

MONITORING  
**REPORT**

# EU Border Crossing Points

## Slovakia

**Juraj Buzalka, Vladimír Benč**  
The Research Center  
of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association

Bratislava and Prešov, November 2007

## Table of Content

<b>1.</b> Introduction	1
<b>2.</b> Method of the research	1
<b>3.</b> Basic characteristics of the studied border crossing points	2
<b>4.</b> Characteristic of the people crossing the border in Vyšné Nemecké/ Uzhgorod	3
<b>5.</b> Characteristic of the people crossing the border in Vel'ké Slemence/ Mali Selmenci	7
<b>6.</b> Work of the external EU border crossing points in opinion of the Border Guard and the Custom Officers	8
<b>7.</b> Influence of the border regime on local communities in Slovakia	9
<b>8.</b> Findings and recommendations	10
<b>9.</b> Conclusion	11

## 1. Introduction

The regions of eastern Slovakia (Prešov and Košice regions: 1 569 thousand inhabitants) and Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine (Zakarpatska oblast: 1 254 thousand inhabitants) have an exceptionally heterogeneous ethnic and religious structure in Central and Eastern Europe and belong to the poorest ones in their countries. They are distant from capitals, with very weak developed economic and social infrastructure comparing to other parts of their countries. Nevertheless, they share similarities in historical and economic trajectories that represent a basis for further development of cross-border cooperation.

The accession process of the Slovak Republic to the EU has been a key factor, which essentially changed the bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian border regime in terms of legal movement of persons in the period after 1989. The adoption of the EU legislation in field of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) as well as bringing the visa policy on the side of Slovakia in accordance with the EU standards in June 2000, considerably interfered with human contacts between Slovakia and Ukraine. Imposition of the visa regime has affected the travel of Ukrainian citizens to the territory of Slovakia. On the contrary, the visa regime did not affect so dramatically the travel of Slovak citizens to the territory of Ukraine<sup>1</sup>.

This report presents the results of the monitoring of Slovak-Ukrainian border crossings points in Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod and Vel'ké Slemence/Mali Selmenci<sup>2</sup>. Due to its size and importance at the 98.5 km long Slovak-Ukrainian border, the results of fieldwork from Vyšné Nemecké helps to design a general picture of border regime. The fieldwork was carried out between 6 August and 14 September 2007.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on visa and its impacts see: Bilčík V., Duleba A. (ed.), *Carpathian Euroregion and External Borders of Enlarged European Union: Confronting the Effects of Schengen*, Carpathian Foundation, Košice 2003.

<sup>2</sup> The original plan was to gather data at and in close proximity of the Slovak-Ukrainian road border crossing Ubl'a/Malyi Bereznyi, north of Uzhgorod. Due to the renovation works at this border crossing during the fieldwork period, this fieldwork location was replaced by the border crossing Vel'ké Slemence/Mali Selmenci.

The major finding of the report is that in spite of recent modernization and improvements in terms of flexibility of border procedures, there is still space for making the border more opened. This further opening, however, also requires the change of the attitude among the political representatives, media and analytic community in Slovakia and Ukraine.

## 2. Method of the research

After arriving to the field, the local monitoring team was established and trained. Due to the need for gathering the questionnaire in Ukrainian, the local experts and assistants were hired. The ethnographic methods were used for drawing the general picture of the local communities on both sides of the Slovak-Ukrainian border. The head of the research team and his assistant frequently crossed the Slovak-Ukrainian border – by car, by bus and by walk – and observed its functioning.

The questionnaire survey started in Vyšné Nemecké on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2007 and continued on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2007 in Vel'ké Slemence. Apart from the questionnaire survey, the head of the research team and his assistant gathered “in-depth” interviews in the Slovak border villages and towns (Vyšné Nemecké, Vel'ké Slemence, Sobrance, etc), carried out the participatory surveillance including the informal surveillance and the surveillance with the use of a surveillance questionnaire. Also interviews with people crossing the border, border guards and custom service officials were gathered. Approximately 50 persons were interviewed “in-depth” and 473 persons were queried for the quantitative survey at the border crossings, 332 in Vyšné Nemecké and 141 in Vel'ké Slemence<sup>3</sup>. Each day of the monitoring, the coordinator organized the “rehearsals” with the research team and corrected the procedures of the fieldwork.

We focused in particular on individual travelers who formed the bulk of travelers as well as on bus passengers traveling at regular lines

<sup>3</sup> Due to the almost exclusive type of travelers, petty commodity traders, the research sample of surveyed in Vel'ké Slemence did not exceed 141 people.

between Slovakia and Ukraine who were a minor group of all the travelers crossing the border. In Vyšné Nemecké we surveyed 10 buses and 310 passenger cars, in addition to 12 truck drivers whom we interviewed for comparative purposes.

