary

The analysed group of countries is diverse in many ways, also in terms of the barrier effect on their borders. Looking at the direct impact of a border as a barrier, the best situation occurs on intra-EU borders, although in this respect a little worse situation is on EU borders between Bulgaria, Croatia and

Romania because these countries do not belong to the Schengen Area. Theoretically, the barrier function is not played by the border between Belarus and Russia either. On the opposite side, there are parts of the borders between Ukraine and regions directly or indirectly linked with Moscow, i.e. the borders with the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic, the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic and occupied Crimea (the Autonomous Republic of Crimea plus Sevastopol). On the other hand, looking at the indirect impact of a border as a barrier, one can see its most negative impact on the entire area of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic, the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic and the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts still remaining in Ukraine. However, a negative impact of a border as a barrier can also be noted in the remaining borders of Ukraine with Russia (including Crimea).

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