



Pedestrian border crossings

Diagnosis, arguments and recommendations

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The Schengen area is based on two principles: 1) the internal borders between members of the Schengen zone are open with no border checks, customs control or external borders and 2) the gateways to the whole Schengen area are protected by state-of-the-art infrastructure and the well-trained border police of border countries, coordinated by the Warsaw-based EU agency FRONTEX. The functioning of the EU external border is regulated by the Schengen Borders Code, which entered into force in 2006¹. Out of approximately 9,000 kilometres of the total EU external land border, 1,163 kilometres are in Poland (33% of the Polish land border). Keen on maintaining good relations with its neighbours who are not EU members, Poland is a frontrunner in streamlining cross-border traffic and implementing new technology and means of border controls, including pedestrian border crossings. An ongoing refugee crisis in 2015 puts under question not only the effectiveness of the EU external borders, but also the future of the Schengen area as such. Nevertheless, current challenges should not be an excuse for only maintaining them secure but not making them more friendly for travellers.

Poland has been a part of the Schengen zone since 2007 and its citizens have therefore already got used to the fact that crossing borders with other EU countries is just like crossing from one voivodship to another. It is easy to not notice the signs on main roads informing us about crossing national borders. There is no border or customs control, no queues and no “ants”². Neighbours from both sides of the border can visit each other without any obstacles.

If we take a look at Poland’s eastern border, which also acts as the EU’s external border, we can see that it is not just a line in fields and woods, with border markers and signs with the names of the neighbouring countries. The Polish-Russian (Kaliningrad region), Belarusian and Ukrainian borders are a barrier, on the one hand protecting the EU from trafficking in human beings, smuggled goods and organised cross-border crime, while on the other, this barrier harms relations between neighbours living close to each other on the opposite sides of the border.

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV:l14514>

² Small-scale smugglers at Polish external borders, trafficking goods as their “personal belongings” are unofficially called “ants” (Pol. *mrówki*)

One, although not the only, way to increase the attractiveness of border areas, which could therefore stimulate cross-border tourism, is the option for pedestrians to cross the border on foot. It is not in a lorry, a car or a coach, but rather on foot that tourists in the Bieszczady mountains or Białowieża forest, as well as the inhabitants of villages, towns and cities situated in the border areas, would cross the border to visit their friends or go shopping.

Currently only two border crossing points (BCPs) on a border allow pedestrians and cyclists to cross on a regular basis: Medyka-Shehyni and Dołhobyczów-Uhryniv. The border can also be crossed on foot in Białowieża-Pererov – a BCP targeted at tourists visiting Białowieża forest and the national parks on each side of Polish-Belarusian border. Pedestrians and cyclists are allowed to pass at selected times of the day and no customs service is provided. The pilot project enabling a pedestrian border crossing in Dołhobyczów in July 2015, should be considered as a move in the right direction and should be expanded to other BCPs on the borders with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine as soon as possible.

The main goals of this text are to analyse the functioning of existing pedestrian border crossings, to indicate the advantages of this solution on the EU's external borders, to discuss the concerns raised by opponents of pedestrian border crossings and, first and foremost, to issue recommendations for the wider and more effective use of this solution.

Existing pedestrian border crossings

Poland, which shares a border with three countries that are not members of the European Union and the Schengen zone, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, is managing one of longest sections of the EU external land border. It needs to be highlighted here that it differs from other parts of the EU external border due to the specific nature of the former Soviet external border with low population density in the border areas and villages and towns located some distance from the border. It means, that, with some exceptions such as Terespol-Brest, there are no cities divided by borders, unlike Poland's western and southern borders where the best-known examples are Ślubice-Frankfurt, Zgorzelec-Görlitz and Cieszyn-Tešín. The Polish-Soviet border after the WWII was in fact a whole system of highly engineered protection facilities up to a few kilometres wide, which included ploughed strips of earth and no-man zones. However, the example of the Polish-Lithuanian border, with Lithuania being part of the Soviet Union until 1991 that was also a part of the Polish-Soviet border with all the afore-mentioned solutions, proves that the opening of a border (in this case the complete opening as it has been a Schengen internal border since 2007) and the freedom of cross-border movement for pedestrian or cyclist tourists, supported by local authorities, cause the previous border systems to become forgotten and do not affect the comfort of crossing the border between Poland and Lithuania³.