In spite of general willingness to share information with the researchers, due to the specific culture of secrecy and prevalent suspicion towards the “strangers without uniforms”, it was particularly problematic to gather the personal opinion of the border guard and custom officers. When attempting to survey the functioning of the activities considered as illegal or informal, such as petty trade, petrol and cigarettes smuggling, dealing with the position in the queue, the same limitation appeared among the travelers.

As far as the questionnaire was concerned, in most of the questionnaires the participants did not differentiate between the border guard and custom officers. This lack of differentiation might have resulted in a very similar (i.e. positive) evaluation of both groups. A more nuanced view resulting from the interviews showed less satisfaction with the custom officers than border guard officers which is the result of requirements the customs officers pose on travelers as far as petty commodity trade was concerned.

We think that a much more accurate picture would have been achieved if the fieldwork would have lasted longer, the researchers would have had an opportunity to observe local life on a more everyday life basis and learn more also on the “informal side” of the border functioning. In spite of these limits, however, the research team was able to gather valuable “bottom-up” insights on the border and its functioning.

### 3. Basic characteristics of the border crossing points

Like Slovakia, Ukraine as a sovereign state is a new actor in the international arena. Ukraine gained its sovereignty in 1992 and Slovakia respectively in 1993. Historically, both Slovakia and Transcarpathia were parts of the same state

formations, most recently the first Czechoslovak Republic 1918–1938. In 1946 Czechoslovakia ceded its former province, the Subcarpathian Rus, to Soviet Union following the intergovernmental treaty. Thenceforward, the Soviet-Czechoslovak border became a strictly controlled border, which interfered with natural historical ties between citizens of Czechoslovakia and Transcarpathian Ukraine. Up to the present day, the legacy of the pre-war and early post-socialist past influences the specific attitudes that the local people have towards each other on both sides of the border. Despite the demands resulting from the requirements of JHA, this **cultural legacy might help in keeping the current border as open as possible.**

Taking into consideration the communist past when the access of citizens of communist countries to travel documents was under the strict political and police control, the new travel regime imposed at the beginning of the 1990s on the Slovak-Ukrainian border was broadly understood in Ukraine and Slovakia as an imminent part of individual freedoms. Since then, the free travel of citizens boosted human and cross-border contacts between Slovakia and Ukraine. However, the accession process of the Slovak Republic to the EU since 2000 has essentially changed the bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian border regime in terms of restricted legal movement of citizens between the two countries. Although the numbers of border crossings have returned to the levels from the period before the introduction of visa regime, the border remains the main obstacle for building closer co-operation.

There are five border crossing points at the 98.5 km long Slovak-Ukrainian border (3 road and 2 railway border crossings). As by August 2007, the border crossing points Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod (road) and Vel'ké Slemence/Mali Selmenci (pedestrians) were the only functioning border crossings for individual travelers in addition to two railway border crossing in Čierna nad Tisou/Chop (Strazh). At the time of fieldwork, the second largest road border crossing (Ubl'a/Malyi Bereznyi) was under reconstruction. There are preparations to establish a new road border crossing point for cars, buses and pedestrians in Čierna

nad Tisou/Solomonovo in 2009<sup>4</sup>. In 2005 and 2006 there was a 33% increase in movement of persons across Slovak-Ukrainian border and the number of border crossings is still on the rise in 2007. The number of people crossing Slovak-Ukrainian border in first half of 2006 was 1 087 410. In the first half of the year 2007 the number increased to 1 158 820 people<sup>5</sup>.

Due to the proximity of two major fieldwork locations – the border crossings in Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod and Vel'ké Slemence/Mali Selmenci – as well as due to the specific position of gate to/from Transcarpathian Ukraine and the major travel destination for citizens of Slovakia (and Hungary) to this part of Ukraine, the city of Uzhgorod (126 000 inhabitants) was chosen as a fieldwork base. In addition to Slovak rural countryside along the Slovak-Ukrainian border, Uzhgorod offered an excellent opportunity for researching the impact of border regime. The selection of these two border crossings offered an opportunity to compare two different border regimes. While Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod is the eldest major road border crossing on Slovak-Ukrainian border, Vel'ké Slemence/Mali Selmenci represents the border crossing which benefited from the development after 1989 on the new EU eastern border. Established for pedestrians in 2005, it serves for the citizens of EU countries and Ukraine.

