

Sociopolitical Stability in the Conditions of the Ukrainian-EU Border: Identification of Threats and Challenges

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Abstract

The project proposes a conceptual approach to a comprehensive study of sociopolitical stability in the border regions of EU and Ukraine (on the example of Transcarpathia) through the prism of the influence of ethnopolitical, geopolitical, sociocultural and other factors. Transcarpathian region borders four EU countries. This factor is unique to other border western regions of Ukraine. The project sets the task – to identify risks and challenges to sociopolitical stability in the conditions of the Ukrainian–EU border. Border conflicts are preconditioned by several factors that can be used to destabilize the situation in the border regions. These factors encourage comprehension of the pros and cons of Transcarpathian model of relations with the EU countries, and, therefore, description of ethnopolitical, social, migration and electoral processes in the border areas, the specifics of their implementation in modern geopolitical circumstances.

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Introduction

At current rate, the problem of border and frontier zones occupies the first place in the social and political development of European countries. The question of transborder security and social stability in frontier zones is aggravated due to such processes as illegal migration to EU countries, Covid-19 pandemic spread, international terrorism, Russia's hostile acts. The history and modern times prove that conflict potential of frontier zones is set foremost in the context of interstate policy implementation. Border conflicts are preconditioned by several factors that can be used to destabilize the situation in the border regions. These include ethnic, social, economic and other factors.

Transcarpathian region presents a particular case for investigation of social processes at the frontier zones between Ukraine and EU countries:

- Transcarpathian region borders four EU countries. This factor is unique to other border western regions of Ukraine. Transcarpathian region belongs to 4 European transborder regions: Ukrainian and Slovakian, Ukrainian and Hungarian, Ukrainian and Romanian, Ukrainian and Polish. It creates pre-conditions and potential opportunities for diverse transborder cooperation.
- The transit transport and energy corridors run through the western part of Transcarpathian region actualizing the development of transport and logistics transborder infrastructure system.
- By the aid of important geographical and geopolitical location, Transcarpathian region might be considered as a significant part of security architecture in Central European region.
- The favourable geopolitical location of the region determines significant flows of both legal and illegal migration to the EU countries.
- Transcarpathia is a polyethnic region, where, in particular, citizens of different nationalities live compactly.

These factors encourage comprehension of the pros and cons of Transcarpathian model of relations with the EU countries, and, therefore, description of ethnopolitical, social and electoral processes in the border areas, the specifics of their implementation in modern geopolitical circumstances. Thus, according to the research pattern, Transcarpathia acts as a "special case" in the research, studied by the method of specific situations, aimed at a deep, critical and comprehensive analysis of the social phenomenon on the example of a separate empirical object.

The research approach to sociopolitical stability analysis

Multilevel methodology has been applied to the problem research of comprising theoretical and empirical approaches to studying social and political stability and frontier-zone. Modern science refers to a number of theoretical approaches that allow explaining the reasons and consequences of social and political stability and uncertainty (the theory of transition society, the theory of social and political differentiations, theory of “risk society”).

Sociopolitical stability is meant as a dynamic state of society that promotes balanced interests of social groups and political powers, functioning of conflict situations settlement frameworks in the society, legitimacy of state structures, coordination between political and social spheres in general.

In terms of theory it is necessary to single out the levels of providing social and political stability (global, regional, state, local) at which different but interconnected facilitating mechanisms function. Political stability is an integral condition and mechanism of providing national safety and security in the country. Between social and political stability and countries’ safety there is a tight dialectic contact and the actualization of mechanisms of such contact is the key to successful solution of present conflicts in the society.

Of fundamental importance for the evaluation of social and political stability at regional and state levels are rated-monitoring data. In this context it should be mentioned the indexes of “Worldwide Governance Indicators”¹, “Failed States Index”², “Security threats index”³. Constant analysis of data changes and countries’ rating allow to conduct a research in a comparative context. Due to quantitative ratings one can analyze not only the current situation with social and political stability in the country but also to track its dynamics by key parameters.

In the scope of researching the problems concerning social and political stability in terms of frontier zones, firstly one should take into account the concept of frontier zones in dichotomy “center” and “periphery”. Hierarchic differentiation of the modern world to

¹ “Worldwide Governance Indicators.” Available online: <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/> (accessed on November 12, 2021).

² Failed States Index – Fragile States Index. Available online: <https://fragilestatesindex.org/> (accessed on November 12, 2021).

³ Security threats index. Available online: <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/compare-countries/> (accessed on November 12, 2020).

core, semi periphery and periphery is shown in I. Wallerstein's theory⁴. Shifting the periphery plot to frontier zone is the essence of frontier zones of East and Central Europe paradigm by T. Zarytskyi⁵.

The main factor of frontier region that differentiates it from other territorial units is the presence of border that performs the barrier and contact function simultaneously. In modern politic and science discourses, the sense of the notion "border" has shifted from parting line to a factor of contact and functional space where different social communities overlap⁶. Analysis of relations and problems that arise in contact frontier zones of two or several countries determined the differentiation of notions "transborder zone" and "frontier zone". "Frontier zone" includes space near administrative and political borders within a country, while "transborder zone" is the territories at both sides of a state border featuring certain characteristics. Effectiveness of transborder interaction increases the level of frontier regions' development under the conditions of harmonious and safe relations. The development of transborder regions is important for the territorial safety of the country⁷. The existence of potential threats for social and political stability in frontier zones (Ukraine – EU) and opportunities for their analysis stipulated the work out of a conceptual approach.