The Polish-Russian border, which divided the northern voivodships (counties) of Poland from the Kaliningrad region, cannot be crossed on foot or by bike despite a local border traffic regime (LBT) being in place since 2012. The specifics of the traffic here indicate that pedestrian crossings would not be popular, according to the authors of the analysis *Introduction of pedestrian traffic on existing BCPs*, prepared in 2013 by the Polish governmental Group for the Management of the State Border⁴. On the other hand, the occasional and extraordinary option of allowing pedestrians to cross the border is well perceived by inhabitants of the border area, the local media and authorities. Therefore, they recommend to reconsider an option of having a pedestrian and cyclist crossing on the Polish-Russian border, at least in summer time.

³ <http://tic.sesupe.lt/files/Brochure-Nemunas-Rospuda.pdf>

⁴ Annex no. 1 to the Resolution no. 15/2013 of the Group for the Management of the State Border of 29.11.2014.

Elblag in Poland and Kaliningrad are both part of European cyclist route EuroVelo10 (the Hanseatic route) and this fact may be another argument in favour of a seasonal cyclist border crossing⁵.

As for the Polish-Belarusian border, until the end of September 2014 a dedicated pedestrian-cyclist lane was offered to travellers at the Kuźnica-Bruzgi BCP. Despite its high popularity (600,000 crossings from January-July 2014), the Belarusian authorities decided to suspend pedestrian traffic at its borders with the EU from October 2014, explaining this measure by the poor infrastructure and inability to provide a sufficient level of security for travellers (the lack of clear and permanent separation of pedestrians and vehicles). According to Polish radio station "*Polskie Radio*", the real trigger could, in fact, be an attempt to limit the small, individual import of goods by Belarusians, which harms the Belarusian economy⁶. Currently, only the Białowieża-Pererov pedestrian-cyclist BCP remains operational. According to the Polish Border Guard, in July 2015 2,620 individuals, mainly tourists, crossed the border at this BCP (out of 393,000 on the whole section of border subject to the Podlaski Unit of the Border Guard)⁷. Since June 2015, Belarus introduced a visa-free regime for the visitors to the Białowieża Forest National Park, allowing them to cross the border on the basis of a dedicated permit at the Białowieża BCP⁸. Thanks to this solution, the number of border crossings here tripled in July 2015 compared to a year ago⁹. It has not yet been decided whether pedestrian-cyclist traffic will return to the modernised BCP at Połowce-Peschatka, which was partly modernised to improve the comfort for pedestrians, where on Polish side there is a pedestrian lane which is lacking on the Belarusian side. Consultations with Belarusians authorities are needed and both sides are yet need to agree on conditions for the re-opening of pedestrian traffic here.

The Polish-Ukrainian border has two pedestrian crossings, which function as part of the road crossings at Medyka-Shehyni and Dołhobyczów-Uhryniv¹⁰. According to the Polish newspaper "*Gazeta Wyborcza*", up to 8,000 people cross the border on foot every day at the Medyka BCP¹¹. Pedestrian traffic was introduced there in 1998 and out of 4.5 million travellers crossing there in 2012, almost 2 million (41.7%) were pedestrians.

The afore-mentioned analysis by the Group for the Management of the State Border shows that approximately nine out of ten pedestrians in Medyka hold a Ukrainian passport, one in ten hold a Polish passport while third countries citizens constitute less than 1%. Over 90% of Ukrainians and 80% of Poles stated "shopping" as their purpose of visiting the neighbouring country. Only 1.8% of Ukrainian citizens and 9.3% of Polish citizens cross the border for tourist purposes. It should be mentioned, however, that according to the authors of the governmental analysis, a significant increase in the share of tourists among all categories of travellers was noticed in 2012 compared to the previous year at Medyka BCP (0.3% in case of Ukrainians and 3.6% in the case of Poles)¹². Nevertheless, it can be stated that the Polish-Ukrainian border is crossed for non-tourist purposes in the majority of cases, not only when it comes to pedestrian crossings.

