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Old Borders – New Challenges, New Borders – Old Challenges

De-Bordering and Re-Bordering
in Contemporary Europe

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Introduction

Borders matter. In 21st century Europe, they seem to be playing an even more relevant role than was predicted in the past. The continent – which remains an arena for dynamic processes of economic, social and cultural integration and disintegration – is (still) divided by numerous state boundaries. The way they are constructed and deconstructed, as well as how cross-border interactions are designed and performed, mirrors the contemporary relations between European countries, cultures, economies and nations. The nature of the process is complex, however. On the one hand, many “old borders” have been challenged by new problems. Uncontrolled migration flows and the tendency towards fencing are only two examples of this. On the other hand, many “new borders” are appearing nowadays, alongside territorial conflicts, separatist movements or the further consolidation of the European Union, bringing classical border-related issues to a previously borderless environment.

The aim of this publication is to reflect, conceptually and empirically, on border processes in Europe, paying special attention to the most current border-related developments, with a special focus on the processes of de-bordering and re-bordering. As the authors represent different academic centers and specializations, the volume reflects not only diverse perspectives but also has an interdisciplinary character.

The book contains nine contributions. The first set of chapters analyzes the borders and borderlands of the European Union, especially in the context of the ongoing changes observed in its direct neighborhood. The text by Ondřej Filipeček concentrates on the EU's external border management. He explores the issue of the effectiveness of Frontex with the use and application of the principal-agent concept. This analysis leads to the conclusion that the politicization of Frontex's power and capacities has occurred due to member states' different approaches to the role of EU's institutions. This is especially visible in the context of mass migration. Sergii Glebov explores the security dimension of borders, examining the case of the Black Sea space, with a special focus on Ukraine. He claims that the region has become a borderland between the European Union and Russia, and one of a divisive nature to boot. Studying social elements, identities and territorial processes, he concludes that it is an arena for the collision of both spaces and norms dominating there. Ruchan Kaya investigates the case of Belarus as a state bordering the European Union and Russian Federation simultaneously. He uses the image of a transit state, especially with regard to energy resources, which offers an interesting

perspective on Belarus' *borderness*. The role of *trade bridge* allows the regime to consolidate power and achieve stability. Finally, Olga Brusylovska and Iryna Maksymenko concentrate on cross-border cooperation, researching the Ukrainian-Polish and Ukrainian-Romanian borders. They claim that the main East-West borderland (with regard to CBC) is represented by these states. Moreover, the already visible record at the local and regional levels can have significant transformative power in changing continental relations.

The next group of articles deals with the regional level of border-related processes within the European Union. Tomasz Brańka investigates demands for self-determination in the second decade of the 21st century, asking if territorial autonomy leads in Europe to secession and consequently – disintegration of currently existing states. Javier Martín-Uceda, Joan Vicente Rufí and Jaume Feliu Torrent present considerations on Catalonia and its relations to the European integration project as well as the Spanish state. They revisit the concepts of state, nation, identity and territoriality, using them to interpret current developments on the eastern outskirts of the Iberian Peninsula and understand the complex nature of Spanish-Catalan conflict. Hynek Böhm, Wojciech Opióła and Adam Drosik concentrate on cross-border cooperation and investigate the Praded Euroregion located on the Polish-Czech border. By employing the perspective of cross-border social capital they map the developments there. Their main findings suggest that at the institutional level it is the schooling systems that require further improvement in order to strengthen both the quality and quantity of cross-border interactions.

Finally, the last group of texts deals with border processes at the local level, analyzing border urban structures. Jarosław Jańczak attempts to review academic interest in border twin towns and cities in Europe in comparison with other continents. He investigates one of the most important platforms for the exchange of ideas for border scholars, the *Journal of Borderlands Studies*. This comparative perspective reveals growing academic interest in urban border spaces. It is not, however, equally distributed with regard to regional, disciplinary and methodological dimensions. In the last chapter, Roland Hesz and Bence Jozskin explore one of the most interesting cases of border town twinning, the pair of Komárom–Komárno located on the Hungarian-Slovak border. They investigate the functional integration of the towns and identify its potential and obstacles. When describing rapid cross-border ties (re)construction over the last decades, they also point room for further improvements.

It is highly relevant to stress at the end that the presented volume belongs to numerous studies exploring border-related issues within the framework of the Thematicon publishing series. The authors believe that it will significantly contribute to further and better understanding of the complex nature of borders in contemporary Europe.

About the Authors

Tomasz Brańka, PhD, political scientist, expert in the field of contemporary international relations. His main research interests focus on autonomous solutions in contemporary international relations and non-sovereign entities.

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