The research is based on a suggestion that the frontier region (Transcarpathian region in this case) accumulates the destabilized potential – accordingly the analysis of influence factors and constant monitoring of social and political stability in the region is thought to be an integral part of national security provision in the light of preventing or overcoming threats in the early stage of their occurrence. Moreover, the conflict potential might be used in terms of "hybrid war".

It is crucial to identify and to analyze the potential factors of social and political instability in the frontier zone: ethnopolitical, geopolitical, sociocultural, social and economic, migration, etc. Potential threats and conflict situations might lead to social conflicts, political opposition, massive protests, border violation, separatism and other destabilizing processes.

⁴ Wallerstein I., *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.

⁵ Zarycki T., "The Paradigm of Borderland and Center-Peripher Approaches" [Парадигма прикордоння і центр-периферійні підходи], *Modern Ukraine*, 2011, No 18, pp. 79–99.

⁶ Ratti R., "Borders and Regions in a Changing Europe – a Theoretical Framework," *Regional Contact*, 1997, No. 12, pp. 32–40.

⁷ Newman D., Paasi A., "Fences and neighbours in the postmodern world: Boundary narratives in political geography", *Progress in Human Geography*, 1998, No. 22(2), pp. 186–207.

The structure of the research approach to sociopolitical stability analysis in terms of frontier zones comprises of 3 components:

- Empirical constituent of the research provides the choice of empirical basis for factors' analysis (statistic data, figures of social and political stability of potential treats).
- Analytical constituent foresees the application of strategic analysis to research the inner and outer environment of border area defining the social and political stability threats (SWOT analysis).
- On the findings of analysis the prediction-oriented constituent is formed regarding the strategic aims of border development.

Analysis of the factors

Social and political stability and security in the frontier zones are determined by positive or negative influence of certain factors, it can activate the contacts in transborder area or make them slow by contrast. Defining these influence factors and on time indulgence of their negative effect is a significant and necessary condition to anticipate and decide in the sphere of region's safety and security in general.

Let us consider closely the influence of the given factors on stability and security of frontier region (illustrated by Transcarpathian region).

Historical and cultural factor

The modern state of borders in Carpathian region is a result of complex historical evolution. Country's belonging and region's administrative borders have been reclassified until recently. During the 20th century Transcarpathia belonged to Austria-Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, USSR and in 1939 there were even attempts to create an independent country – Carpathian Ukraine. Historical evolution of the region has been accompanied by complex events that have a disputable mark and create risks for the political forces to use historical memory destructively as a mean to provoke conflicts and revenge-seeking ideas spread.

Long-term stay of Transcarpathia at the cross-roads of different cultures, belonging to other countries, being apart from its ethnographic lands stipulated the formation of a specific regional identity. This regional identity absorbed the specific mentality which was formed in terms of multiethnicity, interfaith and socio-cultural influence of “border cultures”. The existence of communities with expressible regional identity is not a basis for social disability or country's territorial integrity threat. Such threat can become a reality

when foreign policy forces and regional power brokers tend to support separatist sentiments.

Ethnopolitical factor

Frontier zones are considered to be transnational spaces inhabited by different ethnic communities. National communities of Carpathian region being separated by five borders of different countries maintain formal and informal transborder contacts. Common historical past of the neighboring countries determined the mosaic national population of Transcarpathia. According to the last all-Ukrainian population census performed in 2001 more than one hundred nationalities and ethnic groups reside on the territory of the region. Figures show that the majority of region's population are Ukrainian (exceeding 80%), 12,1 % are Hungarian, 2,6% – Romanian and 2,5% – Russian. The most listed nationalities in Transcarpathian region according to the All-Ukrainian population census are presented in the table 1.

Table 1. The most listed nationalities in Transcarpathian region according to the All-Ukrainian population census in 2001

Nationalities	Total (thousand persons)	2001 (%)	1989 (%)
Transcarpathian region	1254,6	100,0	100,0
Ukrainians	1010,1	80,5	78,4
Hungarians	151,5	12,1	12,5
Romanians	32,1	2,6	2,4
Russians	31,0	2,5	4,0
Gipsies	14,0	1,1	1,0
Slovaks	5,6	0,5	0,6
Germans	3,5	0,3	0,3

Source ⁸

For the last years in a row ethnic structure of Transcarpathian population has undergone several changes due to the decrease of a part of ethnic minorities as a result of assimilation and emigration. Paying attention at the inconsequent quantity of residents belonging to ethnic minorities, the worries about separatism in the region tend to be exaggerated.

⁸About number and composition population of Ukraine by data All-Ukrainian population census'2001 data. Available online: <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/> (accessed on November 22, 2021).

Along with that, the national question is frequently used speculatively in the political context. In a point of fact, the “Rusyn question” is considered to be politicized. Ukraine officially labels Rusyns to be a part of its ethnos. In accordance with the census data in 2001 about 10 thousand Transcarpathian residents (0,8%) called themselves Rusyns. A number of countries (particularly Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Poland) where Rusyns reside acknowledged them as a separate ethnic minority as well.

