

# Formalized Borderline as a Prerequisite for Optimal Cross-border Relations: Nine Years of the International Border between Slovenia and Croatia

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**SUMMARY** The first part of the paper\* discusses some theoretical assumptions such as distinguishing borderlines and borderlands, presents three types of relations between bordering states and borderland regions ("iron curtain" case, no relations between the neighbouring states exist but the borderland residents find the way at least for some contacts and exchanges of goods, the relations are normatively defined and co-operation between the neighbouring states and among local communities and their residents in the borderlands regions are developed) and puts forward the effects of various intensity of border delimitation on different fields of co-operation between neighbouring states and borderlands. Here the author points out that the case of "the border in transition" has not yet the normative frame regulating behaviour and the actions of the borderland communities and residents in detail. The second part of the paper, prepared on the basis of researches carried out in the last few years by Slovenian scientists in Slovenian borderlands, concentrates on the borderland situation along the new 546 km long Slovenian-Croatian border. Distinction between the borderland residents based on the nationality has gained importance after the creation of two new independent states. (It is known that the percentage of Croats within the total population of the Slovenian borderlands has been much higher than that of Slovenians in the Croatian borderlands, mostly for the reason of different level of economic development of borderland regions.) The changes in everyday life of the residents of the areas along the new border are characterized by the lack of local border-crossings and by the diminished frequency of cross-border contacts, by stressing either similarities or differences between spoken languages (depending on geographic characteristics of the bor-

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derland) on both sides of the border, and by exposing the problems of everyday life of the borderland residents such as cultivation of agricultural land on the other side of the border, cross-border employment (e.g. work permits), use of services (schools, medical institutions, shops), formal procedures at border-crossings, smuggling. In the conclusion, the author urges the need of formalizing the borderline between Slovenia and Croatia for the sake of diminishing the problems of everyday life of the borderland residents and for normalizing the co-operation between the two neighbouring states.

*Key words:* new border, borderline, borderlands, cross-border relations, Slovenia, Croatia

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## 1. Introduction

Due to the fact that the international border between Slovenia and Croatia has not been formally defined yet, cross-border conflicts and incidents have frequently taken place, and the cooperation between the two neighbouring states as well as between borderland communities has suffered. Until the borderline is formalized, the borderline in use on June 25, 1991 - the independence day of Slovenia, has been in power. Among the results of the latest political changes in Croatia (the election of the new parliament - December 1999, and presidential elections - January 2000), the contacts between the two governments' officials have been intensified as well as the optimism among the citizens of Croatia and borderland residents on both sides of the border has increased. Thus, it can be expected that the findings of the borderland research will be utilized for relevant political decision-making in the near future.

In my presentation some theoretical assumptions will be defined, some of the latest empirical evidence of the situation in the borderlands presented, and on this bases a conclusion will be drawn.

## 2. Some theoretical assumptions

**Borderlines and borderlands.** Border as a demarcation line between the territories of two nation-states serves the purpose of distinguishing two political systems within which different sets of norms are in power. In order to secure the normal functioning of a state and its subsystems, border crossing requires specific formal procedures. It is the formal nature of a borderline which makes the life of borderland residents difficult or at last complicated.

In contrast to the borderline, a borderland region applies to the territory and the residents along the both sides of a borderline taking into consideration similar natural and cultural characteristics as well as social relations among the borderland residents.

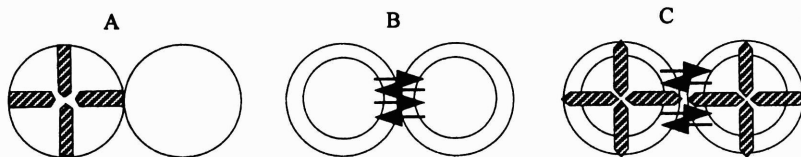
### Three types of relations between bordering states and their borderlands.