## 4. Characteristic of the people crossing the border in Vyšné Nemecké / Uzhgorod

Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod is the major road border crossing at Slovak-Ukrainian border. This is also the only one truck border crossing at the Slovak-Ukrainian border. In order to fit Schengen requirements, the border crossing was recently renovated and modernized. As

<sup>4</sup> Treaty on establishing the border crossing point Čierna nad Tisou/Solomonovo was signed on 11th October 2007 in Bratislava [http://www.prezident.sk/?rok=2007&news\\_id=5227](http://www.prezident.sk/?rok=2007&news_id=5227).

<sup>5</sup> Yearbook of Legal and Illegal Migration 2006 and 2007 (half year statistics), Office of Border and Aliens' Police of SR (UHCP), Bratislava, 2006 and 2007.

our research showed, however, the modernization has been finished only on the Slovak part of the border and did not include the adjustment of the areas close to the border crossing, including infrastructure (see below).

As our survey showed, almost 45% of the travelers crossed the border in Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod on weekly or more frequent basis (44.3%). This indicated a high level of small border movement related to petty commodity trade, consisting in particular of petrol, cigarettes and alcohol. The average age of a traveler was 38.2 years and there was a vast majority of men crossing this border (77%). There was also a quite high level of people with higher education traveling across the border (almost 31% had higher education and 37% secondary education). The people claiming regular employment (including small entrepreneurs) formed a bulk of travelers – 77%. This indicated that **petty trade is an additional source of income** for most of travelers, not the major one.

**More than three thirds (68%) of travelers depart from Slovakia.** The second largest departure country was the Czech Republic, the major destination of Transcarpathian Ukrainians working abroad who, in addition to tourists, formed the highest number of “Czech” travelers. **Almost 90% (86%) of all travelers travel to Transcarpathian Ukraine, mostly to Uzhgorod.** There was a small minority of transiting travelers, heading mostly to Russia. Despite its international reputation, therefore, Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod remains rather regional border crossing at Slovak-Ukrainian border. According to the opinion of border guard officers, 95% of all travelers crossing this border crossing were citizens of Slovakia (and other EU countries, especially Czech Republic) and Ukraine. The remaining 5% were the citizens of other countries, especially the states of former Soviet Union.

According to official statistics, the ratio of Slovak and Ukrainian citizens crossing the border was 60:40 (based on information from Slovak Border Police in Sobrance). The Czechs formed the largest group of third country nationals. More than half of those crossing the border were from a very close vicinity of the border (51% lives

no more than 50 km away from the border, 28% no further away than 100 km). These numbers showed that **almost 80% of travelers were “locals”**. It should be taken into account that the number of people living closer than 50 km from the border crossing would have been higher if the border crossing in Ubl'a/Malyi Bereznyi (around 60 km north from Vyšné Nemecké) would have been opened by the time we were carrying out the fieldwork. Due to the renovation works at the time of data gathering, the inhabitants of Humenne region could not use this second largest Slovak-Ukrainian border crossing. The inhabitants of major regional centers that exceed 100 km distance from the border – Košice (236 000 inhabitants) 100 km and Prešov (93 000 inhabitants) 120 km – formed another large group of travelers with Slovak passports.

There are several traffic peaks at the border crossing during the week. On Mondays, the traffic intensity is rather low. The most intense movement across the border appears between Thursday and Saturday when there is bazaar opened in Uzhgorod (Saturday morning is the most crowded time). This makes the waiting time significantly longer. While morning (between 7 am and 11 am) is the most intense traffic time of the day on the departure from Slovakia, afternoon is very much crowded on the departure from Ukraine. These peaks are the result of petty commodity trade. The same might be applied to the year season. There are peaks during holidays, before Christmas and Easter when the Ukrainian workers return home and Slovak citizens make more intense shopping in Ukraine. While Slovak travelers usually follow these peaks, Ukrainian citizens continue traveling all the time.

According to the questionnaire, for more than one half of all travelers surveyed **the major reason for crossing the border was “to further own business interests”** which meant especially **petty trade**, and/or “to fulfill official duties assigned by the employer”. Roughly 16% of travelers mentioned the visit of family members as the major reason for crossing the border. There were very few first time travelers, most of which were tourists (10%). The large group of tourists consisted of Czech citizens. The remaining travelers (almost one fourth of

the entire survey) mentioned other reasons or there were no data available. It should be underlined, however, that due to the clandestine character of certain activities, such as cigarettes trade and petrol tourism, many people tended to hide the actual reason of traveling. This might explain why there is relatively high level of tourists in the survey in the region where there is not well developed tourist infrastructure (10%) as well as why there is the quite frequent response “other reasons” (25%).