The Rusyn question plays a special role in Slovakia’s regional policy and its relationships with Ukraine. It’s a sensitive topic and despite different views from both countries it hasn’t affected Ukrainian and Slovakian relationships. Moreover, the relationships between Slovaks and Rusyns or Ukrainians on the territory of Slovakia aren’t regarded as conflicting. Thus, the problem of identity and development of this particular minority is thought to be debatable. Currently, Rusyns do not affect the political life of the region but the multiple character of their ethnic identification is used speculatively in the political perspective.

According to the census data performed in 2001, 151 thousand ethnic Hungarians resided on the territory of Transcarpathian region. Hungarians mostly reside in frontier zones – Berehove, Vynogradiv, Uzhhorod regions. During the last years thousands of Hungarians emigrated to more developed countries of EU, the USA, the UK so this figure might be much lower (about 125 thousand)⁹. Hungary leads a purposeful support of Hungarians abroad (grants, loans for businesses, etc.). Various support is provided to the local population in Transcarpathia to hold back Hungarians’ loss from “eternal territory of their ancestors”. From 2018 a post of an authorized minister responsible for the international cooperation with Transcarpathian region has been introduced in Hungary. Criticism from the Hungarian government has arisen because of the new Law of Ukraine “About education” that was issued in 2017 especially its part about teaching language and it all resulted in worsening of Ukrainian and Hungarian interstate relations.

Generally, Transcarpathia has the conditions for ethnic, cultural and language uniqueness of minorities that allow them to cohabit within the region. Intensive transborder cooperation is a guarantor of safety and unity of minorities separated by the border.

⁹ Kubina V., “Hungarian electoral district in Transcarpathia: main dangers” [Угорський виборчий округ на Закарпатті: головні небезпеки]. 21.05.2019. Available online: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-elections/2704913-ugorskij-viborcij-okrug-na-zakarpatti-golovni-nebezpeki.html> (accessed on November 22, 2021).

One of the unsolved problems concerning transborder safety of Ukraine is the problem of dual citizenship. A considerable part of Transcarpathian population, except Ukrainians, have the passports of neighboring countries – firstly Romania and Hungary. According to the current Ukrainian legislation it means that they lose the Ukrainian citizenship. For explanation of various information resources, the abovementioned countries pursue a systematic policy of issuing passports to citizens of Ukraine without taking any steps to extract Ukrainian passports.

For instance, starting from 2011 Hungary simplified the procedure of receiving its citizenship that gives the opportunities for ethnic Hungarians and their ancestors in different countries to get the citizenship by the so-called “right of blood”. According to the Prime Minister of Hungary V. Orban the simplified procedure of receiving the citizenship allowed the country to increase the population growth up to 160 thousand people and to implement one of the main national strategies¹⁰. Despite the protest of Ukrainian government, Hungary has already issued about 100 thousand passports.

Neighboring Romania has also essentially simplified the rules of obtaining the Romanian citizenship what is beneficial for Transcarpathian and Chernivtsi regions. Due to the official data, 3,5 thousand Ukrainians became the citizens of Romania while experts suggest to have Romanian passports for almost 50 thousand Ukrainians¹¹.

As a result of the active foreign policy of these neighboring states aimed at supporting their foreign compatriots, the problem of dual citizenship has become widely known in recent years. Considering a significant gap in social and economic levels of development between Ukraine and EU countries, serious risks of brain drain and loss of labor potential occur. The frontier zone is at highest risk. The abovementioned facts provoke latent demographic crisis and risks for the state bodies to work. Such a situation breeds the so-called “postponed crisis” where hypothetically in case of further Ukraine’s state security easing, the neighboring countries will have the opportunity to attract the annexation mechanism of certain regions through citizens representing a numerous army of multiple nationalities. The issue regarding dual citizenship requires legal regulation from Ukraine as well as

¹⁰ Hanych M., “Ukraine–Hungary: The price of dual citizenship” [Україна–Угорщина: Ціна подвійного громадянства]. 28.01.2012. Available online: <https://zakarpattya.net.ua/News/92285-Ukraina-Uhorshchyna-TSina-podviinoho-hromadianstva> (accessed on November 22, 2021).

¹¹ Melnychuk L., “Cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Romania,” [Транскордонне співробітництво України та Румунії] in *The format of development of relations between Ukraine and Central Europe in the context of the impact of hybrid warfare, electoral processes and the theme of ensuring the rights of national minorities: papers of the II Scientific Conference*, Uzhhorod, 2019, p.146.

creation of the possibilities to preserve human assets using the opportunities of transborder cooperation in the region.

In spite of the complex historical heritage, the current misunderstandings and problems in the ethnic and national spheres in Ukrainian and Romanian, Ukrainian and Hungarian relationships have become pragmatic and beneficial.

Another distinctive feature of regional political process in the context of frontier zone is the existence of ethnic parties.

The most successful minority in the aspect of political representativeness and group interests lobbying at the regional level is considered to Hungarians from Ukraine. On the basis of the Cultural Alliance of Hungarians in Sub-Carpathia (KMKSZ) a political party „KMKS” Party of Hungarians of Ukraine functions. The Democratic party of Hungarians in Ukraine (UMDP) is decisive as it relies on the activity of Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Ukraine (UMDSZ).