In the policy brief *There are not only cars* from 2013, Marek Porzycki underlined the high importance of pedestrian traffic at the Medyka BCP for the Polish-Ukrainian border, not only on a local scale. The

⁵ <http://www.eurovelo.com/en/eurovelos/eurovelo-10>

⁶ <http://www.polskieradio.pl/75/921/Artykul/1246397,Bialorus-zamyka-piesze-przejscia-graniczne-z-UE-od-1-pazdziernika>. (in Polish)

⁷ http://www.podlaski.strazgraniczna.pl/images/statystyki/statystyka_lipiec_2015.pdf (in Polish)

⁸ <http://eng.belta.by/society/view/visa-free-trips-to-belovezhskaya-pushcha-as-from-12-june-13161-2015>

⁹ Only 836 people were serviced in Białowieża in July 2014, <http://www.podlaski.strazgraniczna.pl/index.php/statystyki> (in Polish)

¹⁰ <http://granica.gov.pl/przejscia.php?v=en>

¹¹ http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,13316869,Piechota_za_wschodnia_granice.html, press article from 2013 (in Polish).

¹² Annex no. 1 (...), op. cit.

infrequent public transport connections across the border and long queues of private cars at BCPs make pedestrian crossing the fastest for some travellers, for example when arriving at the border crossing by bus and leaving by another bus on the other side of the border. In this situation, improvements to border infrastructure and procedures are crucial, claims Porzycki, stating that the current conditions are “inhuman” and do not meet any international standards. The author recommends the following actions: the creation of a easily approachable “green corridor” for individuals with no goods to declare, the intensified struggle against “ants”, small scale smugglers and the facilitation and streaming of customs control by, among other things, using devices often used at airports to check luggage¹³. The activity of “ants” should be differentiated from the occasional border crossings of inhabitants of the border area who cross the border to do their own personal shopping.

In the nearly three years that have passed since Marek Porzycki’s analysis was published by the Batory Foundation, the pedestrian-cyclist lane at Medyka BCP has been modernised: in 2013 the old border control terminal was renovated and a separate area for incoming and outgoing travellers was introduced. According to the border guards, this has improved the situation at this border crossing point, although high fences separating the pedestrian lane from vehicle traffic (which many people associate with prison corridors) have to remain in Medyka in order to avoid dangerous situations and clashes between “ants” and the BCP staff. This infrastructure allows a more effective control of pedestrian flows, especially at peak times.

It has been only two and the half months since the introduction of a pedestrian-cyclist traffic in Dołhobyczów BCP and it is therefore too early to determine how popular it is, especially due to the summer season, which has an over-representational share of tourists compared to other periods of the year. Data from the border guards shows that from 1st July (when the pedestrian lane was opened) until 25th August, approximately 12,000 pedestrians and cyclists crossed the border in Dołhobyczów, around 215 people each day. “Every year we do a bike trip to Lviv”, a gentleman quoted by “*Gazeta Wyborcza*” says, “Until now, we used the Hrebenne-Rava Ruska BCP, but now we can bike through Dolhobyczow. It makes things a lot easier, offers better road conditions and Ukraine really has a lot to offer to tourists”, he added¹⁴. Voices like this prove the need to open pedestrian and cyclist border crossings. Dołhobyczów can also serve as a good example because of the low costs of opening a temporary (for six months) pedestrian lane by adapting the existing infrastructure (a bus control terminal which is out of use) – this cost just PLN 30,000 (app. EUR 7,500).