Our ethnographic research showed a prevalent petty commodity character of traveling, i.e. the number of petty traders might have been much higher than the one declared by travelers. For example, we observed a high number of cars with just one passenger (one half of all travelers). We consider the major reason for crossing the border for them was petrol tourism. The second largest group of travelers was traveling with a family member (20%) and traveling with a friend (10%) or business partner/fellow worker (7%). More than 13% of data were not obtained. In addition to bazaar shopping, the composition of the second group indirectly indicates that the higher number of travelers in the car increases the revenue from petty commodity businesses, especially cigarettes (it is allowed to bring ten packs of cigarettes per week per person).

The average time for crossing the border (excluding truck drivers who were not queried on regular basis) was 234 minutes (almost four hours). We found this figure very much a subjective estimation of travelers. We experienced that the actual waiting time varied according to the day of the week and time of the day and, according to our own experiences, it took roughly two hours in average (it was more or less fluent at mid-day and up to four hours at mornings of working days or on Saturday morning). According to some experienced travelers, it was not an exception if the waiting times were exceeding 7 or 8 hours one way. As virtually every traveler indicated the **waiting times was the major discomfort** they were facing while crossing the border. As the travelers claimed, the waiting time also depended on the border guard and customs shift at work. In their opinion, some shifts work faster than others.

**The actual border procedure** on the departure from Slovakia **was fluent**. The average time of the procedure (the time travelers claimed they had spent at the border zone) was 30 minutes. This also roughly coincided with our own experience (20 minutes). Although the actual procedure (checking the documents and custom clearance) was very fluent, the problem was with the management of the traffic between Slovak and Ukrainian parts of the border crossing, i. e. with “no man’s land” in between the border crossings where passengers’ cars were waiting for being allowed to proceed to Ukrainian border crossing procedure. This caused that waiting time on the departure from Slovakia (in front of the border crossing) was often much longer than it would had been if there was sufficient infrastructure and coordination of traffic on both sides of the border crossings.

Therefore, **the second problem** indicated most frequently by travelers was the **lack of coordination of the border traffic between Slovak and Ukrainian side of the crossing**. According to our research, the lack of common management became visible especially during shift changes, in different practices of “official” and “unofficial” permits on Ukrainian and Slovak side, and in the limits resulting from insufficient infrastructure (see below for more details).

As a matter of particular **discomfort among travelers was the disrespect for the position in the queue**. Especially on Ukrainian side, CD line was a frequent “abuse” of rules where the favorite travelers could cross the border faster than ordinary travelers. We saw several cars without CD labels that were allowed to pass through this line and it was clear that there was a hierarchy among the travelers depending on a small bribe for entering Ukrainian border zone or preferential treatment of certain types of travelers considered by other travelers as having special relationships with the border guard and custom officers (such as resulting from family and friendship ties). Some travelers nevertheless mentioned the nepotism was also common among the Slovak border guard. Due to the sufficient infrastructure, on the Slovak side these problems were less visible than on the Ukrainian side and we found only minor cases that were questionable, such as

the businessman asking the head of shift to be allowed to cross regardless the line due to his work engagement on the other side of the border. As we discussed with one of these men, an entrepreneur who crosses the border everyday and sometimes even several times during the day, it would be useful to find the way for creating a special regime for the people whose work demands faster border procedure. As the trade, investment, and work migration between Slovakia and Ukraine increases, either the border regime should become much more flexible in general or there will be a need to make the crossing of the border easier for frequent travelers with working obligations.

**The evaluation of behavior of Slovak border guard and custom clearance officers towards travelers was generally positive among the travelers**. More than one half of travelers claimed the Slovak officers were either very or rather polite and their work was efficient and professional. Only one fifth said they were incompetent and their work inefficient (for the rest – 30% – it was difficult to say or there was no data available).

According to the survey, 55% of travelers have never seen any sign of corruption among Slovak officers. Nevertheless, virtually everybody considers corruption **is hidden, more sophisticated and very much present at the border**. Only 16% of travelers have witnessed corruption behavior among the officers. It is generally held among Slovak travelers that Ukrainian border officials are corrupt (and ask for bribe from among the Slovak travelers, a typical example is 5–10 UAH (hryvna) bribe in the passport for allowing to proceed faster at the border zone). The Ukrainian travelers generally claimed the higher level of corruption is among the Slovak border and customs officers than among the Ukrainian ones. However, these opinions have not been confirmed in the survey. There was no significant difference between the two nationalities as far as the level of corruption practices among the Slovak officers was concerned. Due to the fact that there were no reliable data available from the past, it is hard to make any conclusion about the prospects of corruption at the border crossing. For some observers the level of corruption among

the Slovak border guard and customs officers has decreased in recent years, for others corruption practices remained very present, but became more sophisticated and hidden.