In the context of elections Hungarian mandarins have tried to influence the aim of increasing the Hungarian minority representatives in the regional self-government bodies and in Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Hungary provides a multi-level support to the activity of Hungarian public organizations and political parties in Transcarpathia. In the context of local elections in 2015 and Parliament elections in 2019 in assistance of Hungarian politicians memoranda on cooperation between the competing structures: the Cultural Alliance of Hungarians in Sub-Carpathia (KMKSZ) and Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Ukraine (UMDSZ) have been set. In course of the last Parliament elections in 2019 Hungarian authorities took part in pre-election company of the closest to Budapest Transcarpathian candidates.

One should notice the political attempts towards creating in Transcarpathia Prytysiansk electoral district that has to be a democratic tool for the volition of Hungarians in Transcarpathia. It is about defining a separate electoral district on the territory of several parts of Transcarpathia where Hungarians reside densely, aimed at electing their representative by minorities to Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. As Ukrainian experts put in, initiatives of pro-Hungarian organizations and certain political authorities concerning the creation of Hungarian electoral district jeopardize more the Ukraine’s national security than benefit the Hungarians in Transcarpathia¹².

¹² Kubina V., “Hungarian electoral district in Transcarpathia: main dangers” [Угорський виборчий округ на Закарпатті: головні небезпеки]. 21.05.2019. Available online: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric->

Electoral process and political parties' activity in frontier areas often have regional character which is determined by polyethnic and peripheral nature of frontier region. Under the conditions of non-effective state regional policy, often arise regional parties that reflect the social and political differentiation at the line "center – periphery" and also the conflict of interest between the central government and regional power brokers. The most successful regional parties in Transcarpathia are "Iedynyi Tsentr" and "Ridne Zakarpattia". For instance, during last local elections in 2020 the party "Ridne Zakarpattia" achieved the highest score at the regional level although appearing only several months before the elections.

So, border areas are vulnerable to outer influence factors in the context of electoral companies. Neighboring countries try to manipulate the election process in an effort to increase the political representativeness of minorities.

Geopolitical factor

In the scope of modern international realia, the geopolitical factor plays a major role in Carpathian region. Neo-imperialist and invasive policy of Russia threatens not only the regional but also global security system. Russia's geopolitical revenge attempts created a brand-new situation in the central Europe. Topical are considered to be the ideas of searching effective safety and security from Russian aggression.

The changes in the international relation system, the usage of hybrid impact tools lead to the necessity to review the role of international organizations and security establishments particularly in terms of their efficiency and productivity ensuring national security for the member-countries and assuring the integrity and inviolability of borders.

In the new terms, a special place is dedicated to such regional foundations as Visegrad Group that can function as a discussion platform for debates, especially in security issues. In the context of searching optimal cooperation ways in the Central Europe new opportunities for Ukraine arise. Carpathian region occupies a special place in the geopolitical field considering its strategic geographical location, complex history of development and significant transport and energetic connection.

Most of all, Russia is constantly and deeply interested in Transcarpathia and is boosting the "Rusyn question". At the very least, the Kremlin hopes to produce new divisions in Ukraine in order to further weaken and destabilize the country, this time – on its Western flank. The

[elections/2704913-ugorskij-viborcij-okrug-na-zakarpatti-golovni-nebezpeki.html](https://www.sfpa.sk/elections/2704913-ugorskij-viborcij-okrug-na-zakarpatti-golovni-nebezpeki.html) (accessed on November 22, 2021).

ambiguous nature of Rusyn ethnic identification has been exploited by Russia in its “hybrid war” against Ukraine¹³.

“Rusyn card” became a tool in geopolitical projects not only for Russia but for the other countries that promote the creation of ethnic and social network of Rusyn organizations in the world. As S. Koch puts it, Transcarpathian region is included into the scope of interests of main geopolitical players who consider the Rusyn question as a convenient mean to maintain the long-term “humanitarian intervention” in the regional political system¹⁴. According to O. Kryvytska, the attempts to play the “Rusyn card” in Transcarpathia can lead to encroachment of the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Politization and radicalization of Rusyns’ movement in the background of opposition with political Ukrainophilia, provoke the risk of ethnic and political development of this region¹⁵.

Some political forces in Romania have never hidden the attempts to renew “Greater Romania” (România Mare) and get back the deprived territories. Today these ideas serve to be the basis for political speculations from the both sides of Ukrainian and Romanian border. In the light of geopolitical factor, it is essential to go into the policy of modern Hungarian government concerning the support of Hungarian ethnic communities in Carpathian region. Hungarian politicians support the cultural and territorial autonomy of Hungarian minority in other countries, particularly in Ukraine, that repeatedly led to diplomatic scandals. Hungary and Romania became members of EU and NATO and this fact closed the conflict of territorial claims. These days the question of separatism in Transcarpathia isn’t regarded as a serious threat to national security but it keeps up its conflicting character in perspective.