Cross-border relations among borderland residents (economic, cultural, recreational, contacts with relatives and friends) are to great extent determined by the relations between the neighbouring states. Their normative arrangements as well as general political atmosphere stimulate or hamper local cross-border relations. Theoretically, there are three types of relations between borderlands (Picture 1).

Type A, characterised by no relations between the neighbouring states neither among their borderlands occurs rarely (iron curtain countries), for even if there are no relations between the neighbouring states, the borderland residents find the ways at least for some contacts and exchanges of goods (Type B). Type C indicates the relations/cooperations between the neighbouring states and among local communities and their residents in the borderlands' regions (Barbič, 1997).

Picture 1

Three types of relations between bordering states and borderland regions



**The effects of the intensity of the border delimitation on different fields of cooperation.** The stronger the role of a border in delimiting the neighbouring nation-states is, the greater the difficulties borderland residents face in their cross-border relations are (some of which hold the vital importance in their everyday life) (Table 1).

In a case of a border in transition (Barbič, 1998a) the normative frame for behaviour/actions of borderland communities and residents is not defined, at least not in details. In such situation an agreement about traffic and cooperation between the neighbouring borderlands is essential for life along the border. Everyday activities of local residents such as cultivating land on the other side of the border, using physically closest services (schools, medical institutions), all of which were

Table 1

The residents' estimation (the average on 1 - 5 point scale) of the relations between the neighbouring states and the borderland residents according to gender

	Total	Male	Female	$\chi^2$	Significance
- relations between Slovenia and Croatia	3.2	3.3	3.1	6.081	0.193
- relations among the borderland residents of the two states	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.051	0.549
Relations among the residents of various nationalities within Brežice municipality:					
- before independence	3.6	3.5	3.7	5.533	0.237
- after independence	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.650	0.618
N	(331)	(171)	(160)		

once self-understanding, are in a case of a new border carried out with great difficulties or completely abandoned. Thus, the borderland local communities and residents are "forced" to gravitate to inland regions. Such orientation can, indeed, bring fruitful results as any integration does. But such results are diminished by the impoverishment of former cross-border relations. However, in the course of time, when cross-border relations are formally arranged, the effects of the "forced" regional inland integration of borderland communities definitely enrich the cross-border relations as well.

**The voice of borderland communities / residents need to be "heard" at higher levels.** It has to be expected that in a case of new states formalizing a borderline, defining interstate and borderlands relations take some time. If this time is too long, citizens and especially borderland residents get impatient with their state officials and try to find own solutions to their problems. The local cross-border relations are in such a case limited to dealing only with the most essential problems of everyday life.

In an interstate negotiation process the problems of borderland communities and residents are most likely to be neglected unless they are brought to the states' committees via local initiatives which are usually launched by the most dramatic events. In order to avoid dramatic situations in the course of negotiations about the borderline, borderland communities need to be equal partners with the respective states' committees. In such a case the representatives of bordering communities will bring their interests and problems to the state's level and have at the same time an opportunity not only to understand the interest of their state but also to learn that some of their local interests need to be subordinated to broader, e.g. to state's interests.

Borderland research can contribute a great deal in bringing the interests of borderland communities and their residents to the level of the state if done at the right time and if results are presented to the right officials/committees as well as to the general public whose opinion might be utilized in a referendum about the borderline.

### **3. Some empirical evidence on the borderland situation along Slovenian-Croatian border**

Before starting to discuss some latest empirical evidence about the situation along the new border between Slovenia and Croatia, let me stress that the new international borderline is not the only cause which is separating the residents on both sides of the border. It has only intensified already nationally defined distinctions. There has always been a fluctuation of self-distinctiveness among the local residents in accordance with their national origin (Knežević Hočevar, 1999: 15) depending on the intensity of political, economic, social and cultural gaps between the neighbouring countries.

