

**PhD Thesis Abstract**  
**Doctoral School of Earth Sciences**

**The security-geographical analysis of the Carpathian Euroregion  
divided by the external borders of the European Union**

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## **I. The choice of the topic and objectives**

This dissertation examines the security aspects of the Carpathian Euroregion, located in the borderland of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Ukraine. When selecting the area I chose to analyze this border region, which is the scene and hereditary land of the change of borders both geographically and historically.

The Carpathian Euroregion Interregional Association, which is the geographic frame of this study, was established by the Central and Eastern European countries in the atmosphere that followed the dissolution of the bipolar system in 1993. The fundamental objectives of the cooperation were: "...to improve the quality of life, to preserve the peace, to develop the good relations, to reduce the separating role of the boundaries, and to ensure the conditions of crossing the borders..." (B. BATA 2008). As a positive example it indicated the possibility of strengthening the good neighbour relations and the resolution of possible arising conflicts. The geopolitical events which happened in the past twenty years confirmed the correctness of the objectives and the need for cross-border cooperation. It was particularly true in such a transition period, that was in many aspects characterized by instability bringing to the surface the increased social and national security needs.

By the establishment of the Carpathian Euroregion an ethnically, religiously, culturally, economically and socially colorful border region was created, which area is worthy of analysis concerning both the narrower and the broader security environment. In addition, at the level of the Euroregion, which is "...a region with fine prospects..." (J. TOTH 2003) a security-oriented thinking and research is needed in order to increase the level of security, which is the fundamental interest of the people in the Euroregion and which is not feasible without regional actions and bilateral and multilateral relations of its countries. Besides the economic and ethnic issues, we need to highlight the problem of cross-border threats, risks and sources of conflicts, with special regard to illegal migration and environmental security problems. The topicality of the research on the Euroregion is supported by the interests of the enlarged EU needs, the tasks of border police on the external borders of the EU, the arising security tasks at EU level, and the role of Ukraine located between the European Union and Russia.

The Carpathian Euroregion - with an area of more than 161 000 km<sup>2</sup> and with more than 16 million inhabitants - has lots of characteristics that make it worthwhile to examine the place and the role the region plays in the wider geographical area from the viewpoint of security geography.

- The Carpathian Euroregion areas in their countries are socially and economically disadvantaged and peripheral. The majority of these member regions are hit by environmental problems, lack of infrastructure, problems of economic cooperation, and political, psychological and socio-cultural problems as well (I. Süli-Zakar 2004).
- All the countries of the member regions formerly belonged to the Socialist Bloc.
- Typical factors of the area are the history of frequent changes of borders, and the ethnic diversity.
- They are economically depressed, peripheral areas, their economic indicators are below the average of their mother countries, the level of unemployment and emigration is high (B. Baranyi 1999, I. Süli-Zakar 1999).
- Through this area run the East-West transit routes, and the region serves as a gateway to Central Europe towards the East. There are lots of further boundaries in this region, such as linguistic, ethnic and religious.
- Historically, the broader area of the region is the intersection of superpower influences.
- By the expanding of the EU and NATO the boundaries have got importance on EU, and alliance level.
- The borders of five countries meet in a narrow area where security related threats (e.g, black market, corruption, cross-border crime, smuggling, illegal migration, environmental hazards, natural disasters).



*Fig.1.: The Carpathian Euroregion (DOBÁK I. 2010)*

The objectives of the thesis are as follows:

- to analyze the current and future place and role of the Euroregion in the greater East Central Europe, in the light of the larger geopolitical changes happened in the recent years, concerning the transformation of the "type" of the border.
- to highlight the components of cross-border security issues.
- to analyze their appearance on regional level, and to determine the main threats and challenges which may affect the area in the long term.
- to emphasize the role of the non-EU member Ukraine in the broader region in relation to security issues.
- to analyze the role of the region in the process of illegal migration.
- to justify the reason for the existence of the political and geographical approach in the "regional analyzing frame".

## **The hypothesis:**

- Concerning security, the Carpathian Euroregion is an interface zone between the areas of the European Union and Ukraine, where the various security risks and challenges appear with their effects as a cross-border phenomenon.
- The segment area of the Euroregion is not only a „joint area" in the geographical sense, but parallel with it many security problems emerge, which are connected to the separating and liaison role of the borders. The majority of the Euroregion member countries mostly meet the same security risks and challenges, however, several values and interests meet in the Euroregion.
- The examined area is affected by security threats and challenges because of its historical legacy, the effects of the major geopolitical changes and its geographical location.
- The Carpathian Euroregion by covering a territory of the external borders of the EU and the Schengen Area serves as a scene of illegal migration and of the fight against this phenomenon.
- The geopolitical role and the future of Ukraine given its location between the European Union and Russia is significant in terms of the security situation of the Central and Eastern European area. Unlike in the case of other member countries of the Euroregion, the real european integration of Ukraine - due to further factors beyond this region - will remain permanently open.