Social and economic factor

The source of social and political destabilization in frontier zones might be the existence of social and economic inequality among regions, stimulating the disaffection of regional power brokers and population by state’s income splitting. The stability in Transcarpathia is affected by a number of social and economic factors – migration of labor force, one side development of the agrarian sector, lack of center’s attention to the development of local

¹³ Panchuk D., Nedelcu H., Lendel M., “Foreign interference in the Zakarpattia region of Ukraine: The 2019 elections and beyond,” *New Eastern Europe*, May 6, 2020. Available online: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2020/05/06/foreign-interference-in-the-zakarpattia-region-of-ukraine-the-2019-elections-and-beyond/>

¹⁴ Koch S., *Transboundary: a Space of Social Order and Political Action [Транскордоння: простір соціального порядку і політичної дії: монографія]: monograph*, Odessa: Phoenix, 2019, p. 124.

¹⁵ Kryvytska O., *Demarcation Lines in Ethno-Political Sphere of Ukraine [Демаркаційні лінії в етнополітичному просторі України]: monograph*, Kyiv: IPIEND I.F. Kurat of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2015, p. 131.

production, etc. These factors can cause politization of economic issues and radicalization of representative economic forces and to increase the separatism in the region. It should be emphasized that Transcarpathia belongs to the least developed regions due to the economy development index.

Social and economic asymmetry of frontier areas between Ukraine and EU is even more vivid than within the country. This is proved by the social and economic figures of Carpathian Euroregion country-members in 2017 (see the table 2).

Table 2. The social and economic figures of Carpathian region country-members

Figures	Ukraine	Poland	Slovakia	Hungary	Romania
Average monthly income (euro)	204	865	975	798	411
Unemployment rate (%)	8,7	9,6	12,0	6,4	3,9
Gross regional product per person	1419	8470	11156	8496	5947
Capital investments per person (euro)	203	1325	-	1727	519
The number of enterprises per 1000 people	42	80,4	26	54	20

Source¹⁶

Along with the widening of development opportunities, the frontier zone is additionally threatened to its economic security having its own specificity unlike other regions (shadow economy, unregulated border trade, investment unattractiveness of the region, flow-out of labor forces to a positive environment). Quite a number of problems can be solved in the context of different forms of transborder cooperation (EU regions, clusters, industrial estates).

Social and economic boundaries of transborder cooperation can significantly be broadened due to the support given by EU through corresponding programs. In response to European programs, the life in frontier zones has been changed for the better, a lot of

¹⁶ Kalat Y., *Euroregional cooperation in securing the socio-economic development of border regions of Ukraine [Єврорегіональне співробітництво у забезпеченні соціально-економічного розвитку прикордонних регіонів України]. The thesis to obtain the scientific degree of the PhD in economics, Lviv, 2021, p. 276-280.*

social stereotypes have been broken, mutual trust has been increased, a lot of common business projects have been launched therefore, increasing the functioning of transborder regions. However, priorities, financing and decision making are determined by EU strategy while Ukraine has to follow the only way of the European policy.

At the present time, the dynamics of Transcarpathian external trade shows positive balance. The figures of external trade are seen in the table 3.

Table 3. Transcarpathian region. The figures of external trade (thousand dollars USA)

Figures	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Export of goods	1 383 032,9	1 094 413,5	1 165 337,2	1 446 425,4	1 659 251,3
Import of goods	1 734 490,3	1 011 710,6	1 123 694,9	1 341 660,4	1 516 295,7
Balance	-351 457,4	82 702,9	41 642,3	104 765,0	142 955,6
Export of services	200 561,4	172 942,5	182 317,3	245 092,6	307 112,7
Import of services	32 806,5	20 846,5	25 531,2	20 223,9	27 745,4
Balance	167 754,9	152 096,0	156 786,1	224 868,7	279 367,3

Source¹⁷

It should be emphasized, that more than 90% of export products belong to EU. Analysis of Transcarpathian foreign trade relations with EU countries shows the tendencies to annual export boost: in 2016 up to 14% in comparison with 2015, in 2017 up to 17,7%, in 2018 up to 14%. Part of Transcarpathian external trade with neighboring countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Poland) during 2018 equaled to 46,7% from the total number and total external trade turnover was 1 484,1 million dollars¹⁸.

In terms of social and economic threat to frontier zones' security, its development demands an effective and well-thought state regional policy aimed at effective use of regions' resource potential, its balanced development and competitiveness.

The migration factor has become a new challenge for social and political stability between Ukraine and EU countries. High level of population migration is not always judged to be a threat especially in the context of globalization of labor markers but it is a vital indicator of a social conflict and society's development level.

¹⁷ Regional development strategy of Zakarpattia region for the period 2021-2027 [Регіональна стратегія розвитку Закарпатської області на період 2021-2027]. Available online: <https://carpathia.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/21/Economics/201001-1840p.pdf> (accessed on November 30, 2020).

¹⁸ Ibid

The following problems connected with migration can be distinguished in Carpathian region: proliferation of illegal migration and provision of a service package for illegal migrants' transfer through the state border of Ukraine; big amounts of local population labor migration abroad, especially in form of the so-called "shuttle migration (close to frontier migration)"; load build up on the social, transport and ecological system of Carpathians, low level of infrastructure supplement to frontier and border zones to fulfill migration processes¹⁹.

Last years, the load on border infrastructure increases due to revival of transborder mobility. The scales of mobility on Ukrainian and Slovakian borders are shown in the table 4.

