



Partium – Borders, Ethnic Groups and Territorial Development

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A Review of the Volume

Bakk, Miklós – Süli-Zakar, István – Szilágyi, Ferenc:

*Partium – Borders, Ethnic Groups and Territorial Development*¹

Through studies emphasizing multiple aspects of its formation across various historical eras to the present day, this volume is focused on a detailed presentation of the Partium region first as an independent and then as a bisected region along the borderline set up during the Treaty of Trianon. The central theme of the volume's four main, partly separate chapters is thus Partium as a region. The authors treat the topic in a way typical of scientific works, combining different research methods and tools. It should already be noted that the way the topic is discussed is original and in many ways thought-provoking.

The four separate studies, in fact the main chapters of the volume, although structurally do not form a complex unit, are complementary in nature, which is clear and sufficiently transparent. The studies in question have a number of subsections, and at the end of each there is a list of bibliographic references.

The first chapter attempts to present in sufficient details the possible ways of cross-border cooperation, the possibilities of regional and territorial development through it, and the established Euroregions in Central and Eastern Europe. *István Süli-Zakar* begins with a historical introduction, more precisely, he describes the policies of European countries on regionalism, also the economic cooperation between France and Germany, which is the basis of the European Union and which will later enable the creation of Euroregions. Many consider the above mentioned cooperation to be the first example of Euroregions. The author explores the essential details and contexts by numerous practical examples for the processes

¹ Miklós, BAKK – SÜLI-ZAKAR, István – SZILÁGYI, Ferenc. 2019. *Partium – Borders, Ethnic Groups and Territorial Development*. Budapest: Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary – Faculty of Law. ISSN 2676-9980.

just mentioned, which, in comparison with the events of the regime change in Central and Eastern Europe, provide answers to the failure of ethnic regionalism attempted in this region. At the same time, he discusses in several subsections primarily the role, the transformation, and development of Hungarian–Romanian border settlements, counties, and possible regions after cross-border cooperation come into view. In order to illustrate the collaborations in detail, the author presents as a case study the Carpathian Euroregion established in 1993 and the Danube-Kris-Mureş-Tisa (DKMT) Euroregion established in 1997 as well as a comprehensive analysis of the official cooperation and development since 2002 between Hungary's Hajdú-Bihar and Romania's Bihar counties,² taking into account the issues of minority existence. It can be observed that although the focus of the study is on the Partium region, the author also specifies international collaborations outside its territory, presenting all the examples operating along the Hungarian–Romanian border, including the Interregio Euroregion established in 2000, as the already mentioned DKMT Euroregion.³

The second chapter aims to present the different communities, regional reforms, and ethno-regional models of Europe. Miklós Bakk begins his study with a detailed historical overview, which discusses the mentioned issue from the initial processes of state- and nation-building particularities to the paradigms of the modern state. The author pays special attention to the maturation and consolidation of ethnic and national identity as well as to the development and transformation of the living space of different communities. In his description, he presents a number of definitions relevant to the subject, but he does so in such a way that the text remains easy-flowing and readable throughout. In the course of presenting the ethno-regional models, Bakk mentions Hechter's diffusion and internal colony model and Rokkan's theory, which details the relationship between the central and peripheral consolidations of a state; he also cites Hroch's approach to nation and state building as well as Roth's approach to regionalism. The work systematizes, explains meaningfully the presented models and to some extent creates correlations between them. Furthermore, for the sake of transparency and comparability, the author edited and inserted simple yet complex explanatory tables into his study. It then illustrates the state and administrative structures that exist and operate today by presenting a number of European states, regions, and autonomous provinces (Åland Islands, Catalonia, the Basque Country, North Tyrol, the decentralization of the United Kingdom), referring to all significant historical events concerning the mentioned territories and their populations. It is worth emphasizing that plans

2 Within the Hajdú-Bihar–Bihar Euroregion, also the Bihar/Bihor micro-Euroregion was established in 2003.

3 BARANYI, Béla. 2009. Paradigmaváltás a határon átnyúló kapcsolatokban. *Tér és Társadalom* 23(2): 25–43.

for regionalism, which have not yet been put into practice, are also mentioned (for ex., the case of France and Romania).