Although it is impossible to compare a temporary solution introduced to attract more travellers to a rarely used BCP in Dołhobyczów-Uhryniv with the highly popular Medyka-Shehyni BCP, dedicated pedestrian infrastructure draws attention to two aspects. First of all, it is a proof of the flexibility of border services and the border protection system that can be easily adapted to meet current needs, and secondly, it shows that pilot projects are useful to assess the interest of certain groups of travellers in having pedestrian crossings at selected BCPs, which enables the better planning of infrastructure developments.

At least two more pedestrian border crossings can be expected in the future on the Polish-Ukrainian border. It is planned to enable pedestrian traffic at the new BCP at Budomierz-Hrushev, opened in December 2013, although no dates have been provided¹⁵. Furthermore, in August 2015 a decision was made to allow not only vehicles, but also pedestrians and cyclists at the planned BCP at Malhowice-Nizhankovitse. This is important for the further development of the border, not only because Malhowice is

¹³ <http://www.batory.org.pl/upload/files/Programy%20operacyjne/Otwarta%20Europa/nie-tylko-samochodem.pdf> (in Polish)

¹⁴ http://lublin.gazeta.pl/lublin/1,48724,18286127,Nowe_przejscie_graniczne_z_Ukraina_Najbardziej_zadowolone.html (in Polish)

¹⁵ <https://rzeszow.uw.gov.pl/aktualnosci/ponad-250-mln-zl-na-przejscia-graniczne-w-regionie/> (in Polish)

a neighbouring town to the city of Przemyśl and the BCP will become an alternative to the Medyka-Shehyni crossing, but also because the towns are situated directly on each side of the border, which gives a chance for cross-border people-to-people contacts at local level to intensify.

Arguments for opening pedestrian border crossings

An argument can be put forward from a social, ecological, tourist, practical and image perspective concerning the development of border crossings for pedestrians and cyclists.

The possibility to cross a border on foot brings advantages to societies and local communities. It allows inhabitants of the border areas to visit neighbouring towns (regardless of the reason for doing so), establish people-to-people contacts, make friends and therefore help tackle stereotypes which can harm the mutual perception of neighbouring nations for years. The establishment of people-to-people contacts also fits the European Union's strategy of supporting the development of border areas, which has been implemented, among other things, by the Euroregions or Neighbourliness Days initiatives organised on the Polish-Ukrainian border, when concerts and cultural events are held for local inhabitants. This all helps to increase people's feeling of responsibility for their environment.

Ecological and tourist arguments, which also fit within the EU's priorities mainly concern enabling "green", clean cross-border traffic and promoting hiking and biking. Pedestrian border crossings would also enable the creation of new hiking trails on both sides of the border, in areas which are currently not popular for tourism due to the afore-mentioned border policy of the USSR and the Polish People's Republic. The new pedestrian crossing at Wołosate-Lubnya in the Bieszczady mountains, which was opened in coordination with a new BCP on the Slovak-Ukrainian border, would create a whole new hiking trail connecting three national parks: the Bieszczadzki National Park (Poland), Uzhansky National Park (Ukraine) and National Park "Poloniny" (Slovakia). These rarely visited areas, which are attractive to tourists, are currently divided by the Schengen border (with no BCPs) and are therefore avoided. The Wołosate-Lubnya BCP could be seasonal crossing, open during the day, like the functioning tourist BCPs on the former Polish-Slovak border. Its opening would require the cooperation of three countries, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine, and consultations with Poland's Ministry of Environment, which raises objections based on the possible negative influence of intensified tourist traffic on the state of nature in Bieszczady.

Finally, pedestrian border crossings do not need to be expensive, as Dołhobyczów's pilot project proves. The PLN 30,000 spent on adapting the existing infrastructure to serve pedestrians and bikers is an insignificant expense, compared to the total investment of PLN 147 million in this BCP¹⁶. This pilot project aimed, among other things, at attracting travellers who would usually cross the border at other BCPs. Not only the costs of construction, but also the costs for maintenance and service per traveller are lower for pedestrian border crossings. Border and customs controls become more effective and faster, while large-scale smuggling and human trafficking are not possible. Modern security controls, like baggage x-rays, also help to fight small-scale smuggling.