**National identification.** The present 546 kilometers long borderline between Slovenia and Croatia has been a delimitation line between Slovenian and Croatian nation since Middle Ages (13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century) (Gosar, Klemenčič, 1998). The same delimitation line between the two nations/cultures remained through the era of the first (1919 - 1941) and the second Yugoslavia (1945 - 1991). Thus, it has been expected that the border between two nations would easily become an international border (Gosar, Klemenčič, 1998). But this has not been the case.

The borderland specific has been always and everywhere national self-definition of individuals born in nationally mixed marriages which are in some borderlands more frequent than in the others depending on the natural settings and on the level of socio-economic interdependency (narrow valley versus open plain area; frequent contacts across the border vs. infrequent ones; economic cooperation and daily work migrations vs. economic and job self-sufficiency of each part of a borderland).

For example, in upper Kolpa valley, mixed marriages were almost a rule. The national identification of individuals born in such marriages has in many cases become important with the new international border which offers a possibility of double citizenship.

In a case of a specific situation, a person who states that he is after his father Slovenian but he has lived most of his life in Croatia, married a Croatian woman, their children are Croats and he himself defines as a Croat and is holding a Croatian citizenship, has applied for Slovenian citizenship as well, for, after all, he is also a Slovenian. According to Knežević Hočevar (1999: 211) then this is not a case of confused identity but - in anthropological perception - a case of flexible identity.

Distinction among the borderland residents on the basis of their nationalities defined by the state of residency has gained importance after the creation of two new states. By defining themselves as Slovenians or Croats - borderland residents stress the importance of their national identity for themselves while at the same time expressing their loyalty to their state. In upper Kolpa valley before the new international border, the residents on both sides of the river identified one another according to the settlement of the residency, and only in stereotypes with joke connotations they identify residents on the Croatian side of Kolpa river as "Gorani", and the residents on the Slovenian side of it as "Kranjci". After the new border they still name one another according to the settlement, followed by the name of the state and after that as "Gorani" and "Kranjci" as locally used distinction between the two nations (Knežević Hočevar, 1999: 150-151). A psychological explanation for the rise of the importance of the national component of borderland residents' identity is the fact that in certain new situations the hierarchy of the components of someone's identity changes.

**Life along the border.** In almost all life histories collected in the last year or so (Knežević Hočevar, 1999; Kržišnik-Brkić, 1999) the respondents identified everyday life along the new international border as being more difficult than in the times of the former "soft" borderline.

- **Contacts.** Frequency of cross-border contacts of those who practiced them before the new border has in some instances plunged, e.g. in upper Kolpa valley (Knežević Hočevar, 1999: 139), in other cases the frequency of cross border contacts has not changed or even increased (Barbič, 1998b: 23-24). The frequency of contacts among relatives, friends and holiday contacts were least affected by the new border.
- **Language.** Due to the intensive cross-border cooperation in the past, the residents of both banks of upper Kolpa river spoke 'similar' languages with larger number of Slovenian words used on the Slovenian bank of the river and bigger number of Croatian words on the Croatian bank. Some of the respondents even stated that there are greater differences in the spoken language along Kolpa river on the Slovenian bank of it than across the river (Knežević Hočevar, 1999: 14). On the contrary, on the plain area of Brežice commune at the South East of Slovenia the respondents identified the language differences together with the differences in folk songs and national dances between the borderland residents on the both sides of the border as the most important among the fourteen cultural identity components (Barbič, 1998b: 33) studied.
- **Perceptions of cross-border differences.** While before the creation of an international border inspite of different national identities the borderland residents formed a kind of common social group. After their formal separation they focus on the differences between Slovenian and Croatian part of the borderland in terms of the standard of living, the level of democracy, the value of local currencies, as well as the way of life in general (Knežević Hočevar, 1999: 14-15; Barbič, 1998b: 32). The perceptions of differences has in the course of time widened due to the differences in socio-political systems of the two neigh-