In order to offer new insights into corruption, it is necessary to carry out long-term participant observation among the travelers. The direction for further research on corruption might be to focus on frequent operation of large off road cars (approx. 10 years old) entering border crossing several times per day. For the experienced travelers these are the petrol smugglers. We noticed rumors that these were the cars belonging to the Ukrainian border guard officers who act in cooperation with Slovak officers. We can not confirm these opinions, but we observed several young males driving the same off road cars across the border several times per day. We recorded a local opinion that these young males are considered successful according to local standards. Their presence in the queue also causes extending the waiting times. The research results on corruption nevertheless show the **need for a closer co-operation between the two border authorities in order to suppress it efficiently.**

Especially **Ukrainian citizens claimed the personal controls were very detailed** at the Slovak side of the border crossing, certainly more detailed than in the case of EU citizens. The Ukrainians also experienced more frequently than other travelers a superior behavior from the side of Slovak officers. As one of the travelers said “we are all treated like smugglers” and “the citizens from third world countries”.

An unequal treatment of non-EU citizens by the Slovak border and customs officers has been acknowledged by the travelers regardless of nationality. While more than one third of all Ukrainian citizens queried claimed that Slovak border guard and custom clearance officers treat all the travelers in the same way, **more than 40% of Ukrainians had the feeling as being treated as underdog** compared to EU travelers. Among the Slovaks, more than 18% said the officers have the same attitude towards all travelers, but **almost 30% claimed they behave differently towards travelers from different countries**, in this case especially Ukrainians.

As one Ukrainian traveler confirmed, it is difficult to complain about unequal treatment. The Slovak officers usually ask the travelers to call to the capital Bratislava but, as this traveler mentioned, nobody picks the phone up there.

**Slovak Roma expressed discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin.** Keeping in mind generally “racist” attitudes towards Roma in Slovakia that is rooted in economic exclusion of Roma and in the difficulties in incorporating them into labor market, the discriminatory treatment of Roma at the border is not exceptional. The significant survival strategy practiced by the Roma – the imminent reason for crossing the border among them is petty trade and especially cigarettes trade – makes them additionally suspicious in the eyes of customs officers.

The infrastructure at the Slovak side of the border crossing has been significantly modernized in 2006 and 2007 and the Slovak side of the border crossing has passed all the parameters required by the Schengen regime. However, the travelers expressed dissatisfaction with the cleanness of the areas outside of but adjusting to the border crossing. They also considered the accessibility to toilet facilities very limited, especially while waiting outside of the border zone. Extremely bad conditions for hygiene and lack of rest facilities were expressed by the truck drivers (there is no terminal for trucks at the border and the only opportunity for using the facilities for the drivers is in the regional capital Košice, app. 100 km away from the border). All these infrastructural limitations contribute to a **generally negative opinion of the travelers as far as the cleanness in close vicinity of the border crossing** is concerned, even though the border crossing as such has been renovated and is kept clean.

One third of those surveyed claimed all the border crossings are the same at Slovak-Ukrainian border. Almost one fourth of travelers considered Vyšné Nemecké to be the most travelers’ friendly, and 11% argued Vyšné Nemecké is the worst border crossing (there was quite high number of unknown or “I do not know” and “no data” responses – roughly one third of those queried). **Most of the people expressed a lack of information concerning the customs rules**

or were not aware where to look for the information concerning customs rules when crossing the border. It should be underlined that usual search for information is through asking more experienced travelers on informal basis.

## 5. Characteristic of the people crossing the border in Vel'ké Slemence / Mali Selmenci

Vel'ké Slemence/Mali Selmenci is the border crossing for pedestrians opened in 2005. Its opening was initiated by the local referendum (85% of inhabitants voted "yes" for opening the border). It is opened for citizens of EU countries and Ukraine every day between 8:00 am and 20:00 pm. There are between 700 to 1000 crossings per day. The border crossing united the villages that were divided in 1946. Vel'ké Slemence has approximately 600 inhabitants, Mali Selmenci 150. The exclusive destination of pedestrians is Mali Selmenci. Most of the travelers park their cars in Vel'ké Slemence and a minor part arrives by bus from the town Vel'ké Kapušany or adjoining villages.

More than one half of travelers surveyed at this border crossing (54%) cross this border point at least once a week. **Virtually everybody crossing the border has a Slovak passport.** For Ukrainians the visa for crossing the border is needed and this visa can be obtained in Uzhgorod (it takes time and some costs to obtain them). In contrast to Slovak citizens, there is not much that the Ukrainians can do on the Slovak side of the border. At the time of our fieldwork we have noticed one day when only two Czech citizens and only one Ukrainian citizen crossed the border while the rest of travelers had Slovak passport!