If we look at the benefits of creating pedestrian border crossings, it is important to discuss the development of the environmental needs of the BCPs such as new shops, services, hotel & tourist infrastructure etc. The authors of the governmental analysis have proved that an average foreigner crossing into Poland via the Medyka BCP (without specifying whether the traveller is a pedestrian or a motorist), spends PLN 700¹⁷. Therefore, the more possibilities there are to cross the border, and the more

¹⁶ It should be noted, however, that costs of the construction of a bus terminal, adapted for pedestrians, are not counted in the amount of PLN 30,000. <http://fakty.interia.pl/lubelskie/news-dolhobyczow-ulatwienia-na-przejsciu-granicznym-z-ukraina,nId,1845078> (in Polish)

¹⁷ Annex no. 1 (...), op. cit.

efficiently the border works, the more the state budget gains, from taxes on goods and services offered to foreigners.

However, it is not the pure economy that should be considered the main reason for opening more pedestrian border crossings – Poland’s image is also at stake. No matter how much is invested in building the country’s brand abroad, and the number of media campaigns, the border is the first point of contact with Poland (or second, if a traveller applies for a visa in a consulate). This is why it is crucial for the border to make a good first impression, by providing a professional service, efficiency and a wider selection of places and methods of crossing into Poland.

Concerns and obstacles

Critics of opening new pedestrian border crossings tend to come up with counter arguments, aimed at proving that the border security decreases and costs rise when new pedestrian BCPs are created. While the first of these arguments requires further discussion, the second should be challenged. First of all, a look at the Medyka BCP shows that thanks to the high interest and the pedestrian traffic and economic data proving high spending by foreigners in Poland, it pays for itself because a pedestrian-cyclist lane allows more people to enter the country. The low costs of temporary solutions, like in Dołhobyczów, should also be mentioned in this respect. Certainly, the adaptation of some BCPs would be more expensive, as for instance Bobrowniki or Terespol would require significant investments in infrastructure – e.g. new bridges over the river Bug which forms the border. These expenses should, however, be considered in the scope of the benefits from the increased capacity of BCPs and the reduced costs of service per traveller.

There are two aspects to the security concerns. The first is the difficulty in providing migration security if the infrastructure is insufficient and the border control is done in the conditions of the existing road border crossing, whereby it would be possible for a traveller to not be noticed and therefore skip the border check. The second is the threat to pedestrians from vehicles at the BCP. These concerns, despite being valid, only apply to a situation where pedestrian traffic is permitted but there is no separation of pedestrian and vehicle traffic. A threat to pedestrians and the risk of missing a person during border controls is minimal where there is a separate pedestrian lane, and is even smaller than during a vehicle control, where an irregular traveller may hide inside a lorry or car. It should not be ignored that the more border crossings there are, which would also represent permanent border crossing points, the shorter the so-called “green” border sections are, which are preferred by human traffickers as border crossing points instead of official BCPs.

What should raise concerns is the shifting of responsibility for the financing of the development of pedestrian border crossings between central administration and local self-governments. Although it is legally possible for local communities to contribute to the construction of BCPs, including pedestrian infrastructure, they are not eager to do so. Particular attention needs to be paid to this problem to avoid a situation in which the central government does not open new pedestrian BCPs, relying on local contributions, while local communities in turn expect full financing from a central budget¹⁸. However, positive examples have been observed when it comes to the co-financing of border infrastructure, like the development of pavements and lanes for pedestrians and cyclists during the modernisation process of regional roads leading up to border crossings. This was the case in Budomierz, where the opening of a

¹⁸ The Ministry of Finance of Poland and the Customs Service, as they consider streamlining vehicle and cargo traffic as their priority, are in favour of the full financing of pedestrian border crossings by local administration.

pedestrian lane is envisaged. During the reconstruction of regional road 866 in 2010-2012, over 7 km of pedestrian-cyclist lanes and 10 km of pavement were built¹⁹.