In my thesis I have tried to give a comprehensive analysis about the security-political and security-geographical aspects of the region and to find the right proportions when presenting the complex problems without giving a too detailed analysis. Since the processes in the areas of the Carpathian Euroregion are inseparable from other processes at their national level, and due to the important geopolitical events occurred in this border region, the study - in several topics (such as illegal migration, ethnic issues, economy) - exceeds the analytical framework of the region.

During my research, the framework of the analysis must be defined from different directions. The geographical framework of the study was the area covered by the Carpathian Euroregion, which gave a sufficiently distinct and broader outlook on the individual countries, focusing on the issue of the EU's external borders.

I used the year of 1993, the year of establishment of the Euroregion as a time frame, and perhaps the most important task was the exact demarcation from the security policy, because of complexity and the multidisciplinary of the security issue. Because every component of the security policy is in itself a specific field of research, I did not intend to give a detailed

description of the roots of the problems, and of the solution and treatment related theories. In this dissertation the key guide was the meeting of EU and non-EU 'border regions', and the connecting and separating role of the border as a three-dimensional geographical phenomenon. (N. PAP – J. TOTH 2008).

In this dissertation the main security threats and risks have been reviewed which are significant and appear in both the European visions of security and in the conceptions of the members of Euroregion countries. It is important to emphasize that the constantly changing international and national trends and political-economic motions continually shaping those interests that are directly and indirectly condense in the Euroregion as well. This is why - as it is the aim of the paper - this security type geographical approach provides a current overview of the area and helps to give a better understanding of the relations and the situation of the region.

## **II. Methods**

While preparing the thesis, I applied the following methods for the review and analytical writing of the topic.

### **A primary research method was used:**

- Gaining knowledge of the results of foreign and domestic scientific publications, previous research and literature related to the areas, and conducting analysis and secondary analysis of the results. Getting to know the relevant international security policy documents, pieces of legislation, and monitoring political events in terms of security. The linguistic diversity limited the appropriate comparison of the applied literature in relation to my research regarding the five countries, therefore the material of international conferences have been used as relevant sources.
- Reviewing the topic by applying analysis and synthesis of the statistical data of relevant national statistical offices, government agencies and other international organizations, and drawing conclusions from the acquired information. Due to the fact that four member regions of the Euroregion became the member of the European Union through several stages in the recent years, and because Ukraine is a non-EU country, in order to compare and summarize the relevant data I used resources which were available in the case of all member countries.
- The participation in domestic and international conferences related to the various segments of the topic (law enforcement, migration, geopolitical security in particular) and participation

in the discussions reviewing the examined questions and conducting interviews with experts, researchers familiar with the topic.

**Secondary research methods were used:**

- I processed, analyzed the results of the questionnaire which can be interpreted as a structured interview, and drew conclusions. The research on the five countries contributed to the revision of the current problems of the issues involved, and provided an opportunity to get to know the opinions of other professionals as well. With the questionnaires on cross-border security issues and the topic of risk assessment, aiming at receiving opinion from some well-known local professionals, I wished to point out the complexity of the problem. The questionnaire on the environmental safety segment focused on becoming acquainted with the views of disaster management practitioners dealing with the related problems on a daily basis, and also on the environmental hazards their priorities.

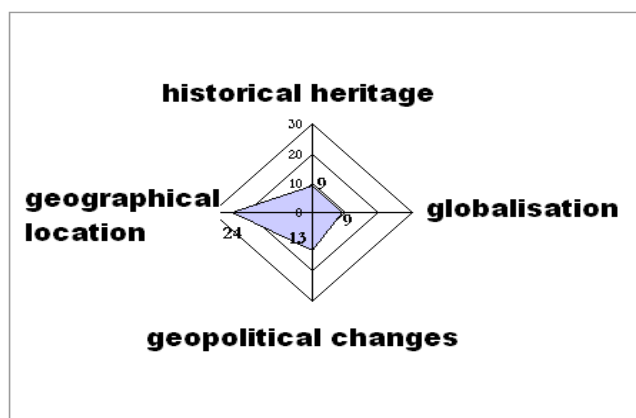
### **III. Results**

The thesis presents the various security challenges and risks of the area of the Carpathian Euroregion with security-geographical approach. Taking as a basis of the interpretation of complex security issues the topics examined are extremely far-reaching, however, it appears as a new result that with its overall review concerning the area covered by the Euroregion, there might be a more complete understanding of the conditions.