Unlike in Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod, there was equal number of men and women crossing this border crossing. The average age of a traveler was 46 years. If Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod is a regionally important border crossing, Vel'ké Slemence/Mali Selmenci might be considered very local – the vast majority of the travelers are Slovak citizens (many of them Roma or citizens of Hungarian origin) who come from the

neighboring Hungarian speaking villages and towns (94% of all surveyed came from the area located less than 50 km away from the border crossing). When compared to Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod, the level of people with primary education was higher and the level of people with higher education was lower at Vel'ké Slemence/Mali Selmenci. There were also a high number of pensioners and housewives crossing the border. These findings widely supported the demographic characteristics of the poor rural region.

With the exception of few family visits – 11% of travelers mentioned family visit in addition to shopping purposes – **the almost exclusive reason for crossing the border was petty commodity trade.** Since 2005 there have been family shops flourishing along the main village road in Mali Selmenci and new shops are still being built. Thanks to public transport, there is a regular connection with Uzhgorod (30 km distance). Nevertheless, Slovak citizens make shopping most willingly in the village where the prices are slightly higher than they are in the bazaar in the city. The average visit takes roughly 2–3 hours and the remaining two-three hours both ways travelers spend on queuing. The border crossing seems to serve to different purposes than its advocates argued when the border crossing was opened. While the purpose today is almost exclusively the petty trade – especially cigarettes, alcohol, can food, clothes, etc. – by the time of opening the border crossing the idea was to re-unite the once divided village and re-establish once divided family ties. In the opinion of locals, the border opening brought significant increase of income for municipalities on both sides of the border. In spite of frequent presence of "strangers" in once isolated village, **the opening of the border is well-perceived by inhabitants and travelers alike.**

If compared to Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod, only one third of travelers in Vel'ké Slemence crossed the border alone and one half with a family member or/and a friend. This indicates the popularity of family shopping as a typical feature of this border crossing. An average time for crossing the border was estimated by travelers to 109 minutes. During our presence at border, however, the waiting time was very short, the crossing took roughly 20 minutes.

The actual border procedure on the departure from Slovakia is very fast. The problem arises after travelers fill in the immigration cards before entering Ukraine. As in the case of Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod, the waiting time becomes significantly longer due to the crowded “in-between” zone. This longer procedure makes the waiting time longer also in front of border crossing on the departure from Slovakia.

Due to the “family atmosphere” at the border crossing, the evaluation of the work of officers was also positive among the travelers. Contrary to the opinion held in Vyšné Nemecké, many travelers also mentioned that Ukrainian officers behave very well towards them. It might be concluded that **border procedures at small border crossings are generally more travelers’ friendly than the ones at bigger crossings.**

The positive opinion of travelers might be applied to **corruption**, too. Corruption was **considered very rare at this border crossing** (71% of travelers have never seen any signs of corruption at this border crossing and for additional 4% it has been very rare). This opinion comes from the fact that due to the size and type of the border crossing, there is a limited opportunity for illegal trade to flourish. Nevertheless, some travelers criticized nepotism and favourization of friends among the officers which resulted in disrespect for the waiting position in the queue.

It should be underlined that much higher numbers of travelers are Roma at this border crossing. As in Vyšné Nemecké, the Roma expressed certain dissatisfaction with some discriminatory practices from the side of officers. As we were told by travelers and border guard officers, there are entire large Roma families traveling every week to Ukraine and bringing back as many packs of cigarettes as possible. As our source claimed, some of these might end in the black market in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. It can be argued, however, that **Roma represent a large special subgroup of petty commodities traders at Slovak-Ukrainian border.**

As far as infrastructure is concerned, the people mostly criticized the provisional border fa-

cilities (see the pictures bellow). As the major discomforts the impossibility to use the toilet (there is an insufficient number of chemical WC at the border crossing) and the lack of rest facilities such as benches in front of the border point were stated. The information availability among the travelers about the customs rules was considered higher in Vel’ké Slemence/Mali Selmenci than in Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod. Most of the information was located in the area in between the border crossing.

## 6. Work of the external EU border crossing points in opinion of the Border Guard and the Custom Officers

The major finding concerning the border guard and custom officers in Vyšné Nemecké is that there is no common management as far as border procedure is concerned. There are no common trainings organized between Slovak and Ukrainian officers, especially at the lower level. For those border and custom officers involved, the possible coordination of Slovak-Ukrainian management of border procedures must start from above, from among the higher ranked officials.

According to the officers, the information on border and custom procedures are widely available on the internet, at consulates, as well as at the border crossing. As the officers claimed, the travelers are usually well educated and they are able to find the information they need easily. The finding on the availability of information contradicts with the opinion of travelers.