Table 4. The number of people that crossed the Ukrainian and Slovakian border legally

The number of people	2017	2018	2019	2020
Citizens of the SR and EU	934029	816 422	692 216	129 622
Citizens of third countries	1 546 022	1 889 794	1 968 130	649 651
Total	2 480 051	2 706 216	2 660 346	779 273

Source²⁰

The number of people that crossed the Ukrainian and Slovakian border legally was constantly growing and in 2019 it reached up to three million crossings per year. In 2020 the number of crossings on Ukrainian and Slovakian border has extremely fallen to 779 thousand. One of the main reasons for that was the pandemic.

The Ukrainian and Slovakian border has 6 border crossing checkpoints but the current infrastructure of the checkpoints is built up unequally and has low throughput. Top-of-the-agenda today are the issues of opening new border crossing checkpoints, the emerge of which can ease the social and economic life of border area.

For the last years, the situation with illegal migration has aggravated due to military actions and crisis in the countries of Middle East, Asia and North America.

The dynamics of illegal migration on the border of Ukraine and EU in 2017 – 2019 reflected the tendency to growth. If in 2017 there were 679 undocumented migrants detained for

¹⁹ Bil M., "Cross-border mobility as a determinant of regional development" [Транскордонна мобільність як детермінанта розвитку регіону], in *Materials of International scientific conference "Socio-economic potential of cross-border cooperation"*, L'viv, 2016, p. 44.

²⁰ Štatistický prehľad legálnej a nelegálnej migrácie v Slovenskej republike. URL: <https://www.minv.sk/?rocceny> (accessed on November 26, 2021).

illegal border crossing, in 2018 this figure was up to 24% higher (842). Illegal migrants were trying to get to EU countries mostly through the border with Slovakia – 405 people (+22%) and Poland – 252 people (exceeding in 1,7 times), also with Hungary – 97 people and Romania – 88 people²¹. In 2019 the number undocumented migrants on the border with Poland increased – up to 59% (2019 – 407 people), Romania – up to 47% (2019 – 129), Hungary – up to 30% (2019 – 129 people, 2018 p. – 99)²². It is through Transcarpathia that all main directions of undocumented migrants' transfers are performed from Ukraine to EU.

There is a risk of migration flows increase through the war in the East of Ukraine.

In case of full-scale military conflict in Donbas there is probability of internal migrants number growth, they will move to other regions of Ukraine including Transcarpathia. The absence of chances to return home or favorable social, economic and political conditions for sustainable living in the regions where internal migrants have moved, may be causative factor for moving to the EU. Besides, there will be reasons and precedents to give refugee status that will encourage Ukrainians' exit from the East to European countries (those who moved to Transcarpathia might also move to Slovakia) to obtain political asylum²³. According to the GFK–Ukraine forecasts, in the case of this scenario up to 3 million people may leave abroad for employment, education and fundamental security²⁴.

The problem of transnational illegal migration is common for Ukraine and EU. Illegal migration is a challenge for security in political, social, economic and individual formats. Illegal migration creates real and potential threats: generates social tension, exacerbates the situation on labor markets, determines the increase of xenophobia and extremism, is thought to be a source of crime and terror. In modern Europe the safety is one of the main cultural values while illegal migration is tightly connected with national and personal security²⁵.

²¹ The Ukraine Migration Profile 2018 [Міграційний профіль України за 2018 рік], State Migration Service of Ukraine, 2019. Available online: <https://dmsu.gov.ua/diyalnist/monitoring-migracijnix-procesiv/migracijnij-profil.html> (accessed on November 26, 2021).

²² The Ukraine Migration Profile 2019 [Міграційний профіль України за 2019 рік], State Migration Service of Ukraine, 2020. Available online: <https://dmsu.gov.ua/diyalnist/monitoring-migracijnix-procesiv/migracijnij-profil.html> (accessed on November 26, 2021).

²³ Lendiel M., Maradyk N., Melehanych H., *Migration processes in Ukraine as a factor of Ukrainian-Slovak borderland development in 2014–2016*, Bratislava: RC SFPA, 2017, p. 25.

²⁴ Lendiel M., Maradyk N., Melehanych H., *Migration processes in Ukraine as a factor of Ukrainian-Slovak borderland development in 2014–2016*, Bratislava: RC SFPA, 2017, p. 25.

²⁵ Mytryayeva S., Galkin S., "Nelegálna migrácia na ukrajinsko-slovenskej štátnej hranici: charakteristické znaky, trasy nelegálnej migrácie," in V. Benč, ed., *Slovensko-ukrajinská schengenská hranica: vybrané aspekty*, Prešov: RC SFPA, 2017, s. 71.

Another migration vector is labor migration with Ukraine – it is thought to be the main part after 2014 and is directed to EU countries. State migration service has approximate data concerning 2-3 million of Ukrainian labor migrants abroad in 2017–2018²⁶. With an opening of global trade markets for Ukrainians, homeland economy can't compete with other states. Poland, Slovakia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and even Germany compete for Ukrainian labor migrants experiencing a vital lack of qualified and non-qualified labor force²⁷.

In the countries of Visegrad Group, Ukrainians account for the biggest group of immigrants from the countries outside EU. According to Eurostat figures, the biggest number of permissions Ukrainians received in Poland (585,4 thousand), Czech Republic (18,9 thousand), Hungary (7,8 thousand)²⁸.