With reference to the region's economic, social process, the enlargement and membership of the EU and the extension of Schengen's external borders, or even the border research, several issues - related to security - have been widely studied, concerning the Carpathian Euroregion, the review focusing on a broader spectrum of security threats, however, is considered novel. It must be emphasised that as far as the Carpathian Euroregion security approach concerned it can not be considered of equal rank to the states among the participants of international security, therefore the problems arising appear as cross-border, regional or even inter-state problems. We can not talk about a uniform vision concerning the security of the region, and although in a number of issues (NATO and the EU institutional system) there are common means, as far as the Member States concerned, the region is judged by different points of view and interests, therefore certain security issues are judged in a different way. In addition, the thesis points out that on the regional level it also has a place of security-oriented thinking and research.



The Carpathian Euroregion is affected by the studied security threats and challenges, mainly due to its geographical location, conditions of the area besides which the processes traced back to the larger geopolitical changes, impacts are also emphasized. While the former points out the dangers of certain security-oriented approach to geographical challenges and the *raison d'être*, the latter indicates the topicality of the theme, and the effects of an ever-changing external environment.



*Fig.2.: Source of the main security threats and challenges concerning the Carpathian Euroregion (DOBÁK I. 2010)*

It is undeniable that the region is now one of the key areas of Central and Eastern Europe, where many interests and values converge. The area is a link between East and West, while the borders stretching here separate the developed European regions. Therefore, the characteristics of the borders ("separates and unites") become vital due to the significance of security and security-geographical review.

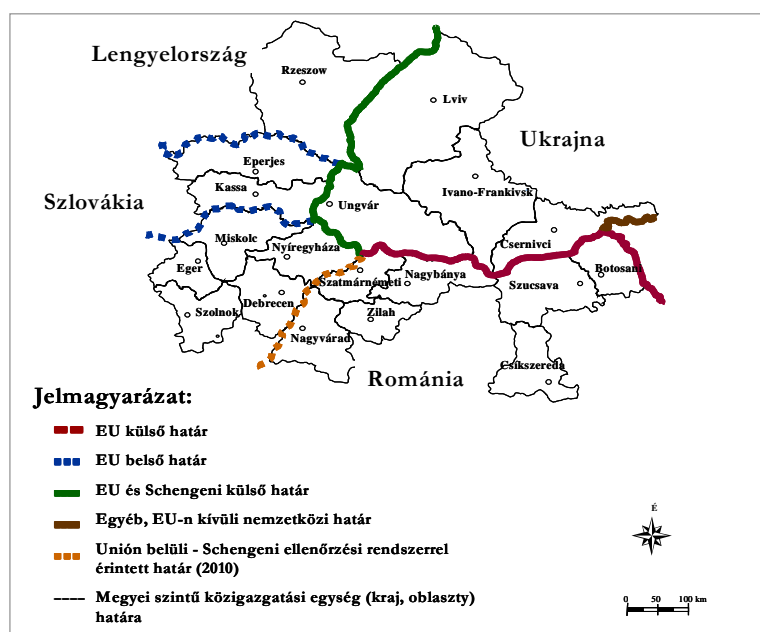
The Eastern Carpathians region historically have been a contact zone with various nations, nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, political and economic power lines. The East-West routes in addition to the North-South transport directions were also present, beyond which the Carpathians by their natural borders were the areas of the European security and the role of a real separation.

A major part of the present Euroregion used to be a member of a higher-organized conglomerate integration. The Habsburg Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy formed the area hosting many nationalities over a long period, then the demarcation occurring in the first part of 20th century "in the history, continuous, interdependent areas were cut apart ..." (I. Süli-Zakar I. 1999). Later in the soviet era, in spite of the numerous links of the socialist

ideology, ruling the area, the sub-regions belonging to various countries (especially Sub-Carpathia) were isolated even from each other. The links between them began to take shape again in the early 1990's, first by getting to know one another. As a result of the rearrangement after the dissolution of the bipolar world the "border role" of the region have transformed, however, – appraised again– remained. The turning point was the EU's eastward expansion and extension of the Schengen zone when the filter and barrier role of the borders (N. PAP – J. TOTH 2008) significantly affected the border region as a whole.