As the officers underlined, there is no need on their side to speak a foreign language except for Russian (Ukrainian) that everybody among the officers is able to speak on communicative basis. English or any other language is not used at the border at all.

Concerning the infrastructure in front of the border crossing, the officers would appreciate closer cooperation with the road police. Especially the assistance with the coordination of traffic in

the close vicinity of the border crossing would help to make the crossing procedure more fluent. The major problem at this border crossing is the unavailability of rest facilities for trucks.

Although one of the major criticisms from among the travelers was that contrary to the situation before the renovation, the border crossing is nowadays closed for walkers, the officers appreciated this situation because it made the smuggling less common and the clearance procedures easier.

The more experienced officials consider the simplification of Schengen rules – as avoiding using different rules for individual import of cigarettes, for example that differentiates from country to country (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) as another way how to make the EU entry procedure easier.

Ukrainian border guards wish to have more information on Schengen regime. Also, infrastructure on the Ukrainian side of the border crossing is unbearable and the technical documents are incompatible with the ones on Slovak side. The organization of the work at both sides of the border Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod (shifts, breaks, bank holidays) is not coordinated. There is a special question opened for Ukrainian border officers concerning the exceptions from the Schengen rule for the small border movement.

According to Ukrainian officers, the relationships between border officers are not particularly good at border crossing in Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod. Common shifts might contribute to increased cooperation and higher efficiency of the border crossing procedures. These opinions were confirmed by the Slovak officers, too. There is a willingness on Ukrainian side to extend cooperation. As in the case of common training among the border guards which is already common, the closer cooperation shall be extended to Slovak and Ukrainian customs officers as well. It would be useful for Slovak officers to learn about the Ukrainian rules as well. In the opinion of the officers, the crossings for pedestrians might be opened only in the case that it will serve for pedestrians separately, not as a part of the road border crossing.

As the border guard and customs officers in Vel'ké Slemence underlined, the border crossing was designed for approximately 200 crossings per day. Nowadays, there are 1000 and exceptionally even 1400 crossings per day which demands additional work from the officers. If the number of travelers is considered as the major problem among the Slovak officers, the cooperation and relationships with Ukrainian colleagues was considered as particularly good by them.

## 7. Influence of the border regime on local communities in Slovakia

People take advantages from the price differences between Slovakia and Ukraine. The border regime – especially the introduction of visa – affected the local economy in a negative way. The local shops have had lower turnout of products, especially after the crossing for walkers was closed.

At the same time, the municipalities do not have any direct profit from the border crossing. In Vyšné Nemecké the crossing is exempted from paying local taxes. Due to the increased movement of people, at the same time, there are additional costs for cleaning the streets (the road along which most of the dust is spread belongs to the region, the local roads to the municipality which is unable to finance the cleaning activities) as well as higher level of criminality activities. As the municipality representatives suggested, it would be good to introduce a monitoring system in the villages for combating border crime. Still another problem is the reparation of the damages caused by the illegal migrants and border police – such as crop damages, etc. As we have heard from the municipality representatives, there is a lack of co-operation between the municipalities such as the one in Vyšné Nemecké (247 inhab.) and the border crossing authorities.

There is a lack of information and training from the side of border officials for the municipal representatives and the infrastructure is not sufficient – there is no public toilet or better

quality restaurant at the border. There is just one lower class restaurant opened between 7 am and 3 am, three village shops and two exchange offices (open until 9 pm). The village is expecting to benefit from small border movement as well as from the cross-border projects within EU neighboring policy. There is a lack of information about the changes prepared in relation to the Schengen system, both on the Slovak side as well as in Ukraine.

Forming a separate type of travelers, the priests are treated with respect at the border. Due to the historical legacy and current activities, the Church, especially the Greek Catholic Church, might be considered as building a bridge between the people on both sides of the border. It is also one of the channels providing social care for those in disadvantaged positions. Religious activities shall also be acknowledged while preparing recommendations as far as EU neighboring policy is concerned.

Due to their activities in Transcarpathian Ukraine and Eastern Slovakia, the businesspersons form another special group of “regional” travelers. As our random investigation showed, the businesspersons pay bribe almost always if they want to cross the border faster. As far as corruption is concerned, it is certainly better than it used to be, the biggest corrupt fishes from the border crossing have been suspended, but it is still hard to follow the rules if one wants to follow his/her business interests on time. Especially Ukrainian officers are considered corrupt by the Slovak entrepreneurs who regularly cross the border!

## 8. Findings and recommendations

There are three major findings of the research:

1. There are different capacities and possibilities of Slovakia and Ukraine in dealing with problems concerned with the border (such as financial resources, management incompatibility, legislation, different quality of human potential, responsibilities to the third parties – EU, NATO, CIS, etc.).