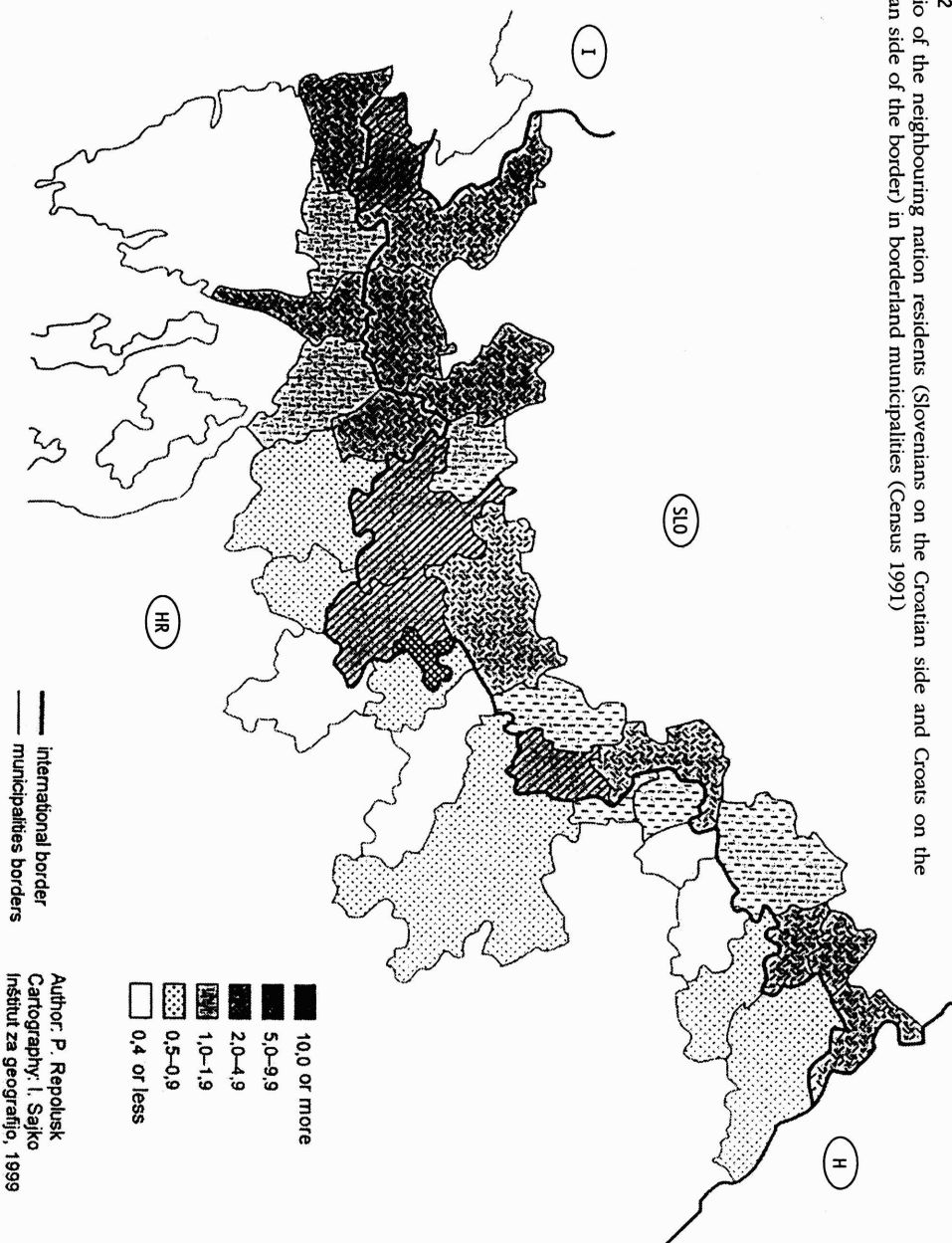
bouring states (social security, job opportunities), due to the speed of economic development (GDP, unemployment rate, loans for small entrepreneurs) and last but not least due to the intensity of the inclusion of both countries into European integration processes.

