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Borders in Central Europe After the Schengen Agreement

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The waves of the migration crisis struck Europe around 2015 and opened many questions about the Schengen area, its control and its very functioning. *Borders in Central Europe After the Schengen Agreement* states in its introduction that one of its goals is to connect with this period when the Schengen rules gained great importance. Control at the external borders of Schengen did not work as expected, and countries like Greece and Italy were faced with a huge influx of refugees. The entire Schengen system was very strongly criticised by some parties. Therefore the publication also addresses the question of whether the Schengen is a functioning system that really yields benefits or if it's just wishful thinking on the part of some European politicians.

The publication has three main editors: Assistant Professor Tomáš Havlíček from the Faculty of Science at Charles University, Associate Professor Milan Jeřábek from the Department of Geography at Masaryk University, and Associate Professor Jaroslav Dokoupil from the Faculty of Economics at the University of West Bohemia. Additionally, many other researchers contributed to all parts of the book.

Representing Czech academia, the following authors contributed. Petr Dostál, professor of regional and political geography at the Department of Social

Geography and Regional Development at Charles University. Slovak Marian Halás, associate professor at the Faculty of Political Science at Palacký University Olomouc, wrote a chapter on the Slovak borderlands. Josef Miškovský, consultant in the field of local and regional development and member of the Czech Geographic Society, wrote the ninth chapter about the eastern borderland of the Baltic States. The eleventh chapter is the work of three authors: Associate Professor Alena Matušková, Assistant Professor Jiří Preis and Assistant Professor Magdalena Rousová, all of whom are with the Department of Geography at the University of West Bohemia in Plzeň. František Zich is professor of General Sociology and the Sociology of Communication at the University of Finance and Administration, Prague.

Contributing to the chapter on Silesian Identity is Tadeusz Siwek, professor in the Department of Social Geography and Regional Development at the University of Ostrava. Contributing to the twelfth chapter is Veronika Klečková, PhD student in Regional and Political Geography at Charles University.

Leading some chapters are academics from foreign departments, such as Martín Guillermo Ramírez, general secretary at the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) in Berlin and who wrote chapter six, which deals with the role of the AEBR. The seventh chapter, which is on Switzerland, was written by Walter Leimgruber, professor emeritus at the Institute of Geography at the University of Freiburg, Switzerland.

As for the theoretical framework, it is mainly based on the study of borderlands, which has gained increasing interest in recent years. The publication defines terms such as *borders* and *border areas* very consistently. The main goal of this project was the enrichment and deepening of the theoretical framework for the purposes of studying borderlands, which was to be achieved by analysing the entry of the Czech Republic into the European Union and joining the Schengen area, and the subsequent evaluation of the impacts of this decision, both on the objective and subjective levels. At the theoretical level, the main goals are to identify the administrative aspects of the regions and to capture the internal structure of border regions. While at the application level, the research aims to characterise the effects of cross-border cooperation and specify similarities and differences in the development of the Czech border region at the regional, Euro-regional and microregional levels.

A very interesting method in this research is data collection based on the participation of respondents in collaborations with students. The survey was carried out in 2010 between the months of May and October with the help of the students, who collected information directly in the field. A total of 3,283 respondents were obtained. This was 721 respondents from the Euroregion Elbe/Labe (CZ/Germany—Saxony), 860 from Šumava/Bayerischer Wald—Unterer

Inn/Mühlviertel (CZ/Germany—Bavaria), 638 from Silva Nortica (CZ/Austria), 524 from Bíl/Biele Karpaty (CZ/Slovakia) and 540 from the Euroregion Pradd/Pradziad (CZ/Poland).

Some chapters largely provide us with the historical context of how the structure of the Schengen Agreement developed between European countries, which was also complemented by public opinion data and statistics on free cross-border movement and external border controls. Several conclusions are then offered, the main one of which is that nine countries have a rather negative perception of free movement, which is related to the already-mentioned free migration in Europe.

In chapter eleven, attention is especially paid to the Czech territory and how after 2004 the standard of living changed for the 3,300 respondents and whether they consider this change to be beneficial. The interesting results are, for example, that in the Czech-Polish region, more than 50% on the Polish side feel a change for the better. On the other hand, in the largest part (i.e. the German Euroregion Elbe/Labe), 83% of the respondents did not feel any change. In general, however, it can be concluded from the research that the proportion of respondents who consider it a change for the better is greater than those who perceive the changes negatively.

In their conclusions, each chapter in this publication tries to answer one of the questions stated in its introduction and whether the Schengen area is a real phenomenon affecting the lives of citizens living in border areas. Some chapters answer this question very clearly – according to the authors, entry into Schengen has a psychological effect in terms of the free movement of people, rather than an economic benefit connected primarily with the standard of living. These specific conclusions are immediately followed by chapters seven to twelve, which discuss a more specific concept of cooperation between border countries. The successful development of cross-border cooperation then depends on external and internal framework conditions. According to the survey, residents of the area are mostly well informed about these collaborations, but only half of them know the term Euroregion and what it entails. In general, the interviewees consider the possibility of new contacts and opportunities for socioeconomic development to be very beneficial.

The publication is very well and clearly prepared and certainly beneficial not only for the academic community, but also for beginner students of European studies or related fields, as well as for the public. As the greatest contribution, I would highlight one of the methods. Namely, this was the obtainment of knowledge directly from citizens living in these areas, which is sometimes problematic on a larger scale. Here, however, it showed us how Schengen is really perceived by these residents (either positively or negatively) and how this study can help

further discussions regarding the functioning of the Schengen area in the future. As a result, the publication fulfilled one of its main goals and enriched the study of borderlands not only by deepening the theoretical framework, but also methodologically. The importance of personal opinions of specific individuals living in the researched areas has proven to be very beneficial and rewarding for these types of research works in the future.