The third chapter focuses exclusively on the historical Partium region, from its formation after the Battle of Mohács to the present day. In addition to making the precise geographical delimitation of the region and to presenting the most important changes in its territory, Ferenc Szilágyi enumerates all significant historical events, the official conventions and contracts in chronological order that can be linked to the topic. He subdivides the subsections of his study according to the most defining moments concerning the region of Partium such as: the already mentioned Battle of Mohács as a result of which it became an independent region for the first time; the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, according to which it was included into the unified administrative system of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; the Treaty of Trianon as a result of which its historical territory is bisected by the newly drawn Romanian–Hungarian border; the administrative-territorial reorganization periods in Romania. It should be emphasized that in presenting these processes, the author also discusses the alternative ideas which were eventually not realized and put into practice – through these aspects, a much broader picture unfolds to the reader regarding the borders of the region, its internal organization, reorganization, and circumstances. Although the primary focus of the study is on the administrative-territorial reorganizations and decisions, the various and relevant social, ethnic, economic, and infrastructural aspects of the region are also mentioned as they are an integral part of the issue. Finally, the fourth chapter of the volume introduces the possibility of the Partium region's self-determination, more precisely the potential directions and obstacles related to it. Ferenc Szilágyi discusses the multicultural nature of Partium, the cohesive nature of the region, and its geographical location (along the country border) as arguments in favour of autonomy. At the same time, in the case of enforcing self-determination, perhaps the most significant limitation which he mentions is the existence of a less characteristic regional identity among both Hungarian and Romanian ethnic groups. The author presents and details these aspects through a comparison with Szeklerland.

The volume, while spanning vast distances of time and space, does not make it difficult for the reader to follow the detailed descriptions. In terms of content, the work is rich in knowledge, details, and examples, so it does not need to be supplemented; however, as for the structural composition, if the reader changes the reading order of the main chapters, the connections between them become more understandable. The editors of the volume, through the arrangement of the chapters, set up an order starting with the larger area in the geographical sense (Europe) and heading towards the description of the smaller one (Partium). If the reader does not have sufficient prior knowledge of the different European regions, it is likely that it will be difficult for him/her to comprehend the analysed

correlations with their own historical context as well as with many other specific features. From my point of view, it is thus worthwhile to read the third and fourth chapters first, which outline a detailed analysis of Partium from its formation to the present day. Afterwards, the study of European ethno-regional models is recommended, which provides a rich historical background for the formation of many states, regions, and autonomous provinces, thereby increasing the level of knowledge in this regard and establishing a framework for comparability. Finally, knowing the practices, theories, models, and, last but not least, the aspirations of state structures and regionalism, we can turn our attention to the possible ways of cross-border cooperation and, at the same time, to regional development.

This volume pays maximum attention to the systematization, synthesis, and a kind of further reflection of the knowledge processed in all studies related to the topic and their central issues, which goes beyond the cited references and provides additional information. Hungarian and Romanian as well as international authors are represented in approximately equal proportions in the case of citations, which fact demonstrates the knowledge and professionalism as well as the authors' successful attempt to go beyond the local and regional medium (the cited authors are: András A. Gergely, Thomas Benedikter, Csaba Béres, Luiza Bialasiewicz, Vernon Bogdanor, Gábor Csüllög, Daniel Elazar, György Éger, Yash Ghai, Christian Giordano, Ioan Horga, Alexandru Ilieș, Rudolf Joó, Michael Keating, Csaba Miklós Kovács, Will Kymlicka, Gheorghe Mahara, Svitlana Mitryayeva, Anssi Paasi, Miroslav Papa, Constantin Țoca, and László Vofkori).

While making the background of Partium's administrative-territorial history known internationally, compared to the information found in the used bibliographic sources, the authors of this volume draw our attention to a number of new connections and contexts through the systematization and remodelling of existing knowledge.

From a methodological point of view, the only shortcoming is not providing a description of the historical comparative research methodology applied in writing the volume.⁴ However, this fact is not equal to ignoring the research methodology procedures as both case study and historical comparative methods are clearly applied in the studies. As for the use of professional literature in the volume, the authors make use of legal documents and contemporary regulations, articles published in modern scientific journals as well as other professional works. Regarding the use of bibliographic reference, the authors prefer intertextual referencing, but both explanations in the footnotes and citations are used.

The style of the volume is basically objective in tone, transparent and well organized. Nevertheless, it is recommended not only for professionals active in the research area but also for students or researchers in the related domains as its understanding presupposes certain basic knowledge. The volume also includes

4 TOMKA, Béla. 2005. Az összehasonlító módszer a történetírásban – eredmények és kihasználatlan lehetőségek. *Aetas* 20(1–2): 243–258.

plenty of illustrations and tables embedded in the chapters, but the authors do not list these systematically as appendices. As for the printing of the volume, it was published as a paperback book under the care of the publisher of Károli Gáspár Reformed University in Budapest.

Overall, the work of Miklós Bakk, István Süli-Zakar, and Ferenc Szilágyi: *Partium – Borders, Ethnic Groups and Territorial Development* seeks to provide a broad insight into Partium as a historical region, also covering regional reforms, Euroregions and ethno-regional models as well as possible ways of cross-border cooperation. Although the scientific methodological procedures applied in writing this volume are not described in detail by the authors, their practical application can be ascertained while reading the study. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that both the practical and the theoretical aspects of the book are valuable. With all of these aspects, the scientific value of the volume is unquestionable; moreover, the authors are dealing with its central issue from a system approach perspective. Finally, I would like to point out that the present work would also be recommended for use in higher education.