- **Problems of everyday life** caused by the new borderline are, indeed, numerous: they range from cultivating agricultural land across the border, the lack of local border-crossings, smuggling, cross-border employment, use of services (schools, medical institutions, shops) across the border, formal procedures at border-crossing, work visas for working across the border, and especially the variety of problems occurring along the problematic parts of the borderline. The general impression from the life-histories of borderland residents (Knežević Hočevar, 1999; Kržišnik Bukić, 1999) is that everyday life in the borderlands along Slovenian-Croatian border has changed enormously which makes residents feeling so uneasy that they demand the Slovenian parliament to pass the Law on traffic and cooperation in borderland regions between Slovenia and Croatia (Predlog Zakona ..., 1997) which has been in the Slovenian parliament procedure since 1997 and already passed by the parliament of Croatia.

**The level of economic development of borderland regions.** Croatian borderlands are strongly related to the economy of the neighbouring Slovenian areas. The evidence of this fact are the directions of daily and permanent migrations, the later expressed in the national composition of the border areas as well as in the provision of services on both sides of the border (Repolusk, 1999: 45). In the past, some of the Slovenian firms opened even their branch operations on the Croatian side of the border in order to employ local labour. In general, Slovenian firms on the Slovenian side of the border before the independence almost as a rule employed workers from Croatia as daily work migrants many of who moved to Slovenia for good, which effected the national composition on the both sides of the border (Picture 2). The percentage of Croats within the total population of the Slovenian borderlands is much higher than the percentage of Slovenians in the Croatian borderlands (Repolusk, 1999: 37).

Better life and job opportunities on the Slovenian side of the border in the past (before independence) was not so much due to the differences in general level of economic development between Slovenia and Croatia but rather due to the politics of polycentric development of Slovenia (Barbič, 1993), which had positive effects also on the borderland regions. In spite of the fact that Slovenia is continuing with its polycentric development policy (Zakon o skladnem regionalnem razvoju, 1999), the border regions along the Slovenian-Croatian border are searching the inland cooperation and integration.

Picture 2  
The ratio of the neighbouring nation residents (Slovenians on the Croatian side and Croats on the Slovenian side of the border) in borderland municipalities (Census 1991)





The participants of the recent Regional planning workshop Pokolpje (attended by 10 representatives of region municipalities, 9 representatives of state offices, 7 experts) among the comparative advantages of the region mentioned the closeness of the border, higher level of safety because of the new border, and cross-border cooperation. But, by the same token the international border, borderlands' isolation on the both sides of the border were stated as obstacles to regional development. In defining the components/options of future development, the border was not even mentioned (Rejec Brancelj, 1999).

#### 4. Conclusion

In the situation of new international borders, national identities are being reformulated, revitalized and contested (Smith; Law; Wilson; Bohr; Allworth, 1998). Today, a border mainly represents a challenge for searching new opportunities (for markets, jobs, cultural experiences, personal contacts) to be discovered or even invented by borderland residents in spite of a risk to violate a law, and not so much an obstacle for cooperation across it.

Nine years of unsuccessful negotiation of formalizing the borderline between the two new states is too long of a span of time and has effected borderland life significantly. It seems obvious that the borderland residents' problems do not match with the interests of the two neighbouring states. The delay of formalizing the borderline is partly due to rather informally defined delimitation line between two nations/two republics of socialist Yugoslavia in the past, and partly to poor cooperation between the governments of the two new states. It is expected that the new government and the new president of Croatia will speed up the process of fixing the borderline. But a danger exists that this process might be slowed down by the Slovenian partners, for the year of 2000 is the election year in Slovenia. However, if the nine years of experiences in borderline negotiations, supported by volumes of borderland research and initiatives of borderland communities are taken into consideration, the process of settling the borderline can be finished before the end of 2000.