Today, Ukraine's westernmost county, Transcarpathia, has more than 470 kilometer long border with the EU countries. Three countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary) have Schengen borders on 268 kilometers towards the Ukrainian province. As a result of the multi-level geopolitical changes from the wider region of Transcarpathia have created:

- The EU internal borders (the Polish-Slovak, Slovak-Hungarian)
- Schengen border in the EU (the Hungarian-Romanian) (internal border is expected in 2011)
- EU external borders (the Romanian-Ukrainian)
- EU and Schengen common external borders (Ukrainian-Hungarian, Ukrainian, Slovak, Ukrainian, Polish)



**Fig.3.: "Types" of the borders lines in the Carpathian Euroregion (DOBÁK I. 2010)**

Concerning the military aspects of security, we have to widen the regional framework to national and international levels, and date back to 1990, and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the region's governments facing a lot of economic and social problems recognized that, they could not maintain the soviet-style armies economically, due to neither of their numbers, nor the necessary modernization of weaponry. The large number of armies with their obsolete weapons, doctrines, organizational structures, and equipment did not meet the requirements of the age, therefore the reorganization of the forces, the modernization and the implementation of redundancy became urgent. The individual countries recognized that they could not guarantee their security alone, so to fill the security vacuum came up the NATO accession issue. Poland and Hungary had already received an invitation for NATO accession negotiations in 1997, and as a result, the first round of enlargement in 1999 provided the reaching the former Soviet borders for the military alliance of the geographical area of the Carpathian Euroregion. Later, following Slovakia, Romania also obtained the NATO membership, but the NATO membership of Ukraine is still open today. Over the past decades, the relevant states have appeared as members in the PfP activities, and in other peacekeeping tasks (UN) as well. Parallel with their NATO membership they have been actively participating fulfilling the obligation of the alliance (e.g.: Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq)

The geopolitical events of the recent years (NATO and EU enlargement), the security norms of the member states, joining the same alliance, as well as the special status of previously nuclear weapon owner Ukraine with NATO have reduced the risk to a minimum level of using of military force towards each other. All things considered, the states of the region have no territorial claims that can be solved by military force and there is not military threat of the member states towards each other.

Concerning the member countries of the Carpathian Euroregion it must be emphasized that they have not become the main targets of international terrorism in recent years. But it must be pointed out what makes terrorism threatening is “the random occurrence of the individual acts in time and space” (E. Száraz 2003). Like the area of Hungary, which could be a “...transit, logistics, and business...” ground for terrorist organizations (P. Deák 2008), the finding might be considered true with regard to the other member countries of the Euroregion. Searching for the causes of the possible terrorist attacks, we can not ignore that by joining the NATO the countries of the region have become members of such an alliance whose several members are primary targets of the international terrorism. By having taken part in the major

NATO and the US led military operations outside Europe, the threat of the military contingents have increased, as well as the threat of the home areas. In this region it is the threatened infrastructure and objects as possible targets of terrorism which receive importance, creating tasks for the disaster management, as well as the law enforcement agencies to combat against terrorism.

While the military threats have continuously declined in the recent decades, the fluctuating illegal migration, connected to the events of the source and destination areas, concerns the region basically as a transit area. It is obvious that the region which is a route from East to Europe, and lies on the East-West European migration route, assumes the role of the eastern gate of the EU, which is indispensable concerning the illegal migration. At the end of 2007, by joining the Schengen area the region gained a key position. While before the enlargement the EU faced the illegal migration with area as a "filter" from the Eastern Europe countries, parallel the enlargement and the Schengen membership, this role diminished.

The border region is attractive in terms of geography, as it misses (or do not coincide with the administrative borders) the natural borders that would provide the natural protection of the eastern borders of Europe. While in Northern, Western and Southern Europe, the sea as a border appears as natural, in the eastern half of Europe, after crossing the eastern Ukrainian borders, the migrants have to get across only the eastern border of Ukraine. Previously, this area as the pre-bastion of the Union played a transit role, however, this role perhaps may change with the membership of Poland, Slovakia (and Czech Republic), Hungary and Romania.

