

Borders As an Interdisciplinary Problem: Territoriality and Identity - Past and Present

Nowadays, the term „border" has different meanings and it primarily refers to the physical (material) barrier, which is delineated and constructed. In a wider sense, it can be seen also as an imaginary, social and symbolic dividing line or obstacle and in this sense, the term „boundary" seems more appropriate. For state borders on the sea, the term „maritime boundaries," is conveniently used. Such political borders are conveniently called „frontiers" (Fr.: *frontière*; German: *Staatsgrenze*). In order to discuss the meaning of borders more precisely, we suggest to distinguish between five meanings of it: borders as physical or material barriers, borders as the spatio-legal entities (state frontiers and boundaries), thirdly, borders as limits of jurisdiction, fourth, borders seen as processes of construction of self and other in the context of space, identity and power, and finally, borders as institutions of surveillance and control. „Bordering" as a process relates in particular to symbolic politics, collective imaginations and a nation-building processes.

Borders and boundaries could thus be seen as the mental maps, which -following Foucault- represent deep structures of thought, which may also constitute transient cultural artefacts. As such, boundaries in the most general sense, construct social and individual identities, public and private as well as they contribute to the various institutional practices.

The state borders have been conceived with the emergence of international law especially after the Westphalian peace settlements in 1648, as lineal delimitations of state's territories conceived as national space. They were considered as the marks of state's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Since then state territory appears as a cohesive entity divided from the neighbours by clear geometrical lines. Besides arguments in favour of selfdetermination and linguistic divisions, claims to border acquisitions and revisions have been also based upon the idea of „natural borders". But, the border areas were also considered as buffer zones, which should contain foreign influences and enable better control of the local population with questionable loyalties. The buffer zone function was also the protection of the domestic economy threatened by illegal trade and not-supervised traffic of people and goods. The backbone of many territorial aspirations in the past were imperial designs and irredentist ideologies. Already developed and realised by Britain and France together with some smaller nations like Portuguese and Dutch, these aspirations were aimed at the conquest of colonies and over-seas possessions. But, the idea of the millenarian Reich in Germany corresponded with older geopolitical considerations about „living space" (*Lebensraum*). In Italy, imperial designs connected irredentist ideology in the wake of *Risorgimento* with the reminiscences of the glorious Roman past, in order to build up the new Roman empire, which had to extend to the whole Mediterranean and the parts of Africa.

During centuries and after the emergence of the modern nationstates, introduction of the official language, elite culture and the concept of citizenship led to the establishment of civic model of nationhood at the expense of the older traditional loyalties. They were situated around kinship, local customs and vernacular, folk beliefs and religion. Instead of them, elites in France for example, stressed the loyalty to the patrie and patriotism as the most important bond between citizens. National identity then appears as basic cultural construct of national consciousness, assembling images and symbols from the past and present into a meaningful whole. It becomes also the foundation stone of state's legitimacy and an instrument of political manipulation.

One of the salient characteristics of the European political and institutional development, has been the standardization of rules regarding border controls. In this context,

one has to distinguish between control policies at the entry to the EU, and that in the interior of the Union, i.e. between external and internal borders. Basically, European border practices and institutional arrangements appear as complex and are subject to the rising controversies among member states, on one hand, and between EU and other states, on the other. Actually, border policies have become a particularly sensitive issue as the rules and procedures governing admission of foreign nationals are increasingly contested especially by the countries of entry which feel unable to deal with migration flows and to fight illegal immigration.

Actual external border system in Europe is essentially built on two union arrangements, precisely the Schengen Agreement in 1986 for migratory policy and 1990 Dublin Convention for asylum and refugee policy. From the institutional point of view, control and surveillance system of the EU consists of an array of several agencies and mechanisms; FRONT EX, (the agency for the cooperation at the external EU borders), EUROPOL, Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABIT), the Mediterranean Coastal Patrols Network (MEDSEA), the Schengen Information System (SIS), the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) and the European Dactyloscopy (EURODAC). The last name refers to the fingerprint database which is used mainly for identifying asylum seekers and migrants in general.

Contemporary border controls in Europe do not extend only to the frontier checks and to the traditional use of passports and travel documents. They concern nowadays expanding use of advanced, sophisticated systems of mobility surveillance developed by the information and communication technologies (ICT). As it is well known, modern technology (computers, digital photography, scanners) may facilitate body controls, but they also provide means for the falsification and forgery of identity papers.

Moreover, there have been also attempts to create poles of the cross-border interconnections in form of transnational regional entities. Rejection of the ethno-religious allegiances has been for a long time a feature of the cosmopolitan feelings and universalism based upon human rights concerns. Moreover, reflexion on the disastrous consequences of xenophobia, racial and ethnic persecutions, and armed conflicts has fostered the idea -already born in the Enlightenment- on the possibility of the emergence of a new world of openness, tolerance and multiculturalism. Also, the creation of the EU and the idea of globalization seemed to announce the end of history, the end of the nation-state and territorial-based identities. Yet in spite of the neoliberal economic linkages, that transcend local bonds and the state borders, the nation-state and the bordering practices will not disappear in the foreseeable future. With the massive migrations and the terrorism, it is obvious that there is a need for more border controls and consequently, several states have already revised their former policies of the border openness and exchange in order to control phenomena that are perceived as the security threats.

It could be said, that the reflexion on borders, appeals necessarily to an interdisciplinary approach, as it concerns not only politics and the state, but extends to the several aspects of social life, including institutional, economic, environmental and cultural developments. One can also agree with the Enver Hasani's remark that „borders are always artificial because states are not natural creations“.