In order the negotiations to be effective, at least the following principles should be applied:

- The borderline in use at the moment of independence as well as relevant historical facts should be taken into consideration;
- Borderland municipalities must be partners or at least consultants in the borderland negotiations;
- The will of the negotiating states for long lasting good relations among the two neighboring states should prevail over short-term interests, for one can choose friends but not the neighbors.

Why is the formalization of the borderline between the two neighboring states so important? The shortest answer to this question is: because the formalized borderline provides borderland residents with the feeling of security and it is a prerequisite for normal cross-border cooperation. In addition, borders protect nations against homogenization, cultural globalization and lost of national identities, but at the same time promote a synergy of separation and connection (Zoreda, 1997).

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## **Utvrđivanje granice kao preduvjeta optimalne prekogranične suradnje: devet godina međunarodne granice između Slovenije i Hrvatske**

### **Sažetak**

U prvom dijelu priloga autorica razmatra nekoliko teorijskih pretpostavki koje se odnose na razlikovanje granične linije i pograničnog područja. Pritom određuje tri tipa odnosa između susjednih država i pograničnih područja: slučaj "željezne" zavjese, nepostojanje odnosa ali pogranični stanovnici nalaze načine za uspostavljanje barem nekih kontakata i razmjenu dobara, te uređeni odnosi i razvijena suradnja između susjednih zemalja i lokalnih zajednica i njihova stanovništva u pograničnim područjima. Zatim autorica raščlanjuje učinke razgraničenja različitoga intenziteta na određena područja suradnje između susjednih država i pograničnih područja, pripominjući da slučaj "granice u tranziciji" još nema normativan okvir kojim bi bilo detaljno uređeno ponašanje i djelovanje pograničnih zajednica i stanovnika. U drugom dijelu rada, temeljem istraživanja što su ih zadnjih nekoliko godina proveli slovenski znanstvenici u slovenskim pograničnim područjima, prikazano je stanje u pograničnim područjima uzduž nove 546 km duge međudržavne hrvatsko-slovenske granice. Razlikovanje pograničnih stanovnika na onovi nacionalne pripadnosti dobilo je na važnosti nakon osamostaljenja i stvaranja dviju novih država. (Poznato je, uglavnom zbog razlike u stupnju gospodarskog razvoja, da je postotak Hrvata u stanovništvu slovenskih pograničnih područja mnogo veći od postotka Slovenaca u hrvatskim pograničnim područjima.) Karakteristične promjene u svagdašnjem životu stanovnika uzduž nove granice ogledaju se u gubitku lokalnih graničnih prijelaza i smanjenju učestalosti prekograničnih kontakata, isticanju bilo sličnosti bilo razlika između govornih jezika na obje strane granice (ovisno o geografskim značajkama pograničnog područja), te narastanju problema u svagdašnjem životu stanovnika pograničnih područja, kao što su obrada poljoprivrednog zemljišta na drugoj strani granice, prekogranično zapošljavanje (radne dozvole), uporaba usluga i službi (servisa poput škole, zdravstvene ustanove i trgovine), te krijumčarenje. U zaključku autorica naglašava nužnost formaliziranja granice između Slovenije i Hrvatske, jer bi ono smanjilo svakodnevne probleme pograničnih stanovnika te pridonijelo normalizaciji suradnje između dviju susjednih država.

*Ključne riječi:* nova granica, granična crta, pogranična područja, Hrvatska, Slovenija.