More than a quarter of permissions to work for foreigners in Slovakia have been issued to Ukrainian citizens. Accordingly, Ukrainian labor migrants are considered to be the biggest group of foreign workers in Slovakia with a significant tendency of increasement. Totally, Ukrainians take the first place among foreigners that have the permission to reside in Slovakia – 42 162 (as at 31.12.2020), 38307 (as at 31.12.2019), 24913 (as at 31.12.2018)²⁹. Within Ukrainian and Slovakian transborder region Ukrainian labor migrants significantly determine the character of labor market processes.

The population of frontier zones has to actualize a high level of transborder mobility, using commuting and accompanied services as means of survival. Employers of neighboring countries' frontier zones are interested in using the labor of Ukrainian labor migrants. This fact is proved by the number of work permissions issued. Along with that, Ukrainian labor migrants, especially the transborder commuting ones are quite vulnerable abroad. Taking into account a considerable gap in levels of social and economic development of Ukraine and EU countries there are serious risks of losing human potential due to flow-out migration of educated, workable, economically active population to neighboring countries.

²⁶ The Ukraine Migration Profile 2018 [Міграційний профіль України за 2018 рік], State Migration Service of Ukraine, 2019. Available online: <https://dmsu.gov.ua/diyalnist/monitoring-migracijnix-procesiv/migracijnij-profil.html> (accessed on November 26, 2021).

²⁷ The Ukraine Migration Profile 2019 [Міграційний профіль України за 2019 рік], State Migration Service of Ukraine, 2020. Available online: <https://dmsu.gov.ua/diyalnist/monitoring-migracijnix-procesiv/migracijnij-profil.html> (accessed on November 26, 2021).

²⁸ The Ukraine Migration Profile 2018 [Міграційний профіль України за 2018 рік], State Migration Service of Ukraine, 2019. Available online: <https://dmsu.gov.ua/diyalnist/monitoring-migracijnix-procesiv/migracijnij-profil.html> (accessed on November 26, 2021).

²⁹ Štatistický prehľad legálnej a nelegálnej migrácie v Slovenskej republike. Available online: <https://www.minv.sk/?rocenky> (accessed on November 26, 2021).

However, labor migration promotes social adaptation to EU living standards, gives working experience in EU business environment, creates opportunities for personal contacts' establishment, maintains the quality of human capital, growing opportunities for build-up investment assets and growing of population's purchasing power. Ukraine benefits from labor migrants due to constant cash proceeds from abroad. The National Bank has estimated that in 2018 Ukrainians totally transferred almost 11 billion dollars³⁰. Migration is the reason of a global crisis at the labor market that foremost leaves a trace on severe shortage of labor forces.

For authorities in border areas the task of managing migration processes lies in border control strengthening and in civilized transborder labor force formation. It is crucial to form a developed transborder social and economic space with appropriate infrastructural maintenance for transborder mobility actualization. The transborder cooperation regional programs set up has a convincing potential for solving problems.

Border factor

In the end its necessary to point out the security of borders as a mean of social and political stability. Sharpening of geopolitical opposition worldwide maintained the problem of states' transborder safety and security. The spread of "hybrid war" practices became possible due to borders' transparency growth and inability to control the transit of people, goods, finance, information.

Today Carpathian region faces new challenges that threaten the security of Ukraine and EU borders, especially: the activity of transnational criminal groupings, illegal migration, human trafficking, contraband goods, drug trafficking, etc. One more problem is the fact that very often these threats are not independent and affect comprehensively the safety in the state and in the region.

Traditional approach of the states to borders' security that provides for savage control methods and restricting measures of border crossing contradict the structure of modern international relations and can have negative consequences on states' development.

In this aspect there is a need of forming a new transborder security paradigm that envisages transnational approach to border security. Border security and transborder regions' safety are considered to be the tasks and duties of all neighboring countries but

³⁰ The Ukraine Migration Profile 2019 [Міграційний профіль України за 2019 рік], State Migration Service of Ukraine, 2020. Available online: <https://dmsu.gov.ua/diyalnist/monitoring-migracijnix-procesiv/migracijnij-profil.html> (accessed on November 26, 2021).

not a separate state or its institutions. Accordingly, there is a necessity of coordinating all states' safety institutions' activity that have common share of the border. Only the following transborder coordination and cooperation of countries will allow to effectively resist the transborder security threats.

SWOT analysis

Analysis of the factors that influence sociopolitical stability in frontier zones between Ukraine and EU countries allowed to differentiate the strengths and weaknesses, external threats and opportunities for Transcarpathia (see the table 5).