Besides the technical issues mentioned above, political dialogue about the functioning of borders between Poland and its eastern neighbours remains a significant challenge. Russian authorities are apparently not interested in allowing pedestrian traffic on the Polish-Russian border, while at the same time Belarus is not eager to re-open pedestrian crossings. Although good relations are maintained with Ukraine and there is a general consensus on the future development of the border, misunderstandings tend to arise in the details and the traffic organisation at specific BCPs.

Conclusions and recommendations

The arguments discussed in this text seem to prove that there are more advantages than disadvantages and threats associated with the opening of pedestrian-cyclist lanes on the Polish eastern and northern borders. In order to ensure pedestrian traffic is allowed at further BCPs, the following actions should be considered:

- Improving political dialogue with Russia and Belarus on common sections of the border. Negotiations with Russia on the possible opening of BCPs for pedestrians, and with Belarus on re-opening BCPs for pedestrians.
- An updated analysis, in 2016, of the costs of opening pedestrian lanes as a targeted solution at each and every BCP on the eastern border – supplemented by an analysis of the possibility to adapt existing and unused infrastructure for pedestrian traffic (like bus terminals, see: Dołhobyczów).
- Creating a list of future pedestrian crossings sorted by envisaged popularity and needs, taking into consideration their distance from towns, hiking tracks etc.²⁰. Pedestrian crossings should be opened based on where they are needed most. Analysing the possibility of using temporary solutions, like in Dołhobyczów, where there is an interest and the building of targeted infrastructure is beyond the capacity of investors.
- Immediately, i.e. in 2015, allowing pedestrian traffic in Budomierz BCP, which was opened for vehicles in 12.2013, and where dedicated infrastructure was envisaged in the project.
- Developing pedestrian-cyclist infrastructure at the Hrebenne-Rava Ruska BCP in order to create a comfortable connection on the Warsaw-Lublin-border-Lviv route (with public transport services to and from the BCP).
- Where possible, the implementation of pilot projects for pedestrian traffic in order to examine the interest in this solution and attract travellers to rarely used border crossings. Continuing the operation of the pedestrian-cyclist lane in Dołhobyczów, originally scheduled until the end of 2015.
- Adopting a rule that every time a new BCP is designed, a concept of a pedestrian-cyclist lane is included in the project on both sides of the border. The implementation would depend on funding and an agreement with the neighbouring country.
- Using the new options provided by the amended EU Schengen Borders Code – common border checks for pedestrians and cyclists on the Polish side of the border (this could reduce the financial contribution of Poland's neighbours to pedestrian infrastructure, with the border check terminals

¹⁹ http://www.portal-kolarstwo.chiba.pl/?title=Droga_wojew%C3%B3dzka_nr_866 (in Polish)

²⁰ Basing on the updated analysis of the Group for the Management of the State Border

being on the Polish side). The alignment of border agreements between Poland and its neighbours with the EU regulations should be considered as urgent. Until then, other means of border checks can be performed, such as “one-stop-shop” checks which were used during the Euro 2012 football championship (for travellers these checks hardly differ from standard checks).

- Using “airport-style” customs and security checks, such as luggage X-rays to help tackle small-scale smuggling, reduce the customs clearance time (compared to manual luggage examinations) and ensure security at the BCP.
- Supporting the development of pedestrian infrastructure at border checkpoints, not only on the Polish, but also on the opposite side of the border using such financial mechanisms such as governmental loans²¹.
- Initiating cooperation on pedestrian traffic across borders with tourism ministries (of Poland and respective neighbouring countries) and tourist organisations. Requesting EU support in order to promote hiking. Opening a seasonal BCP at Wołosate-Lubnya to serve hikers in the Bieszczady mountains (with no vehicle traffic allowed) as a pilot project in cooperation with Ukraine and Slovakia.
- Including data on pedestrian traffic at the borders in the general border statistics published by the Polish Border Guards.

²¹ According to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, part of a governmental loan offered by Poland to Ukraine is to be spend on the development of border infrastructure, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,18595081,jak-polska-pomaga-ukrainie-reformy-pomoc-humanitarna-i-duzo.html> (in Polish)

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