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Prispevek za konferenco

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## **Določitev meje kot pogoj optimalnega preko-mejnega sodelovanja: devet let mednarodne meje med Slovenijo in Hrvaško**

### **Povzetek**

Prvi del prispevka obravnava nekaj teoretskih predpostavk, ki zadevajo razlikovanje med mejno črto in obmejno regijo, opredeli tri tipe odnosov med sosednjima državama in obmejnimi regijami ter obravnava učinke različne intenzivnosti ločevanja na posamezna področja sodelovanja med sosednjima državama in obmejnimi regijami. V drugem delu pa prispevek prikazuje stanje v obmejnih območjih vzdolž nove slovensko-hrvaške meje. Razločevanje med obmejnimi prebivalci na osnovi nacionalne pripadnosti je po ustanovitvi dveh novih držav pridobilo na pomenu. Spremembe v vsakdanjem življenju prebivalcev vzdolž nove meje označuje zmanjšanje preko-mejnih stikov, izpostavljanje bodisi podobnosti bodisi razlik (odvisno od geografskih značilnosti obmejne regije) na obeh straneh meje in izpostavljanje problemov vsakdanjega življenja obmejnih prebivalcev kot so: obdelovanje kmetijskih zemljišč na drugi strani meje, preko-mejno zaposlovanje, raba servisov, tihotapljenje. V zaključku avtorica poudari nujno formaliziranja meje med Slovenijo in Hrvaško, kar bi zmanjšalo vsakdanje probleme obmejnih prebivalcev in prispevalo k normalizaciji sodelovanja med sosednjima državama.

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## **Délimitation de la frontière comme condition préliminaire d'une collaboration optimale de part et d'autre de la frontière: neuf ans de frontière internationale entre la Slovénie et la Croatie**

### **Résumé**

Dans la première partie de sa contribution, l'auteur considère quelques prémisses théoriques concernant la différenciation de la ligne frontalière et de la zone frontière. En même temps, elle détermine trois types de rapports entre les États limitrophes et les zones frontières: le cas du "rideau de fer, l'inexistence de rapport, mais les habitants-frontaliers trouvent le moyen d'établir au moins quelques contacts et d'échanger des biens, puis les rapports établis et la coopération développée entre les pays limitrophes et les communautés locales et leurs populations dans les zones frontières. Puis l'auteur analyse les effets de la délimitation d'intensité différente à des domaines déterminés de coopération entre les États limitrophes et les zones frontières, en mentionnant que le cas de "la frontière en transition" n'a pas encore un cadre normatif par lequel seraient établis de façon détaillée le comportement et l'activité des communautés et des habitants-frontaliers. Dans la seconde partie de son étude, sur la base des recherches qui ont été effectuées ces quelques dernières années par des scientifiques slovènes dans des régions frontières slovènes, est présenté l'état de choses dans les régions frontières le long de la nouvelle frontière inter-étatique croate-slovène, longue de 546 kilomètres. La différenciation des habitants-frontaliers sur la base de leur appartenance nationale a pris plus d'importance après l'indépendance et la création des deux nouveaux États (Il est connu, principalement en raison de la différence du niveau de développement économique, que le pourcentage des Croates dans la population des régions frontières slovènes est bien plus grand que le pourcentage des Slovènes dans les régions frontières croates). Les changements caractéristiques dans la vie quotidienne des habitants le long de la nouvelle frontière se reflètent dans la perte de passages frontières locaux et la diminution de la fréquence des contacts de part et d'autre de la frontière, la mise en valeur soit des similitudes, soit des différences entre les langues parlées des deux côtés de la frontière (en fonction des caractéristiques géographiques de la zone frontière), et l'augmentation des problèmes dans la vie quotidienne des habitants des régions frontières, tels que la culture des terres agricoles de l'autre côté de la frontière, l'emploi de l'autre côté de la frontière (permis de travail), l'utilisation des prestations et services (services comme les écoles, les centres médicaux et les commerces) et la contrebande. Dans sa conclusion, l'auteur souligne la nécessité de déterminer formellement la frontière entre la Slovénie et la Croatie, car ceci réduirait les problèmes quotidiens des habitants-frontaliers et contribuerait à la normalisation de la collaboration entre les deux États limitrophes.

*Mots-clés:* nouvelle frontière, ligne frontière, région frontière, Croatie, Slovénie.

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