In relation to the illegal migration the Sub-Carpathian area could be highlighted, namely the Hungarian-Slovak-Ukrainian border area, as one of the most affected "exit point" from Ukraine. The functioning of the east-west migration routes in the Carpathian Euroregion is supported by the related Ukrainian-Hungarian and the Romanian-Hungarian border statistics detailed in the thesis.

The conditions of Ukraine are different from the other Member States in the cooperation. Due to its intermediate geographical position, and common borders with the countries much more advanced economically, the country is concerned by the phenomenon of illegal migration. On the one hand, the area as a transit area is a major migration route to west, on the other hand owing to the poor economic prospects of the country and the difficult living conditions all over Ukraine, the country itself has a major role in the migration process. The

number of illegal migrants is continuously growing, as the country has a favorable geographic location, therefore more and more people choose the country as a "springboard" to the west. The statistics related to the illegal migration and human trafficking - frequently estimated - only implies the real size of the phenomenon.

Meanwhile the Union's migration policy and the tightening border controls increase the country's "buffer" role. It is clear that the management of the illegal migration is of high priority both for Ukraine and the EU, and maintaining the effective support and cooperation also increase the security of the EU.



**Fig.4.: Illegal migration routes in the Carpathian Euroregion (DOBÁK I. 2010)**

In the framework of the complex interpretation of security, the thesis deals with the security dimensions of the economic issues of the region, as the region is affected by several challenges and risks directly or indirectly. On the one hand, the impacts tending towards the region from the national and international economic zone are important (impacts of globalization, international financial and economic crisis), and their roots and treatment go beyond the scope of the region. On the other hand, it is vital to deal with the risks and challenges that develop inside the region (cross border illegal economy, expansion of black market and unemployment).

In the years following the collapse of the communist regime, parallel with the development of the central areas the marginality of the examined areas increased (I. Süli-Zakar 1999). The major industrial and economic centers - regardless of the countries - ceased, generating huge unemployed crowds. Nowadays the area is generally characterized by

economic underdevelopment, high unemployment rate and illicit cross-border economic activities (I. ILLÉS 2008), the revenues of which directly are non-tradable back to the legal economy.

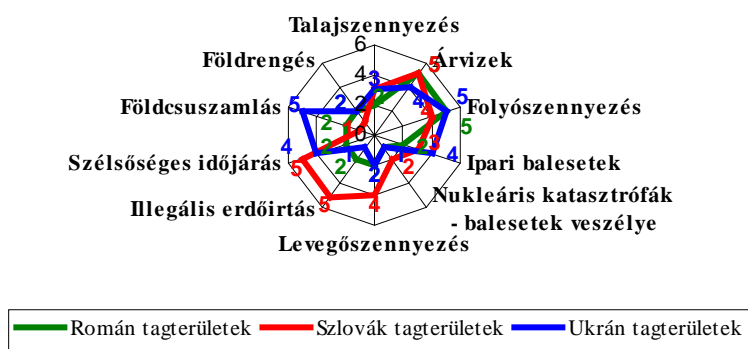
A typical illegal "branch of industry" is the smuggling from the direction of Ukraine towards the territory of the Union, therefore the EU external borders, concerning the Carpathian Euroregion are directly effected. As an example, tobacco smuggling, where, according to the statistical data on the Ukrainian-Hungarian and Hungarian-Romanian border over 1,334 million forints of worth of tobacco products, relating to unlawful acts, were disclosed in 2008 at the border crossing points. The figures show a significant increase compared to the 883 million forints in 2007, especially concerning the Romanian relations (an increase of 319%). While Ukraine is concerned by the trade through the border of illegally manufactured and imported cigarettes, the sub-regions close to the borders are involved in cigarette smuggling into the EU. According to statistics, the amount of manufactured or imported cigarettes in Ukraine is much higher than the consumption of that by the population, or the amount of the authorized exported tobacco. About 20% of tobacco goes to the the illegal trade, and then appears in the black markets, often at the borders towards Hungary and Romania.

Reviewing the relations of the region, the dissertation deals with the issues of ethnically and religiously mixed population present as historical heritage and with the minority issues of the different nations. The majority of the problems which affect the bilateral relations of the countries can be traced back to several reasons, like the changes of the borders several times throughout the history and the ethnic conditions of the population. The presence of the minorities living beyond the borders might be a source of conflict, which may result phobia in the nationalist layers of countries heavily "burdened" by minorities. These tensions have been present in the region in the past and today, and in the background the intention of strengthening the national identity, a strong or occasionally low weight of nationalist line in political life should be sought. In addition, this segment includes the issue of the large number of gypsies living in the Carpathian Basin which gives a lot to do in the countries related to political, social, and economic fields.