2. There is continuing difference in price levels in Slovakia and Ukraine, especially in case of cigarettes and petrol. This difference is most likely to continue playing the role of major attraction for petty traders also in the long run.
3. There is a common interest in economic development and human capital of the regions on both sides of the border. For the time being, this interest very much depends on the decisions made in Kyiv and Bratislava.

We found the following major problems:

1. There is long waiting time for custom and border clearance.
2. The infrastructure around and at the border crossings is insufficient.
3. There are limited human capacities as far as education and communication of Slovak and Ukrainian border guard and custom officers are concerned.
4. Although the situation has progressed recently, the unequal behavior of the officers towards the travelers, disrespect for the waiting procedure as well as bribery have still been acknowledged.
5. There is a lack of cooperation between the border crossing authorities and local authorities (most visible in the questions of responsibility for the cleanness of the areas adjusting to border crossings). The municipalities are not compensated for the discomfort of being located in close proximity of the border.
6. The travelers report the lack of information on the changes of border legislation

We suggest the following recommendations shall be taken into account:

1. The infrastructure shall be compatible on both sides of the border crossing in Vyšné Nemecké (such as 5 lines for cars throughout the whole border crossing, Slovak and Ukrainian). Also, the co-ordination of Slovak and Ukrainian border guard and customs officers shall be more common.
2. It is necessary to detach lorry transport from the passenger car transport in Vyšné Nemecké. An acute requirement for achieving the division of personal and truck transport is the building of terminal and rest rooms facilities for the drivers.

3. It is desirable to prohibit petty trade with sensitive commodities (especially cigarettes and petrol). This can be achieved by lowering the legal limits for import to the EU, additional fee for import and increasing the intensity of clearance controls outside of the border crossing
4. We consider worth of identifying the possibilities for cooperation and sharing of experiences between Slovak and Ukrainian border officials. This cooperation requires more intense communication on regular basis between Slovak and Ukrainian border guard and customs officers at lower levels and includes common shifts and common shift times. It would be worth of thinking to initiate the accidental Slovak-Ukrainian controls of wither side of border crossings.
5. It is necessary to keep the high standards of professionalism among the border guard and custom officers through trainings, team building, establishing a code of ethical behavior. The continuing building of prestige and social status of customs and border guard officers can prevent bribing.
6. In cooperation with the road police, it is necessary to solve the traffic problem outside of the custom area as well as keeping the waiting procedure in front of the border crossing under control (avoid overtaking in the queue).
7. We suggest that the experiences with anticorruption schemes among the Slovak officers shall help to advance anti-corruption policies of Ukrainian partners. The possible assistance shall be initiated politically.
8. In order to share information, it can be mutually beneficial to initiate regular meetings between border officials and regional subjects, especially municipalities, academic institutions and NGOs working in the area. It is also necessary to help local self government to keep the border crossings neighborhoods clean and tidy. This includes especially financial compensation for litter cleaning, toilet cleanness, etc.
9. It would be useful to create regular communication strategy for the public concerning the border legislation and procedures. This can include information tables in further distance from the border crossing, organization of seminars, media coverage of the border procedure, etc.
10. It is necessary to continue monitoring the functioning of the border on both sides of the border and extend it to the visa policies that are related to the effectiveness of the border functioning.

## 9. Conclusion

On the level of societies, it is necessary to change the perception of the border: the politicians' happiness and optimism concerning the fulfillment of Schengen requirements is not a positive achievement in the end; the border is a necessary wrong-doing and it is related to a global increase of migration, not to the relations between Slovakia and Ukraine. There is a need to accept the border but the politicians shall make their best to keep it as open as possible. The reason for the open policy towards the east is based on common experiences of communist period (closed borders) as well as on the popularity of Central Europe in Western Ukraine (political capital which shall not be lost). The new Schengen border is neither historically legitimate nor in the interests of neighboring partners; it is a necessary condition for entering Schengen regime. Both, Slovakia and Ukraine need more flexible rules as far as Schengen regime is concerned. In the case of Slovakia it is even more important as far as it keeps its promises concerning the support for further EU enlargement. The Slovak policy shall be more active towards the open border regime, not only consuming the requirements of JHA. The major challenge for Slovakia and new EU member states in foreseeable future will be immigration. The question is not if but from where the possible immigrants might come from if CEE countries wish to keep its economic growth and living standards. The neighboring regions of the enlarged EU can be the most suitable providers of mutually beneficial migration. Last but not least, the major ethical problem is that the people living along the Slovak-Ukrainian border are certainly not responsible for the side of the border they found themselves in!