Table 5. SWOT analysis of the factors influencing the sociopolitical stability in frontier zones Ukraine – EU (case of Transcarpathia)

Factors	Strengths	Weaknesses
Historical and cultural factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ common historical heritage; ▪ social and cultural identity; ▪ society's multiculturalism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ disputable pages in region's historical development as a part of several countries; ▪ regional identity disputes.
Ethnopolitical factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ cultural and language uniqueness of minorities; ▪ harmonious coexistence of minorities; ▪ tight formal and informal transborder contacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ politization of ethnic questions; ▪ ambiguous ethnic identification of Rusyns; ▪ problem of dual citizenship; ▪ cultural and language discrepancies in the region.
Geopolitical factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ beneficial geopolitical location on the border of four countries; ▪ significant expand of borders with EU countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ geopolitical interest and foreign interference from other countries.
Social and economic factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ proximity to EU markets; ▪ experience in involving investment and grant projects, high business activity; ▪ branched transport, energy and social infrastructure; ▪ social and demographic convergence; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ labor forces migration; ▪ center's inattentiveness to local industry development; ▪ shadow economic activity; ▪ low economic development in the country comparing with other regions; ▪ uncontrolled trade and contraband goods;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ social adaptation to EU living standards; ▪ working experience in EU business environment; ▪ setting up personal contacts; ▪ improving human capital quality; ▪ growth of population's purchasing power. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ loss of human potential due to flow-out of labor force; ▪ illegal structure development that maintains migration flows; ▪ growing load on transport, social and ecological systems.
Border factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ border checkpoints network with three EU countries; ▪ transborder transport and energy routes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ absence of border checkpoints with Poland; ▪ low level of infrastructural provision of border and frontier zones; ▪ illegal infrastructure development in frontier zone.

Factors	Opportunities	Threats
Historical and cultural factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ strengthening of social and cultural relations; ▪ settling disputes and conflicts; ▪ Ukraine's European course legitimation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ destructive usage of historical memory by political groups and states.
Ethnopolitical factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ cooperation with neighboring regions on ethnic background; ▪ active external support of minorities' development from neighboring countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ destructive external policy of neighboring countries towards their foreign fellow citizens; ▪ building up separatist tendencies at Ukrainian borders.
Geopolitical factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ search for optimal cooperation ways in the sphere of security in the Central Europe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Russia's expansionist policy; ▪ "Rusyns' question" as a tool for geopolitical projects; ▪ risks of encroachment on Ukraine's territorial integrity.
Social and economic factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ launching macroregional EU program to Carpathian region support; ▪ elimination of social and economic transborder asymmetry; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ redirecting and / or closing transport and logistic flows due to continuous military aggression in the East;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ development of different forms of transborder cooperation in economic sphere; ▪ grading life standards at both sides of the border; ▪ transborder labor market development; ▪ legal defense of labor migrants abroad; ▪ investment potential build-up; ▪ currency earnings from labor migrants abroad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ separatist tendencies because of unsteady economic development of regions. ▪ big amounts of illegal migration from Eastern countries; ▪ abroad migrants social vulnerability; ▪ marginalization and reduction of labor force; ▪ demographic crisis due to youth's flow-out.
Border factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ transnational approach to border security; ▪ infrastructure and new border checkpoints build-up; ▪ simplified border crossing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ transnational criminal groupings' activity, illegal migration, human trafficking; ▪ drug trafficking; ▪ contraband goods; ▪ spreading of "hybrid war" practices.

Conclusion

Borders give the frontier zones benefits and opportunities but breed notional risks and challenges concerning sociopolitical stability. Transcarpathia as a unique example of Ukraine's region with four EU countries' borders, claimed the presence of destabilized potential that might work under certain factors:

1. Complex history of Transcarpathia determines the opportunities of using historical memory as a tool for settling conflicts or as a mean of their provoking. Countries' strategy in Carpathian region should be aimed at the development of common cultural and historical memory as a tool for neighborliness and myths, stereotypes and disinformation opposition.
2. Border area is a multinational space that creates risks for national issue aggravation in the body politic. Especially in Transcarpathia the destabilized potential is set in politization of issues connected with Rusyn organizations, Hungarian minorities, dual citizenship, providing cultural, educational and language needs for minorities, legal regulation of the citizenship question will guarantee the avoidance of ethnopolitical conflicts and separatist tendencies in the region.

3. Carpathian region occupies a special place in geopolitical space that provokes interest from other countries. In the context of finding optimal cooperation formats in the sphere of safety and security in Central Europe (e.g. Visegrad Group), new opportunities for involving Ukraine arise.
4. Border areas are vulnerable to external influence in context of elections and regional political parties' activities. Overthought state regional and national policy is based on international standards and should act as protector to regionalization of political processes and growth of separatist tendencies in the region.
5. The source of social and political uncertainty can be the existence of social and economic inequality among Ukrainian regions and progressing asymmetry of transborder regions. Quite a few economic problems might be solved in the context of several transborder cooperation forms and balanced state regional policy.
6. The migration has become a new challenge for social and political stability between Ukraine and EU countries. For authorities in border areas the task of managing migration processes lies in border control strengthening and in civilized transborder labor force formation.
7. Sharpening of geopolitical opposition worldwide maintained the problem of states' transborder safety and security. Today Carpathian region faces new challenges that threaten the security of Ukraine and EU borders, especially: the activity of transnational criminal groupings, illegal migration, human trafficking, contraband goods, etc. In this aspect there is a need of forming a new transborder security paradigm that envisages transnational approach to border security.
8. Taking into account the abovementioned challenges and threats, frontier zone requires special attention and consolidation of efforts of decision-making individuals at the international, state and regional levels. One of the tested complex mechanisms of solving conflicts in the cross-border region in ethnic and national, cultural and educational, social and economic spheres.