Related to the environmental security, the dissertation deals with the widely researched, various cross-border environmental hazards and disasters that occurs in a separate chapter. The region with its significant-sized protected area, and unique geographical features

(Carpathian Mountains) particularly concerned by the natural disasters or disasters caused by human activities. The most serious environmental - natural problems are the almost annually recurring floods, the contamination of the rivers, and other forms of pollution which also pose a permanent risk to the security of the area. In this issue the thesis reviews the general situation of the areas, the different segments of environmental security including the pollution of ex-military activities.

**Természeti és mesterséges katasztrófák megítélése a Kárpátok Eurorégió térségét érintően**  
(5 - jelentősebb problémakör, 1 - kevésbé jelentős problémakör)



**Fig.5.: Result of rated questionnaire**  
(DOBÁK I. 2010)

It can be established that the different states and their euroregional segments suffer from the same, studied security risks, but in a different degree. Besides the tasks of guarding the borders, the problems of economy, the environmental, the water conservation issues, and the disaster recovery have priority in all member countries. The processed results of the questionnaire, which is applicable as a structured interview, composed in order to assess the risks support the significant complexity of the issue. The results show that the role of the evaluated factors are close to "significant".

In addition, we can not forget about the effects coming from the international environment, like the EU enlargement in recent years and the significance of extending the Schengen zone. As result, the area of the Euroregion have been divided again into two parts with strong, separating borders, and then the expected Schengen membership of Romania will "colour" the situation of the borderzone.

The major geopolitical changes which had affected the Central and Eastern European region mostly ended in the past two decades, and the members of the Euroregion - except for Ukraine - joined those international organizations and frameworks which basically provide opportunity for the further development of the region. An identical political - economic - military security umbrella covers the Central and Eastern-European area, which makes the region more secure. Nevertheless, due to Ukraine, the processes which may be relevant to the security in the high political arena have not completed yet.

Concerning the energy security the geographic area of the Euroregion might be defined as an important area, particularly related to the nature of transit pipeline networks. The east-west gas, oil and electricity lines run in this region entering the European Union. The gas crisis in recent years have highlighted the importance of the issues, like the energy sales interests of Russia and energy dependency of the Union. Concerning Ukraine, besides the presence of Russia and the EU's, we can not forget about the United States and NATO as the third apex of the "complicated triangle" (I. Balogh 2007), which may appear in key role concerning the future of this unmoved country. Without the Euroregional membership and the direct EU borders, the country would have already moved away from the Central and Eastern European processes. In case of Ukraine Kissinger's thoughts can be cited, that "the future of Eastern-Europe and the Soviet Union is not the same issue", but looking to the future we can not be indifferent about the fate of Ukraine, which has geographical connection with the EU and our country. Without the active participation in the European processes, and without the ties with the EU institutions, Ukraine might be left alone and move towards the Russian sphere of influence.

Ukraine developed in different ways owing to its western neighbours, location, the ethnic composition, and the special connection with Russia. Today, it is the stage of the East-West "border line", or rather an intermediate area with uncertain future between the EU and Russia. Therefore, not only the member countries, but also the EU have to extend and increase the cooperation capabilities towards Ukraine, which - among others - have not gained a place under the security umbrella mentioned above, because of its geographical location and historical roots. That is the reason why the Carpathian Euroregion could receive particular importance, whose role despite of the huge geographical area is indisputable. It provides an overlook to an extremely complex area and provides an outlook and promotes the economic, social and cultural cooperation and development in various aspects.



## IV. Utilization of the results and directions of further research

The aim of the security-geographical examination of the Carpathian Euroregion, was the overall review of the relevant security threats and challenges detailed in the dissertation.

1. The results of the dissertation are the security approach of some problems, which can provide additional knowledge for experts and all who are interested in.

2. The continued need of the research of the theme is supported by the described presence of security threats and risks, and the constantly forming and changing internal and external (economic, social, political) processes. These continuous changes on the different levels (national, international) directly or indirectly influence the region. The explained issues in the dissertation give extensible results to continue the research in this direction.

3. The topicality of the theme researched, the appreciated security issues along the EU's eastern borders, and the future of Ukraine located between Russia and the Union, indicates the reasons to continue the research. The thesis may suggest the expediency of doing other security-political and security-geographical oriented studies related to the EU external borders in cross-regional cooperation.

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